

BRAND WARS THROUGH BRAND SOLDIERS:
INTER-BRAND COMMUNITY CONFLICT

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INTER-BRAND COMMUNITY CONFLICT

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Dissertation Abstract

Zeynep Mina Seraj Akşit, "Brand Wars through Brand Soldiers: Inter-Brand Community Conflict"

With the digitalization in the marketing realm, consumers have become more interconnected and more powerful to raise their voice through social media environments. This has also prepared the setting, which could not have been established otherwise, for opposing brand communities to come across and engage in rhetorical confrontations to support, protect, and augment the brands they cherish. These confrontations have bred the novel concept of *inter-brand community conflict (IBCC)*, which is the main subject of this dissertation.

Even though brand communities are entities that have been thoroughly investigated within consumer culture theory, the concept of inter-communal engagements has been rather uncultivated and this manuscript seeks to explore what IBCC is and why it gets elevated during inter-communal interactions. The study uses the Apple and Android brand competition, or rather *war*, as the context; and netnography supported with in-depth interviews as the methodology to comprehend how and why the brand communities around these two brands are in constant conflict and what goads brand community members to become voluntary *brand soldiers* within this dispute.

The qualitative approach both defines what IBCC is and yields that differences in *communal personalities, corporate strategies, and brand legacies* nourish this phenomenon. The study also discusses and further evolves the concepts of *mainstream vs. non-mainstream brand communities, voluntary brand soldiering, and the cyclicity of IBCC* within the grounds of market competition.

Tez Özeti

Zeynep Mina Seraj Akşit, "Marka Askerleri Üzerinden Yürütülen Marka Savaşları:

Marka Toplulukları Arasındaki Çarpışma"

Pazarlama dünyasındaki dijital dönüşüm hem tüketicilerin kendi aralarında daha çok bağlantı kurmasına hem de güçlenerek seslerini sosyal medya vasıtasıyla yükseltmelerine olanak tanımaktadır. Bu dönüşüm aynı zamanda marka topluluklarının karşı karşıya gelmesine imkan veren bir mecra sağlayarak, birbirleriyle yüzleşmelerine, benimsedikleri markaları desteklemelerine, korumalarına ve yüceltmelerine imkan sunmaktadır. Bu yüzleşme ve çatışma ortamı, bu tezin ana konusu olan Marka Toplulukları Arasındaki Çarpışma (MTAÇ) kavramının doğmasına da neden olmaktadır.

Marka toplulukları hakkında oluşmuş yazın tüketici kültürü teorisi altında detaylı araştırmaları kapsamakla birlikte marka toplulukları arasındaki karşılıklı çarpışmalar henüz kavram olarak derinlemesine ele alınmamıştır. Bu çalışmanın amacı MTAÇ kavramını ve topluluklar arası etkileşimlerde neden artış gösterdiğini ortaya koymaktır. Çalışmanın çerçevesi olarak Apple ve Android markaları arasındaki rekabet, hatta savaş, ve araştırmanın metodolojisi olarak da derinlemesine mülakatlarla desteklenen netnografi yöntemi seçilmiştir. Bu çerçevede bulunan iki marka topluluğunun neden ve nasıl sürekli çarpışma halinde olduğu ve bu marka topluluklarında yer alan tüketicilerin neden gönüllü askerler olarak çarpışmanın bir parçası haline geldikleri araştırılmıştır.

Kalitatif yöntem hem MTAÇ kavramını tanımlamakta, hem de artışına sebep olan topluluklar arasındaki *kişilik*, kurumlar arasındaki *strateji*, ve markalar arasındaki *devralınan miras* farklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışma aynı zamanda *popüler kültür*, *gönüllü marka askerliği* ve *MTAÇ kavramındaki döngü* gibi kavramları tartışmakta ve geliştirmektedir.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Orwell, as the visionary he is, was right about the conduct and the essence of "war" in his book, *1984* (Orwell, 1950). In the novel, the three super powers in the world are in a constant battle with each other. The continuous war was used as a means to control the economy and sustain the welfare of the parties that ruled the three countries by keeping the people of Oceania ignorant and fearful. One of the main mottos of the Party in *1984* was the "War is Peace" oxymoron that forced everyone to believe war was good. It is fascinating to find parallelism between the war concepts in *1984* and the marketing realm and competition paradigm of our century. The competition between super brands like Coke and Pepsi; like Mercedes, BMW, Audi, and Jaguar; like Microsoft and Apple; etc. has been in a prolonged battle that does not seem to reach a victory either. Yet, brand competition or brand war brings nothing but novelty, innovation, and choice to consumers. Therefore, it is possible to claim that "war is peace" for consumers in the marketing realm.

One major difference in contemporary brand wars compared to the *1984* world is that consumers are not ignorant slaves of institutions. The *Cluetrain Manifesto* (Levine et al., 2011) explains the power consumers have gained through the evolution of digital conversations very articulately. The first thesis in the manifesto, "Markets are conversations" is a great summary of how the meaning of the marketplace has changed into an internetworked web of communities with

conversations among actual human voices and how companies need to become a part of this communal conversation to be able to reach their customers. This social consumption is a relatively new concept. The prior image of consumers in the sales and marketing eras (Kotler and Keller, 2012) were more like that of the residents of Oceania, who were manipulated by strategies of prominent institutions. But not anymore. The new world of co-creation, open-source mentality, and easy access to information precludes anything from being concealed and any attempt to manipulate or mislead the individuals gets revealed instantaneously. The impact of computer mediated environments and social media on this change and market transparency is, of course, undeniable (Hoffman and Novak, 1996; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). In 2014, thirty years past the dull world of *1984*, consumers do and become anything voluntarily, and companies that try to play the "Big Brother" role get demolished quickly. With the digital revolution, the rules of the brand war have changed immensely; and the new era of brand wars needs new weapons. Schultz (2005, p. xi and p. xiv) expresses this need for change very bluntly:

Media advertising, as we have known, practiced, and worshipped it for the past sixty or so years, is in trouble. Big trouble. And it's not going to get well. Ever. [...] Traditional media advertising, with its myths, traditions, pecking orders, perks and privileges, is being replaced by gaming, on-demand, communal, and consumer-generated content and the host of other, more relevant approaches. We likely will never, ever see a commercial like Apple's "1984," simply because there will never, ever be a similar venue or a similarly focused audience. While that's a shame, it's reality. So let's move on.

This dissertation aims to focus on the new context of brand wars and the role of brand communities as part of brand war. Brand communities have been a well studied area with thorough research investigating their ethos, their motives to form, their intra-communal engagements, their traditions and rituals, and the value they create (Kozinets, 1997; McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002; Muñiz and

Schau, 2005; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Seraj, 2012). However, current literature studies them as individual entities with a focus on their intra-communal interactions. Yet the interactions of brand communities are not limited to internal dialogues. Brand communities engage with the world around them and influence parties other than their own members as well. Most importantly, brand communities are becoming prominent parts of brand wars, with their power coming from their intact membership base. Still, not many works are available on how brand communities interact with each other, how they behave in the presence of conflict, how they contribute to conflict, and how they become critical collaborators during brand wars. This research aims to contribute to the literature by defining inter-communal conflict and studying it within the context of the Apple and Android competition. The factors that create and augment inter-brand community conflict (IBCC) are delineated thoroughly, and business implications are derived.

Apple has competed against Microsoft and other technology brands since its birth and has managed to rise from an eccentric underdog to a commercial giant. As the company entered the mobile phone industry in 2007 with its iPhone product, it has become the pioneer in mobile devices with the touch screen technology. Surely the competition did not let Apple rule the market as a monopoly since other operating systems and brands entered the game to get a share of the excitement created on the consumer side. Later, in 2009, Android and many smartphone brands that utilize the Android operating system appeared as main competitors to the iPhone running on iOS software. Currently, both Apple and Android have brand communities that are actively participating in the brand war between the two streams, and the interesting phenomenon that emerges is that consumers fiercely defend the

brand they use, reminiscent of the fanaticism of sports club fans. The main research questions that arise in this context are:

(1) How do inter-communal interactions turn into conflict?

(2) Why do inter-communal interactions turn into conflict?

The study utilizes qualitative methods of netnography and in-depth interviews to shed light on these questions.

The rest of the manuscript is organized as follows: first, a review of brand community literature is conducted and presented as a structure with three main headings: engagement, culture, and value, which depict the state-of-the-art in this theme. The literature review continues with the discussion of the gap related to inter-communal engagement and conflict. Next is the outline of the context with the definitions of the two brands and brand communities of Apple and Android, followed by an analysis of the competition in the smartphone market. After theoretical foundations and the context of the study are depicted, the research methodology is outlined. The manuscript continues with the definition of IBCC and brand soldier constructs, and findings of the research are thoroughly discussed under the three headings of personality, strategy, and legacy. Complementing the trio of findings, business implications related to IBCC research are portrayed before drawing the conclusions.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The online enactment of relationships has attracted many scholars to investigate online or virtual communities since the early 1990s. Rheingold (1993, p. 7) defines online communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace." Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002, p. 3) portray these platforms as "mediated social spaces in the digital environment that allow groups to form and be sustained primarily through ongoing communication process." The advances in the online world have further encouraged the formation of communities around brands with an easier access of consumers to brands, other consumers, and the general marketplace.

Brand Communities

Consumer-brand relationships can take many forms (Schau and Muñiz, 2002) through consumer and brand interactions in subcultures of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), consumer-to-consumer dialogues, and relationships around brands (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001) resulting in brand loyalty (Fournier, 1998). As a more specific type of such relationships, *brand communities* have been thoroughly investigated in the marketing

literature as enduring or sometimes ephemeral entities made up of a spectrum of participants from mere observers to highly devoted enthusiasts that center around a brand. In one of the pioneering works in this field, Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) study the brand communities of Ford Bronco trucks, Macintosh computers, and Saab automobiles, and define brand community as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (p. 412). They demonstrate specific qualities such as being in a state of *consciousness of kind*, practicing community specific *rituals and traditions*, as well as acting with a sense of *moral responsibility* as the main defining aspects of brand community membership. In today's world of consumption and online interactions, memberships in these communities are fundamental for a comprehensive experience of the brand consumption.

Many scholars have further developed brand community research. One of the main aims of this research is to delineate the current stance of brand community literature. In order to thoroughly analyze brand community literature, the most prominent works are explored and presented under three main headings, each explained by three dimensions to provide an overall picture of what current research portrays (see Figure 1). Accordingly brand community literature mainly explores:

- a) Engagement within and related to brand communities
- b) Brand community culture formation
- c) Value created by brand communities

These three aspects in brand communities nurture each others' progress as engagement succumbs to the formation of culture, which creates further value for the community yielding auxiliary participation and engagement.

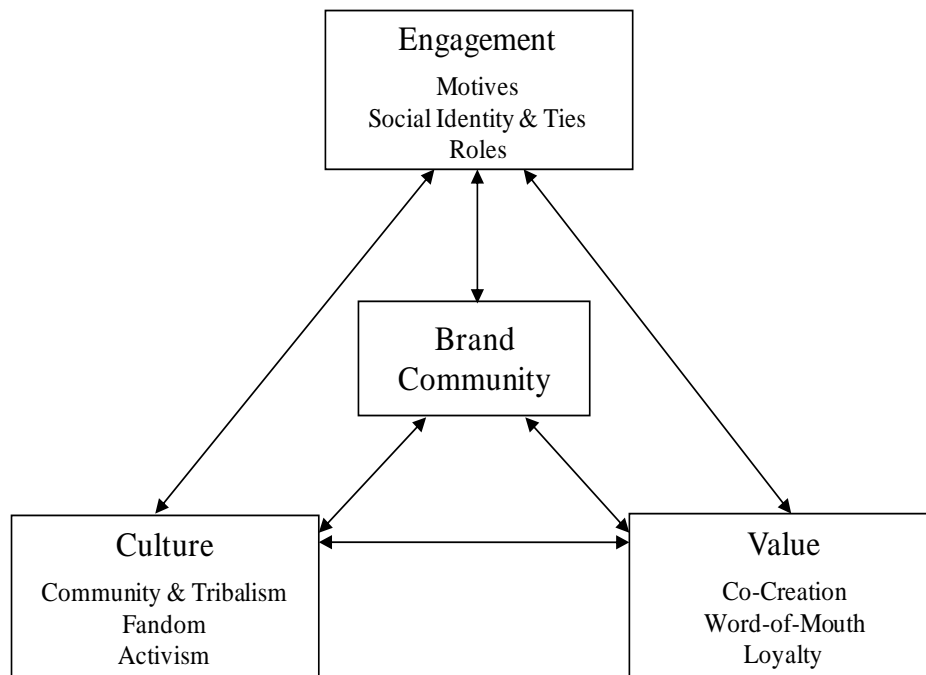


Figure 1. Analysis of brand community literature

Engagement is the interaction of community members on the brand community platforms, and the main issues discussed in the literature related to engagement have been motives for engagement in brand communities, social identity and ties that submerge during engagement and roles that are undertaken by community members. Culture is the outcome of prolonged engagement within a community that defines its ethos. Tribalism, fandom, and activism are derived in cultural exchanges and further enhance cultural formation. Finally, engagement and culture deliver value to the communal grounds by triggering co-creation, word-of-mouth, and loyalty. However, these are not just one way relationships. Value dimensions further feed culture and engagement, too. These three areas will be discussed in detail to exhibit the current state of brand community literature.

Engagement in Brand Communities

With the rise of Web 2.0, consumers can interact with each other online through various means: forums, social networking sites, list servers, online games, blogs, etc. Through the development of these many-to-many communication channels, individuals are not just recipients of information, but rather creators and messengers of knowledge, experiences, and opinions about almost anything (De Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga, 2009; Hoffman and Novak, 1996). For a brand community to emerge, interactive engagement around brands is essential since it is the relationships which transpire out of exchanges between individuals that establish a community (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009). Hence, the discussion of brand communities needs to start by first touching upon the subject of engagement.

Members of a brand community have versatile engagement with all aspects related to the brand they are involved in. In their study of Jeep fans, McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) show that the consumer is at the center of all kinds of engagement and has multi-faceted connections related with the brand, the product, the mother company and the consumer community simultaneously. All of these relationships are crucial. It is the brand community engagement that especially strengthens the consumer-brand relationships as in the case of how Jeep Festivals bring the community together and augment the attachment of Jeep users to their vehicles and the brand. In a later study, Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig (2007) pinpoint the significance of offline brand fests and how they create a transcendent customer experience and instigate integration with the brand community. So, it is appropriate to say that it is the engagement between brand fans and the dynamism

due to this engagement that forms communities (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Hermann, 2005). Then reciprocally, the community further reinforces interactions.

The foundation of engagement in online communities have been studied by many scholars and interpreted in various ways with different analogies. Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) explain the need to form relationships online as "desire for social action;" Cova and Cova (2002) argue that it is the links rather than the content that matter in communal sharing and pinpoint the "linking value" of engagement in online platforms; Balasubramanian and Mahajan (2001) define this natural growth of cohesion as "organic solidarity," and Simmons (2008) describe the associations in online communities as the "virtual glue" of community establishment. The deepening and maturing communications eventually give rise to the development of social capital within the community (Seraj, 2012) and facilitate conception of culture (Goi, 2009).

In this section, three main dimensions related to the engagement construct in community literature will be visited: motives to interact, social ties that form around these interactions, as well as the roles individuals take on during online exchanges.

Motives

Deighton and Kornfeld (2009) show that thought and activity tracing as well as property, social, and cultural exchanges are the main patterns of interaction between consumers and companies in the recent marketing era. Communities are essentially active organisms of this interaction paradigm and it is important to understand why people engage in online communities. This is one of the most frequently studied questions in community literature, and many authors provide different rationales and

motives for these engagements. As for brand communities, strong involvement and brand passion are related to consumer identification with the brand community (Füller, Matzler, and Hoppe, 2008; Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder, 2008), and brand community identification further increases engagement (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Hermann, 2005). Therefore, it is natural to see more engagement in brand communities that instigate passionate relations with their consumers.

One of the earlier works in this area that is well worth mentioning is the Model of Goal-Directed Behavior by Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002), where the authors name the desire to interact as a group in communities as "we-intentions." The authors find that positive anticipated emotions as well as social identity that comprise self-categorization, affective commitment, and group based self-esteem are the main determinants of desire for we-intentions. While positive anticipated emotions are an individual level motive to engage, social identity is a group level motive to engage in communities. In a follow up study, Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo (2004) propose five types of values that drive the individual and group level motives of consumers: purposive value, self-discovery, inter-personal interconnectivity, social enhancement, and entertainment value. Purposive value is derived from instrumental purposes such as giving or receiving information. Self-discovery is related to understanding oneself better through interactions with others; maintaining inter-personal connectivity is achieved through friendship and intimacy; and social enhancement is a result of acceptance and approval of others. Finally, entertainment is the playful relaxation obtained in communal interactions. The authors also reveal that participation in smaller groups where the same bunch of people usually attend versus interactions in network based groups where people do not necessarily know each other are driven by different values being sought by different people. While engagement in small group-

based communities is due to accomplishing social benefits, participation in network-based communities is mostly urged because of informational and instrumental purposes.

Shang, Chen, and Liao (2006) argue that engagement in consumer communities occurs through posting or lurking activities, and participant involvement is driven either cognitively or affectively. Most authors do not classify motives based on affect or cognition, but rather try to provide a list of all possible rationales. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) reveal eight different motivations: venting negative feelings, concern for other consumers, self-enhancement, advice seeking, social benefits, economic incentives, platform assistance, and helping the company. In addition, they find out that social benefits are the factors that motivate consumers to visit and engage in consumer platforms the most. Similarly, Ridings and Gefen (2004) lay out information exchange, social support, friendship, and recreation as the main reasons for people to hang out online with others. Summarizing all these prominent works, it is possible to note that the main motives of engagement are based on intellectual or social exchange experienced collectively and within boundaries of moral responsibility (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Collins (2004) explains the totality of these concepts through his Interaction Ritual (IR) theory. Accordingly, for collective effervescence there should exist group assembly, barrier to outsiders, mutual focus of attention, as well as emotional entertainment.

The exchange of information is a fundamental motive for engagement in a community (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996; Rheingold, 1993). Preece (2001), Jayanti and Singh (2009), and Seraj (2012) all focus on learning about a topic, knowledge creation, and intellectual sharings as the main purpose for both lurkers and posters in a community. De Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga (2009) show that the phases

that are most relevant in community engagement are related to need recognition, search for information, pre-purchase evaluation, and post-purchase evaluation. Accordingly, community members interact to retrieve, supply, and discuss information, or, in other words, increase their intellectual capital related to the central topic of the community. Moreover, Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) also propose that information exchange for reassurance of product quality is a frequently observed behavior. Ultimately, intellectual engagement leads to co-creation and innovation (Füller, Jawecki, and Mühlbacher, 2007; Pitt et al., 2006).

Next to intellectual motives, socialization is a fundamental *raison d'être* for online communities. High-involvement product categories usually guide their consumers to get connected. There is space for joint consumption of a brand through the communal interactions: some products need to be consumed within communities rather than individually, as in the case of online games where the utility is produced more synergistically (Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder, 2008). In terms of social engagement, people engage in online communities for relationship building (Seraj 2012), self-exhibition (Simmons, 2008), and recreation (Molesworth and Denegri-Knott, 2007). New friends around common interests can be acquired in these environments leading to brand devotion experienced as a group. It is not only the consumer-to-consumer relationships that make up the social engagement. De Valck et al. (2007) argue that the user participation in online communities is stimulated by membership satisfaction with not only the interactions with other members, but also the connections with the community organizer and the community site. This supports the fact that the social engagement in brand communities should be studied as a relationship based model.

Fun is imperative for community engagement, and gamification can be observed in many community activities. In his book, *Convergence Culture: When Old and New Media Collide*, Jenkins (2006) gives a great example of how Survivor fans create guessing games for finding out where the next season of the series will take place. Similarly, Seraj (2012) describes guessing games of new airline routes when rumors of new aircraft purchases come to the forums of Airliners.net. In this tribal era, not only do communities create games for fun, but also they can essentially form around online games, too. Online games such as Second Life, Diablo II, World of Warcraft, Everquest, and many others are significant platforms for their participants where they create their parallel worlds and subcultures (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010; McBirney, 2004; Molesworth and Denegri-Knott, 2007).

Finally, it is apposite to count moral responsibility as a motivation to continue engaging in communal conversations. Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) consider it as one of the main elements of brand communities. Other authors discuss similar terms in their works too: Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster (1998) talk about altruism as one of the main drivers why people engage with others who they may not even know. Similarly, Chan and Li (2010) talk about reciprocity as an important factor in virtual community interactions that further motivate participation and co-shopping. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2004) explain the same notion of altruism with the two dimensions of helping others and helping the company. So apart from getting intellectual and social advantages, people want to be helpful and feel good about themselves by giving back to the community and fellow members.

Engagement is the backbone of community formation. Through these motives, digital identities are formed and relationships among these digital

impressions start to develop, which is explained through the identity and social literatures in the next section.

Social Identity and Ties

People desire to display their individual identities by distinguishing themselves from others and managing their impressions based on specific contexts and audiences (Goffman, 1959). Social identity is "the perception of belonging to a group with the result that a person identifies with that group" (Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn, 1995, p. 47). It is related to how a person describes oneself through categorizations of gender, ethnicity, and social groups; and the existence of intergroup bias creates positive social identity for group members leading to self-esteem (Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Hogg and Abrahams, 1990). Consumption is an important unit in building social identities. People use products and brands to define themselves (Schau and Muñiz, 2002) as consumers are what they consume and their possessions become an extension of their self (Belk, 1988). However, actual consumption is not a must for brand attachment and the identification process: Bhattacharya and Sen (2003) discuss that consumers support the brands they associate and identify themselves with regardless of whether they actually own or use these brands. Social identity theory is closely related to brand communities which are driven by personal identification of consumers with a brand community as a result of their intra-communal interactions (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Length of membership, activity characteristics, as well as visiting frequencies impacts this identification as well (Bhattacharya, Rao, and Glynn, 1995).

In computer mediated environments, consumers portray their digital identities together with their brand associations to complement their digital self with symbolic meanings linked with these brands (Schau and Gilly, 2003). However, online identity establishment is a different process than what it is in real life due to lack of physical embodiment and opportunity for anonymity of computer mediated settings (Bargh, McKenna, and Fitzsimons, 2002; McKenna, Green, and Gleason, 2002). People can end up creating parallel lives online where they re-invent a profile that diverges from their real life persona (Schau and Gilly, 2003; Turkle, 1995). However, online self presentation varies based on the context, whether it is an anonymous site like a chat room, a multi-player game, or a nonymous site such as Facebook and an online dating site. In nonymous sites where offline contacts can be "anchored" due to the possibility to meet offline in the future, there appears to be constraints for the identity construction process (Gibbs, Ellison, and Heino, 2006; Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin, 2008). Users try to curtail the diversity between their actual selves and ideal selves with a balance in credibility and desirability (Ellison, Heino, and Gibbs, 2006; Higgins, 1987).

There is variability in terms of members' involvement and commitment levels to the brand community, or as another way to put it, how definitive the brand community is in their online identity formation. Schau and Muñiz (2002) study five different brand communities of Apple computers, Harley Davidson motorcycles, Saab automobiles, singer Tom Petty, and the Xena, Warrior Princess television show and reveal four different categories of identity configuration in brand communities from most devout to more flexible associations: (1) subsumed identity, (2) super member, (3) community membership as identity component, and (4) multiple memberships. Subsumed identity is recognized when the brand and the community

appear to be the most important highlights of the person's online identity or profile; and other personal details seem to be obscured. It is the brand that is the most important and not the actual owner of the messages or content displayed. Super members, on the other hand, display a more evident author identity as their legitimate membership in the brand community as a true fan and authority for contributing to the brand are crucial indicators of their status in the brand community. The more visible the identity in conjunction with the brand, the higher becomes its rank in the community. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) describe this stage in the Harley Davidson subculture through the members' keen utilization of authentic apparel, parts, and accessories as well as increasing their level up the community ladder by acquiring more expensive and unique motorcycles. A third level in this research is defined by the community membership as a part of the online identity of the member rather than a major marker of the profile. Membership is still important for the defined identity but not as crucial as in the case of super members. Finally, multiple memberships may define the online identity rather than a strong association with a single community membership, pointing out to a more diluted relationship with multiple brands in various areas.

As a result of this social identification process, social ties (Granovetter, 1973) within the brand community form leading to social capital (Seraj, 2012; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). The consumer who had been suppressed by domineering attitude of companies so far started to interact with each other online, sharing information and building relationships, leading to a power switch from companies to consumers who have the ability to raise their voice (Kozinets, 2002a; Simmons, 2008). This interactivity yields an environment to build social ties both weak and strong. Strong ties are critical for sustaining interaction levels, but weak ties are also important

since they are the bridges that help people access information resources in other strong tie groups through their acquaintances (Garton, Haythornthwaite, and Wellman 1997; Granovetter 1973). Cova (1997) emphasizes this connection between members as the "linking value" of the community. These brand based links are so strong that they engender a milieu where members feel as if they know each other, even if they have actually never met before (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Following online encounters, the relationships are sometimes translated into offline gatherings (Cova and Cova, 2002) or may reside as only digital get-togethers with intensities even stronger than face-to-face interactions (McKenna, Green, and Glenson, 2002). The more involvement with the community, the more is the impact of the community on opinions, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior (De Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga, 2009) - even to an extent that communal opinions surpass the influence of actual individual experience (Steffes and Burgee, 2009).

The online relationships based on online social identity formation as well as the ties formed among people bare various roles in communities, which is commonly discussed in online and brand community literature. The next section focuses on these taxonomies of roles and how they influence the subsistence of communities.

Participation and Roles

Goal driven engagement in online brand communities brings about relationships, and these relationships cause specific participation patterns and roles to emerge beyond the simple classification of posters and lurkers. Members can take on these various roles at different instances (Seraj, 2012) depending on their level of interaction and commitment.

Kozinets (1999) draws a taxonomy based on the involvement levels of community members, in other words, the centrality of the issue for their lives, and their interest in building social ties within the community. Accordingly, four types of members surface: tourists, who are just visiting the community site and not too involved with the subject or the people in the community; minglers, who hang out just for socializing rather than their inconsequential concentration in the topic; devotées, for whom the central attraction is the subject matter of the community, be it a hobby or an intellectual theme; and finally, insiders who join the community both for their elevated involvement in the theme of the community as well as their motivation to build relationships with other members and join the social interactions taking place in communal grounds. Devotées and tourists are mainly present for the information exchange whereas the minglers and insiders care about social aspects, too.

Ouwensloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) study hobby communities of Swatch and Settlers of Catan, a board game, to develop a typology based on McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig's (2002) four dimensional relationship model of community members with the brand, the product, the company, and other community members. They analyze the relationship intensities of community members with these four possible partners and derive a list of five participation levels. "Enthusiasts" are similar to the Insiders of the previous discussion and have high involvement with all parties of this communal relationship model. They are the ultimate super members of a brand community due to their motivation to be involved in all aspects of the brand and the community. "Socializers" again score high on all four aspects, but their relationships with other community members are the most critical one. The third group, "Users," is present usually for the joint consumption of the brand and their

main motivation to join the community is the product itself. The "behind-the-scenes" group attends the brand community with the very reverse reasons of the users group. This fourth category is present for their involvement in the brand and the company rather than the community itself. Finally, a lurker group is also present who do not present any kind of excessive excitement for any of these four relationships, the "Not me"s. Both Kozinets (1999) and Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) provide classifications based on motivations to engage and involvement in the community's subject area. These works mainly focus on participation levels and types.

Through their study of a culinary site, de Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga (2009) categorize community participation levels in six groups based on their information exchange patterns in addition to their visit frequencies and durations: core members, conversationalists, informationalsists, hobbyists, functionalists, and opportunists. Core members, similar to insiders and enthusiasts, are the most frequent users that stay online for significant amount of time. They are both users and suppliers of information and active participants in the forums. Conversationalists stand out with their social engagement rather than the average level of information exchange they portray. Conversely, informationalsists score high on supplying, retrieving, and discussing information rather than socializing. The hobbyists are more self-centered in terms of their activities and spend a lot of time for playing around with their own profiles. Functionalists are there to retrieve the information they need from various sources, and opportunists visit the community the least and just grab the information they need and stay connected to the site for very short periods.

The three studies discussed here all investigate the participation levels based on involvement, need for socialization, and visiting characteristics. They all agree in the sense that community participation is based on intellectual and social motives with members scoring differently on these two axes. Two other studies approach the participation topic by differentiating the roles community members play during these interactions. Fournier and Lee (2009) provide a list of thirteen different types of roles community members take on based on different needs and activities. Mentors, learners, back-ups, historians, greeters, decision makers, supporters, ambassadors, etc. all provide different services to the community based on their specialty and their general demeanor in their interactions. Likewise, Seraj (2012) provides a list of seven roles that airliner hobbyists take on during their communal interactions. "Seekers" are the curious ones looking for information and "educators" quench their need for content in conversations. "Challengers" add a flavor to these conversations by questioning the rationales and sources of information to ensure the intellectual quality of the site, while "appraisers" welcome high quality content and share it with others to enjoy. "Players" create games for entertainment and socialization purposes, and "innovators" are the generators of novel content or rituals in the community. "Governors" presume the role of protecting the well-being of the community by monitoring the content and engagements to ensure communal policies are not breached. All these different roles help enrich the communities in various ways.

Motives, identity establishment, participation, and relationships all lead to the formation of engagement in communities, which is crucial for the existence of brand communities. Prolonged engagement prepares the ground for culture formation that further enhances these interactions, and many of the brand community articles do

focus on the formation of community culture and the factors that influence this process.

Culture Formation Around Brand Communities

Culture is a set of values, ideas, meanings and symbols that help individuals communicate with each other and understand their environment along with a sense of identity and code of conduct (Davis, 1984). A culture of consumption is an "interconnected system of commercially produced images, texts, and objects that particular groups use - through the construction of overlapping and even conflicting practices, identities, and meanings - to make collective sense of their environments and to orient their members' experiences and lives" (Kozinets, 2001, p. 68).

Online cultures are similar to offline cultures in the sense that they are a result of interactions where norms are formed and intentions become community oriented (Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo, 2004). Sharing of knowledge, emotions, and experience are critical for a distinguished culture to emerge in an online community (Seraj, 2012). Therefore, the occurrence of an online culture is a complex phenomenon and it becomes more stable with higher levels of commitment due to the strong bonds that are formed through cultural exchanges (Deighton and Kornfeld, 2009; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001) and intra-communal tensions resolved to reach common grounds (de Valck, 2007).

A substantial number of works in the literature of brand communities discuss the concept of culture and what constitutes the existence of culture. Through ethnographic investigations aimed at interpreting the surfacing, meaning, and ethos of brand communities, many issues concerning community culture are discovered.

Veloutsou and Moutinho (2009, p. 316) summarize the interactions between individuals and brands in a community culture as follows:

There is a strong connection between brand, individual identity and culture. Therefore, and more precisely, a brand community is as an enduring, self selected group of consumers, sharing a system of values, standards and representations, who accept and recognize bonds of membership with each other and with the whole.

One of the first and most cited examples of this kind of research on community culture is "Subcultures of Consumption" by Schouten and McAlexander (1995). Schouten and McAlexander (1995, p. 43) defines a subculture of consumption as "a distinct subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity." Their work is the ethnography of the Harley Davidson motorcycle owners, where they discuss the structure and ethos of the Harley Davidson subculture as well as its impact on its individual consumers. The subculture has its unique philosophy and values that reflect its members' consumption patterns, how they manage the interactions within the subculture as well as how they define themselves around the central brand. The study reveals that there are hierarchies of commitment and authenticity within a subculture and barriers to entry are present for aspirants. The authors also demonstrate personal freedom, patriotism, brotherhood, machismo, and American heritage as the core values of Harley Davidson Subculture of Consumption. It is important to understand these core values in order to get to know a community and realize how it differentiates itself from the general mass.

The prominent work of Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) explains the existence of brand community through three main concepts: consciousness of kind, traditions and rituals, and moral responsibility. Consciousness of kind is "the intrinsic connection that members feel toward one another and the collective sense of difference from

others not in the community" (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 413). It is the "we-ness" (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002) of members in brand communities that makes them feel a distinguished unity. Rituals and traditions, which commemorate the norms and values of the community, maintain the community's history and culture. They are the inherited practices, acts, ceremonies, customs, and procedures that define the community culture. Finally, moral responsibility is the sense of duty towards the community that leads to collective actions. Recruiting new members, encouraging citizens of the community and lending all kinds of support when needed are the rudiments of moral responsibility (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Similarly, Varman and Costa (2008) depict communities as entities with unity, social interactions, bonds and values, shared symbols, and beliefs. According to their study, community culture in embedded markets are especially built on notions such as commitment, honesty, trust, fairness, honor, and they share norms of reciprocity.

Apart from what Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) explain as three main pillars in the existence of brand communities, the collective consumption experience itself is a very compelling aspect of brand community culture, too (Kozinets, 2001). This unified consumption experience yields many of the characteristics of brand communities such as their religion-like devotion, their potential for fantasy or utopia creation, their intellectual augmentation, and the guidelines that protect their survival.

Religiosity is one such concept revealed by Muñiz and Schau (2005) in their analysis of the Apple Newton brand community, where the authors find that the community displayed piety for their obsolete palm devices, which were unsupported by the parent company. The abandonment of the Apple Newton device is tried to be circumvented by the loyal users through engagement within their brand community.

The religious connotations of this brand community culture are based on faith in the device, survival and miraculous recovery tales, and an expectation of resurrection (Muñiz and Schau, 2005). Through story-telling and naive expectations of a come-back, the community struggles to prolong both the product and their own existence as a community. Religiosity is also present in the Harley Davidson Subculture, where the brand devotion is similar to a religious practice (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). As religion is a determinant in culture formation, so are religious-like interactions in online brand communities.

Fantasy and utopia are other characteristics of consumption experience observed in brand community culture. Fantasy experiences studied in the modern mountain men community (Belk and Costa 1998), during Burning Man festivals (Kozinets, 2001), at American Girl brand center (Diamond et. al, 2009), and in *Airliners.net* forums (Seraj, 2012) all reveal that being out of this world, out of the daily routine, and actualizing dreams together is a common feature in community culture. Along with living in these fantasy worlds, story-telling endorses the aggregate experience by sharing it with fellow community members (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010; Schau and Muñiz, 2002). Therefore, story-telling is a crucial part of community culture as it creates engagement and facilitates its rituals and traditions to pass on. During Burning Man, myths and stories rather than businesslike reports are critical for the anti-commercial consumption community (Kozinets, 2002a); and in *Airliners.net*, members especially like providing stories of their flights in new models of aircraft or pampering experiences in their first class flights (Seraj, 2012). While there is great parallelism with real life culture, online brand community cultures are also great escapism outlets for relaxation and sharing leisure times and dreams.

Knowledge generation and intellectual value (Seraj, 2012) are critical posts for community members to fuse and instigate community culture. Sharing of information and valuable knowledge anchors members in a community as they have the opportunity to augment their own expertise, and this creates a sharing culture rather than keeping knowledge as a secret. Kozinets (2001) discusses the importance of intellectual content for coffee connoisseurship, Preece (2001) for health related compassion communities, Seraj (2012) for aviation community, and de Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga (2009) for culinary devotees. Apart from fantasy and play, it is the community specific, idiosyncratic knowledge co-created by members that cultivates culture. Jayanti and Singh (2009) especially point out the generative learning process of online communities and the fact that persistence in inquiry-action linkages are critical for ongoing learning.

None of the community culture facets are sustainable without a policy to keep the community intact. Preece (2001) denoted sociability and usability as the main factors that affect online community usage, where sociability is the combination of purpose, policy, and people whereas usability conveys dialog and social support, information design, and navigation and access. Through Kim, Park and Jin (2008)'s analysis of this model, it is supported that policy is one of the significant determinants of satisfaction in online communities. Kozinets (2002a) mentions the Survival Guide in the Burning Man community, where the rules and regulations of the annual gathering are clearly sorted and members are expected to abide by the community's policies. In the online aviation community, Seraj (2012) finds that the community policies are strictly followed by the special team of Airliners "Crew" and close attention is paid to the quality of the content being top notch as well as interactions not crossing the lines of community policies. It is an equitable

conclusion to say that communal policies are what preserve the community culture and secure its future sustainability.

The specific characteristics of brand communities – their thirst for knowledge, their religious, utopian, and fantastic inclinations – all add up to their cultural capital (Kozinets, 2010b; Seraj, 2012). In order to understand what further feeds this capital, this discussion will be extended by focusing on the concepts of communities and tribes, fandom, and activism, all of which have been deliberated by many authors to explain the ethos and culture of communities. The "community" and "tribe" concepts have been some of the main argument points of postmodern authors in the field of marketing and especially consumer culture theory. In order to understand the culture of brand enthusiasts, it is critical to point out the implications of consumption communities and neo-tribes (Cova and Cova, 2002; Maffesoli, 1995). Fandom related literature is a more specific examination of individual behavior within or outside of a community, and adds a lot of insights to the discussion of community culture that naturally encompasses fans. Finally, the topic of activism will be discussed in terms of how specific causes or even anti-consumption can congregate a community and expose cultural connotations.

Community and Tribalism

In their book *Cluetrain Manifesto*, Levine et al. (2000) define community as "a group of people who care about each other more than they should," which hints at both the strength and the eccentricity of communities. Cohen (2013) states that community is a unit that resides somewhere between kinship and society, and affects people's lives fundamentally. The concept of community has been investigated by social science

scholars in two main streams: structural communities, which are based on geographical proximity and kinship; and non-structural communities that are based on more symbolic meanings or enlightenment purposes regardless of geography (Varman and Costa, 2008). Brand communities are a special sect of online communities. The gathering of brand enthusiasts around a brand community can be summarized as "a common understanding of a shared identity" (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 431) and a social network of exchanges embedded in the marketplace (Granovetter, 1973) all related with a brand.

An alternative term for a community, which has been adopted by postmodern consumer culture theorists, is a "tribe" or "neo-tribe" (Adams and Smith, 2008; Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2002; Kozinets, 1999). A tribe is a group of heterogeneous people who are capable of collective action, are linked by a common passion or emotion, and act with "a local sense of identification, religiosity, syncretism, group narcissism" (Cova 1997, p. 300). The major quality of these neo-tribes is that they are not mere consumers, they are advocates: they participate, they interact with what they consume and they change and get changed with it (Cova, 1997; Cova, Kozinets, Shankar; 2007). Cova (1997) stresses this engagement and change process as the "linking value" and state that the links built within the tribe are more important than the things the community is about. As for the online version of these gatherings, Adams and Smith (2008, p. 17) define an *electronic tribe* as an "exclusive, narrowly focused, network-supported aggregate of human beings in cyberspace who are bound together by a common purpose and employ a common protocol and procedure for the consensual exchange of information and opinions." In short, it is common goals, focused nature, and aggregate power that produce neo-tribes.

Though the concepts of tribe and community look very similar, they do have their nuances. According to Maffesoli (1995), these neo-tribes are ephemeral, fluid and disperse easily since their gatherings are occasion based. They practice rituals together and do not necessarily stick together with long term membership like subcultures do (Brownlie, Hewer, and Treanor, 2007). Their dispersal and reformation are parallel to the constantly changing identities of postmodern consumers (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Conversely, the community concept Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) portray is more committed and shows more stable structures in contrast to the ephemeral gatherings that Maffesoli (1995) discusses. In short, the two concepts can be distinguished as brand communities being more long-lasting, formal and structured; while brand tribes exist in a more informal and loose fashion (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009). Another difference is the negative connotation of the term "tribe" as it represents more archaic and savage-like lifestyle practiced by its members (Adams and Smith, 2008). However, contrary to its ancient meanings, current literature does not define a tribe based on geography and kinship (Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar, 2007), and becoming a part of a tribe is a privilege to be earned rather than a right (Jaffe, 2008).

Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar (2007) categorize tribes based on two axes. The first axis is market appropriation, the tendency to play with the market identity of the tribe, and we see a range of tribes from double agents to plunderers. As double agents, tribes avoid taking extreme positions in any consumption experience, but they also balance their reactions between resistance and passion. Plunderers, on the other hand, play with the market system - sometimes without purpose, and experience their freedom as consumers, leading to more stylish and fashionable or pop outcomes. The second axis is market annexation, the tendency to utilize material

from the commercial marketplace, that results in a range from activators to entrepreneurs. Activators just stimulate commercial meanings and identity construction, whereas entrepreneurs become "legitimate economic actors in their marketplaces" at the other end of the spectrum (Cova, Kozinets, and Shankar, 2007, p. 20).

Within a brand community or tribal culture, it is possible to see the emergence of more dedicated - even obsessive, aggressive, and sometimes activist behavior, which will be discussed under fandom and activism in the coming sections.

Fandom

Consumer fanaticism is an affect-based phenomenon that can be defined as "a unique form of loyalty characterized by strong and intense levels of commitment, allegiance, devotion, passion, emotional attachment, enthusiasm, and involvement" (Chung et al., 2005, p. 43). Thorne and Bruner (2006, p. 53) make a definition of all related terms to fandom as below:

Fan: A person with an overwhelming liking or interest in a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea. Behavior is typically viewed by others as unusual or unconventional but does not violate prevailing social norms;

Fanatic: A person with a overwhelming liking or interest in a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea that exhibits extreme behavior viewed by others as dysfunctional and violating social conventions;

Fandom: A subculture composed of like minded fans, typified by a feeling of closeness to others with the shared interest;

Fanaticism: The level of investment one has in the liking or interest of a particular person, group, trend, artwork or idea.

All these definitions actually become inadequate to depict the communal aspect of fandom. In fact, fans are "active participants within fandom as a social, cultural and

interpretive institution" (Tulloch, and Jenkins, 1995, p. 23) with self-sustaining interest and enduring involvement in a brand (Pimentel and Reynolds, 2004).

Kozinets' study of the Star Trek fan community reveals this communal effect very well:

Fans (1) consume resistantly while (2) physically gathered together into communities using (3) creative and subcultural participatory acts rather than the consumption of mass-marketed objects (Kozinets, 2001, p. 69)

The distinction between fans and others is that, fans identify themselves as "fans" (Kozinets, 2010b) and provide individualized negotiations of meaning (Kozinets, 2001) for the objects of their devotion. The reading and production of this meaning-making process are concomitant and inseparable (Jenkins, 2006).

Fans have strong involvement or emotional attachment towards the product or brand (Thorne and Bruner, 2006), which they internally express through researching its history, its manufacturing, its management, and its marketing; providing comparisons and ratings; as well as filling the gaps in meaning (Kozinets, 2001), crafting connoisseurs out of themselves. Not only do they individually practice these rituals, but fans also attend outside events and actively engage with the fan community (Thorne and Bruner, 2006) through intellectual dialogues (Seraj, 2012), rumor-starting, and news-spreading about the future (Jenkins, 2006). Moreover, they acquire and especially collect materials related with their interest as a presentation of their devotion (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Thorne and Bruner, 2006) - even sometimes to an extent that is excessive (Chung, Beverland, and Quester, 2005). Through this common culture based on mutual language, history of episodes, and symbols, it is easy for fans to build connections with each other even if they have not met before (Kozinets, 2010b) and which may lead into long term relationships.

Fans also act as advocates. They try to protect the brand or product from the owner company and the competition when needed (Muñiz and Schau, 2005), create positive word-of-mouth (Brown, Broderick, and Lee, 2007; Chung et al., 2005; Kozinets et al., 2010), and try to enhance the community through uplifting others' motivation to join and interact (Muñiz and Schau, 2007; Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould, 2009). The study on the abandoned Apple Newton brand community by Muñiz and Schau (2007) constitutes again a great example of this phenomenon. Even though the company decides to discontinue the product, brand fans prolong its existence through their communal effort and advocacy. They support each other by co-creating quick fixes to keep their devices running. Fans are innovators, co-producers, and advocates (Kozinets, 2010b); they enable co-creation of artifacts, ads, and videos to further promote the significance of their beloved brands (Muñiz and Schau, 2007; Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould, 2009).

Fandom develops over time. Henry and Caldwell (2007) define this process with three stages of *imprinting*, when a fan gets involved with the actual source of his devotion - usually in their teen ages; *incubation*, the time span when fandom is practiced alone; and *intensification*, the stage of involvement in a fan club. As it develops, it may end up in different levels. Thorne and Bruner (2006) categorize fans by their increasing level of involvement: dilettante, dedicated, devoted and dysfunctional. While dilettante indicates a casual involvement, dedicated and devoted fans have the tendency to adjust their lives for the subject of their fandom. This involvement level may climb up to the stage of dysfunctionality involving anti-social tendencies with aggressive behavior. That is why there is also stigma associated with fandom as more traditional consumers have negative impressions regarding fans: they are the isolated lonely ones, the geeks, the weirdos, the

obsessive and pathetic ones, the marginals, the outliers, and the extremes (Chung et al., 2005; Kozinets, 2010b; Smith, Fisher, and Cole, 2007). Their lonely milieu and wedged time in front of a TV or computer screen is, in fact, their very practice of fandom (Kozinets, 2010b), which they are content with. There is mysticism regarding these extreme practices and being an outlaw, which again hints at the dark side of fandom (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Ironically, most fans actually pity "others," because those who are not fans are the ones without a reason to live (Smith, Fisher, and Cole, 2007).

The digital age has facilitated the gathering of fans, and online communities have become the new shrines of fan practices. It has become a great opportunity for firms to utilize their fan base to assemble in more defined platforms. Yet, it is not possible to confine them into defined spaces, as fans are everywhere they can rejoice their devotion, enhance their community, or fight for their brands.

Activism

Activism is another rationale that assembles consumers into communities around a philosophy, creating cultural exchanges of its own. It emerges with individuals that get organized against destructive and unethical practices of the corporate world. The purpose of activism is "not only the changing of principles, practices, and policies, but also a fundamental change to the ideology and culture of consumerism" (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004, p. 692). As an example for establishment of culture around this phenomenon, Rokka and Moisander (2009) investigate ecological citizenship and explain the cultural and political activism built around it. In their study, the roles and responsibilities of ecological citizens are actively negotiated and

the authors depict culture as a complex system with shared discourses and daily rituals through which meaning and cultural artifacts are produced and interpreted. Similarly, Szmigin, Carrigan, and Bekin (2007) talk about the concept of new consumption community culture where the consumption cycle has other stages than branding such as brand communities, boycotting, and anti-branding. The authors also discuss three observed actions of new consumption communities: exit, voice, and positive choice. Accordingly, *exit* strategy is the refusal of brands by members of the community; *voice* denotes complaints coming from the consumers; and positive choice represents a type of loyalty with the hope of change from the company's side. Through these and many other works, it is possible to posit that activism is another and critical precursor for community culture to flourish.

Reciprocally, formation of online anti-brand or anti-corporate communities has clearly facilitated the surfacing of activism and establishment of coalitions further due to their lack of space and time limits (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006). Major discussions related to online activism include anti-branding (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Luedicke, 2006; Szmigin, Carrigan, and Bekin, 2007), anti-consumption (Kozinets, 2002a; Kozinets and Handelman, 2004), boycotting (Kozinets and Handelman, 1998), brand-hijack (Cova and Pace, 2006), brand revival (Muñiz and Schau, 2005), and environmental consciousness (Rokka and Moisander, 2009). All of these works mention the embodiment of "new social movement" (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009), which is based on the rejection of the materialistic orientation of consumerism.

Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006) study three anti-brand communities whose members identify themselves as social activists: anti-Starbucks, anti-Wal-Mart, and

anti-McDonald's. They reveal that there are four main rationales for anti-brand communities to emerge: to form a social platform with common moral obligations, to provide a support network to achieve common goals, to cope with workplace difficulties, and to establish a hub for taking action. Gathered around these rationales, the members of anti-brand communities depict specific behaviors of publicizing marketplace inequalities such as unethical marketing programs; advertising the rewards associated with a restrictive lifestyle; and constructing a new collective identity against prefabricated marketplace identities (p. 480). Through social media, voices of these anti-brand communities reach crowds very easily, fostering their cause further. Similar to participants of anti-brand communities, boycotters refrain from consuming specific products, but boycotting behavior may stay as an individual act contrary to anti-brand communities, and it rather provides an internal satisfaction based on moral self-realization than a community based actualization (Kozinets and Handelman, 1998).

Corporations are not the only targets of activist consumers. Kozinets and Handelman (2004) study activist identity and portray the perceptions of activists regarding consumers who are not activists. They provide an analysis of a skeptic group towards advertising, the anti-Nike activists community, and anti-genetically engineered food community, where they reveal that the activist persona is caring, fond of disclosing facts about their cause, and evangelistic in the sense that want to spread their philosophy. In addition, their findings also show that activists not only oppose corporations for breaching consumer rights, but they also dissent silent consumers who are selfish and foolish enough to stay unreflective about these adversaries. The generic consumers are seen as the "robotic sleepers" or "entranced couch potatoes" from the point of view of the activists. The work of Luedicke,

Thompson, and Giesler (2010), on the other hand, depicts how the controversial consumption of Hummer is vindicated by Hummer owners against anti-Hummer arguments through converting ideological and mythical resources associated with the Hummer brand such as rugged individualism and personal liberty into moral protagonism to justify their causes of consumption.

Not all activist approaches are against brands. Unlike the active opposition in anti-branding and boycotting, the concept of brand hijacking is a pro-brand approach of activism. "A brand hijack occurs when a consumer takes a brand away from its marketing professionals to enhance its evolution" (Cova and Pace, 2006, p. 1090). Through serendipitous hijacking, consumers can conquer a brand site and become the real owners and content creators of the brand. Cova and Pace (2006) study the MyNutella brand community site as an example of brand hijacking where consumer profiles and the interactions make up the majority of brand content and the mother company does not impede this takeover of the brand fans. Another form of pro-brand activism is consumer lobbying. Hart et. al (2001) investigates the rebellion of Crown Pilot cracker consumers as an example for consumer lobbying. When Crown Pilot crackers by Nabisco were discontinued, harsh petitions were raised by its consumers to resume their production and save it from extinction. There can be pro and con approach to a brand simultaneously. Luedicke (2006) study the case of Hummer brand, where an arena of conflicting activism is created with Hummer brand fans as the protagonists and the environmentalists as the antagonists (Luedicke, 2006).

The components of culture creation around brand communities and their characteristics were delineated in this section. Culture is a critical part of brand communities as it influences engagement as well as value created within

communities. Value creation is another distinctive topic frequently discussed in brand community literature.

Value Created by Brand Communities

Why are communities a significant topic anyway? Online communities and brand communities all drive some kind of value for both consumers and companies, hence the worth of their existence. This value is conveyed as a result of engagement and the formation of culture and it reciprocally augments the previous two constructs in a cyclical manner.

Brands, on their own, create value for their producers and consumers. The brand as a whole with its peripheral add-ons creates a complex value system, the "brand gestalt" (Diamond et al., 2009). The American Girl brand is analyzed by Diamond et al. (2009), and their study reveals that the value of the American Girl brand with its dolls, brand center, theater, its philosophy and the atmosphere it creates is a gestalt, that is, it is greater than its individual components. Likewise, through the progress of digitalization and surfacing of online social platforms, brand communities have become a critical part of the brand gestalt and the total value created.

Schau, Muñiz, and Arnould (2009) contemplate how brand communities create value through twelve main practices grouped under four main themes of social networking (welcoming, governing, empathizing), community engagement (documenting, badging, milestone, staking), impression management (evangelizing, justifying), and brand use (customizing, grooming, commoditizing). These practices collectively create value greater than what the firm can accomplish

alone. In addition, Seraj (2012) explains that online communities yield value composed of intellectual, social, and cultural capital. Accordingly, it is the concurrent existence of content quality, playful interactivity, and a self-governed community culture that generates loyalty among community members and these lead to motivation to compensate the communal services financially.

The discussion of value creation in online and brand community literature needs to include the subjects of co-creation, word-of-mouth, and brand loyalty as these constructs are investigated comprehensively and mentioned in many scholarly works related to communities. Co-creation is the concurrent value creation process of community members through their engagement to produce anything related to the brand. Word-of-mouth can be counted as one of the co-created outputs of brand communities and it influences the marketplace intensely as it affects future buying decisions, brand awareness, and brand image. These are all antecedents to the brand loyalty construct, which is also a critical outcome of brand communities.

Co-Creation

The collective act of creation where consumer participation is a competence in company activities was termed as co-creation by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000). Whilst explaining the theory of service dominant logic, Vargo and Lusch (2004) recurrently discuss the co-creation concept as well. According to Service Dominant Logic, everything offered by firms actually constitute services that bring value to consumers rather than goods, and the co-creation of value together with consumers is a critical success factor. Consumers are no longer at the end of the value chain but rather a crucial part of it (Pongsakornrunsilp and Schroeder, 2011). Similarly,

Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004, p. 5) render co-creation as the main pillar in value creation and that the marketplace is actually a forum for iterative discussion between consumers and firms to gratify needs of customers through dialogue, transparency and accessibility:

The meaning of value and the process of value creation are rapidly shifting from a product- and firm-centric view to personalized consumer experiences. Informed, networked, empowered, and active consumers are increasingly co-creating value with the firm. The interaction between the firm and the consumer is becoming the locus of value creation and value extraction.

By participating in co-creation activities, communities aim at increasing knowledge, providing solutions, and pioneering new ideas through collective reflection and conceptualization (Hemetsberger and Reinhardt, 2006). Consumers even take place in co-creating the advertising activities of firms through creating brand artifacts, contributing to viral marketing, and producing self-made marketing contents on behalf of the brands (Muñiz and Schau, 2007).

Open-source platforms are eminent environments for co-creation projects to shape up and many examples of open-source communities are discussed in the marketing literature. The open-source communities of Linux and KDE are examples of how a volunteer community of programmers produces an operating system through co-creation (Pitt et al., 2006; Hemetsberger and Reinhardt, 2006). Similarly, the Nike community designs their own basketball shoes, providing the company with possible models that consumers actually like (Füller, Jawecki, and Mühlbacher, 2007). YouTube is another environment that attracts comments on videos, co-creating a new meaning with all the content uploaded with viewers' interpretations and reactions.

Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau (2008) label co-creation activities of online communities based on their orientation and concentration to innovate. In

terms of their orientation, communities which are driven to innovate are named as "telo-specific" and those that produce innovations as by-products during other activities related to interests, lifestyles, or hobbies are "communo-ludic." The concentration dimension shows whether a minority or the majority of the community is involved in co-creation activities. Moreover, Füller, Matzler, and Hoppe (2008) have found that the major elements that motivate participation in open-source innovation projects are consumer creativity components such as task motivation, skills, innovativeness, and task involvement. Apart from the aforementioned dimensions, trust for the brand and company, identification with the brand community, and passion for the brand are also critical factors to be considered. Another factor that enables co-creation in open-source environments is "a strong group culture with clear rules, norms and patterns of behavior enhance commitment and foster high-quality teamwork" (Hemetsberger and Reinhardt, 2006, p. 188), which hints at the cyclical relationship between value and culture hinted at in this research.

Through co-creation, a shift in power is inevitable. It is the joint creation of consumption experience and democratization of the innovation process, where creation power is disseminated to collective groups, that is needed in the customer-centric world (Ritzer and Jurgenson, 2010; Zwick, Bonsu, and Darmody, 2008). What consumers produce during their interactions become beneficial outputs for organizations since they are knowledgeable about brands and are willing to contribute (Füller, Matzler, and Hoppe, 2008; Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau, 2008). Not only is this co-creation act beneficial for the companies, but it also shifts the power to consumers in determining market actions. While consumer power was only based on individual resources such as demand and information, the social

platforms enable network based resources leading to network actions and crowd-based power (Labrecque et al., 2013). Through these network based actions collective groups determine business models. There are also ethical concerns that co-creation can be exploited as free labor (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Cova, Dalli, and Zwick, 2011). Companies can fully utilize novel ideas coming from customers without rewarding them. However, Arvidsson (2008) states that this is a fair economy of social cooperation since the main motivation in collective innovation is social rather than monetary. Still, the ethics of co-creation is a topic that needs caution since the future beholds further involvement of consumers in business models and outcomes, and a necessity for proper compensation.

Co-creation does not only entail new ideas. Word-of-mouth is a very valuable outcome of co-creation processes (Kozinets, Hemetsberger, and Schau, 2008); hence the following discussion scrutinizes how word-of-mouth produced by brand communities feeds the value creation process further.

Word-of-Mouth (WOM)

WOM is a valuable output of communities and its effects have exceeded that of offline WOM and traditional marketing channels due to the multi-directional flow of information through many-to-many communication channels (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006; Kozinets et al., 2010):

Word-of-mouth is the informal transmission of ideas, comments, opinions, and information between two or more individuals, neither one of which is a marketer. Virtual communities can be considered word-of-mouth networks consisting of multiple dyads. Multiple dyads occur with one source and several receivers, as well as with several sources and one receiver (De Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga, 2009).

The Internet has become a dependable source for consumers to have feedback on almost everything (Dellarocas, 2003). The online rallying of consumers naturally boosts WOM and this is both a great potential as well as a possible threat for companies (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). The effect of online WOM on business performance is evident. It is a very effective marketing channel with almost no direct cost, exponential speed of dissemination, and seven times more powerful influence compared to that of advertising (Dichter, 1966). However, it is also more complex since the new online marketplace operates under a network co-production model where consumers are the main influencers and the marketing messages are filtered through the consumers' perspective rather than reaching individuals in a linear model where companies have the control (Kozinets et al., 2010). Therefore, it is critical to understand online WOM, its antecedents and consequences.

Involvement is a critical antecedent for WOM (Dichter, 1966; Zaichkowsky, 1986). Dichter (1966) argues that there are various types of involvement: product-involvement, self-involvement, others-involvement, and message-involvement. In product involvement, the consumer's attention is based on the product and the tension of usage is relieved by talking about it. Self-involvement is centralized around the creator of WOM and the main motivation is self-confirmation through using the product as a means to reflect one's own emotions or ideas. Sharing and giving a gift are the main impulses in other-involvement where the WOM creator cares for others. Finally, message-involvement is related with the means the product is advertised and not necessarily with a direct experience about the product. Engel, Blackwell, and Miniard (1993) also add "dissonance reduction" as a fifth category to this list. Sundaram, Mitra, and Webster (1998), identify four motives for positive WOM: altruism, product involvement, self-enhancement, and helping the company; and four

other motives for negative WOM: altruism, anxiety reduction, vengeance, and advice seeking. These are actually parallel to what Dichter (1966) stated as self or others involvement as the consumer is either trying to acknowledge or relieve himself for his choices as well as helping others by encouraging or warning them.

Other than involvement, social ties and their strength are also influential in the flow of WOM. Strong ties are enacted more frequently due to their credibility, and they facilitate passage of most of the information (Granovetter, 1973). On the other hand, the inter-group flow of WOM happens through weak ties, which are the bridges of information streams passing from one community to another (Brown and Reingen, 1987). Brown, Broderick, and Lee (2007) determined the main characteristics that induce WOM as homophily, tie-strength, and source credibility. Accordingly, the more similarity there is between profiles and backgrounds of people, or the more the homophily, the stronger the ties between these message exchangers, and the higher the credibility of the source, the more powerful are the effects of WOM. Brand communities naturally comprise involvement and ties that inspire WOM.

Another aspect that accelerates travel of WOM in these communities is the presence of influencers. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) as well as Feick and Price (1987) investigated the topics of opinion leaders and market mavens, respectively, and their influence in the communities is immense. Similarly, brand communities have a lot of connoisseurs and opinion leaders that start and disseminate information as the main sources of WOM. Therefore, marketers try to affect these influencers in their marketing campaigns to reach many members of brand communities (De Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga, 2009; Kozinets et al., 2010). In "Networked Narratives," Kozinets et al. (2010) discuss the motives and the consequences of

different types of influencer interactions online and how their messages are received by their audiences. Through their netnographic study on how technology bloggers endorse products, they find that there are both communal and commercial norms in producing WOM and this causes implicit and explicit tensions to show up in online reviews and discussions. Bloggers who are driven by individual goals utilize the techniques of embracement and endorsement of the product, while those who are driven by goals of the community prefer a tone of evaluation and explanation. Explanation of the pros and cons regarding products or brands without individual or commercial motives draws more positive reactions from the community, whereas other strategies can cause negative or mixed responses from consumers.

Consumers are picky about digesting the massive WOM they are submerged in. While evaluating online WOM, there is a tendency to rely on negative reviews more than positive reviews (Chevalier and Mayzlin, 2006). In addition, consumers are mostly affected by the content of the reviews rather than the general statistics or rankings (Koch, Toker, and Brulez, 2011), and any improvement in reviews automatically translates into an increase in sales. Black and Kelley (2009) posit that these online reviews are story-telling practices of consumers and they find that in order to be effective as reviews, they need to have the qualities of trust, character development, detail, tone of superiority, inspirational content, and quality of writing. In short, it is not only the quantity but also the quality of WOM that determines its business effectiveness.

Engagement, culture, co-creation, and WOM all amplify brand community influence and therefore brand loyalty. Next, loyalty will be discussed as the third subsection of the value heading.

Loyalty

Brand loyalty and brand equity are the ultimate goals of all companies and they bring great value in many aspects (Aaker, 1996; Fournier, 1998). The online gathering of brand communities and transcendental events performed together all contribute to communal loyalty formation around the brand through the formation of communal relations and fidelity that even supersedes the economic utility of the brand (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002; Schouten, McAlexander, and Koenig, 2007). Even lurking in brand community sites augments loyalty towards the brand and the community, let alone being an active participant in the brand community (Shang, Chen, and Liao, 2006). The more identification and therefore the more satisfaction consumers get out of the community, the more is the participation (Woisetschlager, Hartleb, and Blut 2008), and higher satisfaction results in higher affective commitment to the brand and the brand community (Royo-Vela and Casamassima, 2011). The commitment in brand communities is also termed as "oppositional brand loyalty" (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muñiz and Schau, 2001) in marketing literature, where community members display negative and sometimes even hostile behavior and reactions to non-members of the community.

Communal loyalty establishment takes time and includes various phases such as identification and engagement, which can then lead up to the level of citizenship, the ultimate identification of the individual as a building block of the community (Seraj and Toker, 2012). In their analysis of the European Car Clubs, Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Hermann (2005) show that brand community integration and relationships within the community are significant determinants in brand loyalty. McAlexander, Kim, and Roberts (2003) and McAlexander, Koenig, and Schouten

(2005) reach similar results in their studies of consumer relationships in casinos and of brand community formation around universities, respectively. McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig (2002) illustrate that brand community membership is not the unidirectional relationship between the consumers and the community. It is a complex amalgamation of multiple dyads between the consumers, company, brand, and the brand community.

A detailed explanation of this phenomenon where community integration brings communal brand loyalty is discussed by Cova and Cova (2002). The authors scrutinize the case of Solomon skaters as a brand community and pinpoint the fact that the reason Solomon was able to create a loyal brand community by keeping skating, the central topic for the community's gathering, as the main focus of their site rather than their brand. The brand and their advertisements were not explicit and were introduced much later after the company assured that the community was interacting voluntarily based on their high involvement in the subject. This was made possible through observing the community closely and understanding their needs and motives comprehensively.

The engagement, culture, and all types of values built around brand communities are critical factors to explain the importance of brand communities' existence. As it can be deduced from the discussion so far, brand community literature has been mostly involved in defining the antecedents, consequences, and characteristics of brand communities. Scholars have observed outstanding brand communities in order to be able to portray the interesting phenomena related to their existence. However, not many studies have touched upon the subject of what happens when two opposing brand communities clash and what can be observed about possible inter-communal conflict.

Inter-Communal Interactions and Conflict

As mentioned in previous sections, the brand community literature has mainly focused on individual communities and deduced theories based on the engagement, value, and culture of brand communities. Only a few works have been produced that investigate inter-communal exchanges and the role of consumers within these exchanges. The only central construct that has been established so far to shed light to the inter-communal exchanges is the construct of *oppositional brand loyalty* introduced by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001). The authors define oppositional brand loyalty as a social process involved in perpetuating consciousness of kind, which is the demarcation of brand users being 'different' or 'special' in comparison to users of other brands:

Through opposition to competing brands, brand community members derive an important aspect of their community experience, as well as an important component of the meaning of the brand. This serves to delineate what the brand is not, and who the brand community members are not (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001, p. 420).

Oppositional brand loyalty is defined as an attitude towards anything contrary to the cherished brand. Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) and Muñiz and Schau (2005) both assert that this oppositional loyalty and inter-group rivalry especially strengthen the ethos and relational ties among community members.

Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) shows how the opposition of Macintosh users toward PCs and Microsoft turn out to be a way to better define themselves and how these feelings emerge as a building block of their unity. There are a few other notable studies that observe cases of actual rivalry among brand communities. The most notable one is the discussion of cola wars by Muñiz and Hamer (2001). The authors

scrutinize the cola war between Pepsi and Coke with a focus on brand community interactions. Brand community members distinguish themselves from the opposing brand with clear "us" vs. "them" connotations. Not only do the consumers associate themselves with the brands they consume, but they also clearly state the brands they avoid, which is again part of self-identification. The expression of opposition is done by initiating and participating in playful rivalries with the contra-brand community by teasing, degrading, or challenging the choices of the opposing community. Many times mere teasing activities can escalate into harsh fights and even insults. Another example is the work of Hickman and Ward (2007), who argue that, based on social identity theory, community members have a positive image of the in-group members and create negative views, feelings, and stories related to outer-group people. In-group members have the tendency to trash-talk about those who are a member of the opposing team and feel *schadenfreude*, which is the feeling of pleasure for the failure or misfortune of those that are not a member of the in-group. They observe these negative talks and expectancies of rival failure in two different rival scenarios of Mac and PC user groups as well as fan clubs of two college football teams. Ewing, Wagstaff, and Powell (2013) also point out that by means of ridicule, stereotyping, malice, and insults, members of a community feel superior towards their rivals. Other examples that discuss how oppositional loyalty creates polarization – not necessarily based on brands – are the studies of skiers and snowboarders (Edensor and Richards, 2007), of authentic coffee lovers versus consumers of global coffee chains (Kozinets, 2002b; Thompson and Arsel, 2004), and of groups that are scrutinized in boycotting behavior literature.

Works that study the emergence of conflict among brand communities within inter-communal engagement is almost non-existent. The only work that discusses the

emergence of conflict in intra-communal interactions is by De Valck, van Bruggen, and Wierenga (2009). The authors reveal and discuss the issue of intra-communal conflict among core members of a community of culinary hobbies. They point out three different sources of tension that produces conflict: (1) tension among experts, the core members, about who is the best, (2) tension about practices and norms between core community members and regular members, and (3) tension about different life styles and consumption criteria among all members of a community. Most of these tensions are surmounted by community members since they end up focusing on similarities rather than differences with the power of consciousness of kind and moral responsibility.

The discussion of the theoretical background reveals that there is a gap in brand community literature related to inter-communal interactions and the emergence of conflict within these interactions. Studies focus on single communities and intra-communal interactions. However, through the digitalization of interactions, the possibility of two or more communities ending up in clashes is increasing. The antagonistic conduct of brand communities against competing brand communities has become a critical area for research and is a major consideration in understanding the new outlook of brand competition. This dissertation studies the new phenomenon of IBCC to provide theoretical contributions to brand community and consumer culture theories. It utilizes the context of Apple and Android brand war and the interactions between these two brand communities to shed light to the concept of IBCC.

CHAPTER III

THE CONTEXT

The conflict between Apple and Android communities constitutes a good example for studying the emerging paradigm of IBCC. Both Apple and Android brand communities are large and active communities that interact both online and offline in various social platforms; and instances of conflict arise frequently during these interactions. Before discussing the methodology of the study, it is crucial to understand the chosen context; therefore, background information related to the two companies and the competition between them will be outlined in this chapter.

Apple: the Company, the Brand, and the Community

Apple is a company and a brand with a story that is closely tied to its founder, Steve Jobs. The foundation of Apple Computer in the 1980s, the introduction of Macintosh computers; the Mac and PC fight, the development and launch of many legendary mobile personal electronic devices of the "i" series (the iPod, iPhone, and iPad); the history of the company with and without its founder, and the life story as well as the unfortunate death of one of the most influential men as denoted by many references, have all built a captivating chronicle of the Apple brand with its fans and spectators closely pursuing its act.

Apple was founded by Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak in 1976, when they were in their early twenties as college drop-outs, and became a critical player in its sector with its novel Macintosh computers within a very competitive environment where IBM and Microsoft were the leaders of the PC and PC software market. However, its plummeting income due to compatibility and software issues forced Jobs to be "exiled" from Apple and replaced by John Sculley in 1985 (Yoffie and Rossano, 2012). While Apple tried to increase its profit through three CEOs – Sculley, Spindler, and Amelio) who used coercive tactics in producing mass market or premium products along with establishment of licensing businesses, Jobs founded NeXT software and co-founded the Pixar graphics companies, gaining a lot of business experience in addition to his prodigy for design and selling (Arthur, 2012). Apple went through another close-to-bankruptcy period at the end of 1996, when it bought out NeXT. Jobs was first hired as an advisor by Amelio, who was later replaced by Jobs as the CEO to direct the turnaround of Apple back to the company which a lot of people associate with innovation today. After taking over, Jobs made some fundamental changes to redefine the essence and vision of Apple. The company brought along mobile computing to the hands of its consumers with great ease of use, friendly interfaces, and great design that would utterly meet the needs of its consumers. The appointment of Tim Cook as the head of operations also improved the global supply chain management of Apple immensely (Yoffie and Rossano, 2012). Launches of the iPod, iPhone, iPad, iMac, and MacBook series were all world-wide episodes of huge publicity, anticipated with great enthusiasm and curiosity both by the industry and by users. The current business strategy of Apple is summarized as follows:

The Company is committed to bringing the best user experience to its customers through its innovative hardware, software and services. The

Company's business strategy leverages its unique ability to design and develop its own operating systems, hardware, application software, and services to provide its customers new products and solutions with superior ease-of-use, seamless integration, and innovative design. The Company believes continual investment in research and development, marketing and advertising is critical to the development and sale of innovative products and technologies (Apple Annual Report, 2013).

The unfortunate death of Jobs in 2011 due to cancer brought another challenging era to Apple, and the current CEO, Cook, going through a new round of challenges to sustain the success of Apple that Jobs had created. The main issue is to continue Apple's flagship role in innovative technologies (Arthur, 2012; Moritz, 2009; Yoffie and Rossano, 2012).

Apple was very successful in building the image of an innovative company through its marketing communications as well. The 1984 ad for the introduction of Macintosh is still remembered and referred to due to its analogy of the Big Brother and the technology giant, IBM. The Macintosh launch claimed that "1984 will never be like 1984" and presented itself as the company that went against the status quo and dogma. The "Think Different" advertisement in 1997 is also one of the most memorable slogans of all times with the quote that gets repeated in many political, social, or business related instances and gets spread out through social media even today:

Here's to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They're not fond of rules. And they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them. About the only thing you can't do is ignore them. Because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as the crazy ones, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do (Isaacson, 2011).

"I am a Mac" advertisements that were broadcast in 2006 carried a quite aggressive tone in their attack against PCs. They all started with the same slogan "Hello, I am a

Mac," followed by "and I am a PC" where Macs and PCs was personified by two characters, the PC man resembling the style of Bill Gates and Mac that of Steve Jobs. The aim of the ads was to show the "superiority" of Mac by showing what Macs could do or by abashing PCs in terms of their inabilities, which were easily overcome by Macs. Lifestyle applications, compatibility with many languages, speed, lack of issues regarding freezing screens and viruses were mocked in short and simple ads with a cute jingle playing at the background to offset the level of the aggressive tone.

The launch events of the new "i" products are done through simple and chic presentations but with a grandiose atmosphere in terms of publicity due to the rumors and expectations commenced months before the actual launches take place, with everyone's eyes focused on the dates. These presentations aim to make Apple and its products look invincible in the market. In 2007, for instance, the iPhone keynote speech by Steve Jobs was applauded and cheered intermittently for over more than an hour as Jobs revealed the iPhone in his presentation that started with the words "we're gonna make some history together today":

Every once in a while, a revolutionary product comes along that changes everything. And Apple has been – well, first of all, one's very fortunate if you get to work on just one of these in your career. Apple's been very fortunate. It's been able to introduce a few of these into the world. In 1984, we introduced the Macintosh. It didn't just change Apple, it changed the whole computer industry. In 2001, we introduced the first iPod, and... it didn't just – it didn't just change the way we all listen to music, it changed the entire music industry. Well, today, we're introducing three revolutionary products of this class. The first one: is a widescreen iPod with touch controls. The second: is a revolutionary mobile phone. And the third is a breakthrough Internet communications device. So, three things: a widescreen iPod with touch controls; a revolutionary mobile phone; and a breakthrough Internet communications device. An iPod, a phone, and an Internet communicator. An iPod, a phone ... are you getting it? These are not three separate devices, this is one device, and we are calling it iPhone (Steve Jobs at Macworld in 2007).

As much as the fact that the product created was an innovation that addressed many consumer needs, the way the message was delivered was in a quite passionate and

invincible tone, as if it was a Martin Luther King, Jr. speech to move the masses.

This seems to be the style of Steve Jobs and Apple in marketing communications.

Innovation, capturing stories, and creative marketing communications have all played a great role in building the brand of Apple. It is a company that has had its good times and hard times, lived through a few cycles that brought it very close to bankruptcy with a remarkable turnaround story by its founder, who is regarded as genius by many. Within this story, the less noticeable but definitely a highly influential role was played by the Apple consumer community, which is one of Apple's most critical success factors in being what it is today. The consumer community was naturally fostered by the company, but it has also proved to be a separate organism independent of a symbiotic relationship with Apple in many instances throughout its history. Macintosh User Groups (MUGs) have been around since the launch of the Macintosh computer and they are usually local and physical gatherings of people that discuss their Mac issues and become identified with the community. Numerous academic studies have been done regarding Apple communities in order to understand the culture of a brand community, previously mentioned in the literature review section (Belk and Tumbat, 2005; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muñiz and Schau, 2005). Their brand and oppositional brand loyalty, group rituals, consciousness of kind, and moral responsibility dimensions have all been depicted along the lines of these academic works. There are currently Apple community sites that are still active in terms of posting news and rumors such as 9to5Mac, MacOSRumors, MacRumors, MacInsider, etc., but the main site where the community meets online is the actual Apple Support Community on the company website. The community site is divided under main headings based on products, software, iTunes, and specific applications. The community seems to be quite

centralized on this site. In addition, Apple users do comment in well-known technology review sites and forums such as CNet, TechRadar, Engadget, and Trusted Reviews. In the context of this research, it will be mostly the iPhone usage and users that will be focused on, as the clash to be discussed is between iPhone and Android device users.

Android: Google, Samsung, and the Android Community

Android, Inc. was founded in Palo Alto, California in October 2003 by Andy Rubin and three colleagues to develop an alternative for the Symbian and Windows mobile operating systems, and it aimed initially to build a platform for cameras and related applications (Welch, 2013). Later it was acquired by Google in 2005, enabling them to enter into the mobile market, and its first mobile device platform was created on Linux kernel (Elgin, 2005). In 2007, Google formed the Open Handset Alliance, a syndicate of Google, HTC, Sony, Samsung, Sprint Nextel, T-Mobile, Qualcomm and Texas Instruments, along with many others totaling up to forty-five technology companies collaborating to develop and back the open-source system of Android. The very goal was to provide mobile users a "less expensive, richer and more powerful mobile experience" (Google Annual Report, 2008, p. 6). With these goals, the first Android phone was released on September 23, 2008 as HTC Dream.

The Android software development is done by Google and becomes available as an open-source code for other OEMs to adapt to their devices under the heading of Android Open-Source Project (AOSP). Many developers and enthusiasts use this platform to create their own versions of Android and Android-related applications. What sets Android apart from other software systems is the co-creation concept in its

open-source development as well as the fact that it is free. So far, twelve versions of the software have been released, the latest one being the Android L. The names of releases are named after sweets and deserts after the A and B releases, starting with Cupcake for version C and Lollipop for the current version L.

Google's mission statement is "to organize the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful" (www.google.com), and the company specializes in web, mobile, and desktop search and information platforms as their main product portfolio including celebrated sub-brands of its own such as Google Mail (Gmail), Google Calendar, Google Maps, Google Search, etc. The company was started in 1999 by two Stanford graduates, Sergey Brin and Larry Page, after their development of the PageRank algorithm for web search that listed the searched terms and topics on the web based on the references or "votes" they got and their relevance to the searched items. The search engine replaced many of its predecessors such as Yahoo! and Altavista due to its accuracy (Eisenmann and Herman, 2006). Google also developed many products for web advertising through paid listings that were auctioned by firms that wanted to advertise to their target audiences when related terms were searched on the web. Adwords, the text only ads, and Adsense, which allowed platform providers to integrate advertising to their websites, are used widely by many firms and created the whole new area of search engine optimization (Eisenmann and Herman, 2006). The company announces its business strategy as becoming a strategic partner to firms and individual consumers:

We provide a variety of tools to help businesses of all kinds succeed on and off the web. These programs form the backbone of our own business; they've also enabled entrepreneurs and publishers around the world to grow theirs. Our advertising programs, which range from simple text ads to rich media ads, help businesses find customers, and help publishers make money off of their content. We also provide cloud computing tools for businesses that save money and help organizations be more productive (www.google.com).

Ease of use, comprehensiveness, relevance, objectivity, global access, and improvement are the main principles the company operates by and the company philosophy embraces the values of ethics and being commercially not evil, focusing on technology, and utilizing unconventional management practices for innovation to flourish. Engineers in Google used to be even encouraged to spend twenty percent of their time on projects they pioneer themselves (Eisenmann and Herman, 2006).

The Android market is not only driven by Google as the main owner of the brand. Many OEMs also get associated with Android as main operating system providers: Samsung, LG, Sony, and HTC are the main mobile device producers that prefer the Android platform as their operating system. Samsung, which means Three Stars in Korean, is the biggest OEM that utilizes the Android platform. Samsung, founded in 1938 by Lee Byung-chul, the son of a wealthy Korean family, has become a huge conglomerate with various companies in different industries today. It entered the consumer electronics business in 1969 as Samsung-Sanyo Electronics and became a major supplier, especially of LED and LCD panel technology, to many buyers including Apple (Eichenwald, 2014). Samsung has become so commanding in the economy of South Korea that it has power beyond that of the government and the law (Harlan, 2012). With such power and a vast network of international business ties, the company has also been entangled in various legal issues from anti-trust to bribery. The conglomerate owns countless patents and has chosen a counter-attack strategy by suing those that file against it for infringement, raising a lot of brows regarding its ethics and legal policies. Apple sued Samsung for literally copying its iPhone, and the US court awarded Apple over one billion dollars for the damages to be paid by Samsung, while rejecting the plead for the cessation of sales of Samsung Galaxy phones that infringed various design features of the iPhone.

The Android community is a dispersed community using different community sites and different brands of devices that are all combined under the free, open-source, and decentralized realm of Android. The community is active both offline in terms of defending the comparative advantages of the platform as well as online. The characteristics of brand communities discussed by Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001), namely consciousness of kind, and moral responsibility, are present in the Android community and help it maintain its culture. Parallel to its open-source culture, the Android community is rather scattered and interacts in various platforms unlike the Apple Community which is mostly centralized in the company website and a few other major sites. Among many Android online communities, Phandroid, Android Community, Xda-Developers, and AndroidCentral contain some of the most active forums. Androiders are also very active participants in technology news and review sites such as CNet, TechRadar, Engadget, and Trusted Reviews.

Competition Between Apple and Android

Vincent (1911) defined the conflict, competition, and rivalry between groups long ago and stated that they are a result of the wrestle for a superior stance as individuals and as the group that is made up of these individuals:

Conflict, competition, and rivalry are the chief causes which force human beings into groups and largely determine what goes on within them. Conflicts like wars, revolutions, riots still persist, but possibly they may be thought of as gradually yielding to competitions which are chiefly economic. Many of these strivings seem almost wholly individual but most of them on careful analysis turn out to be intimately related to group competition. A third form, rivalry, describes struggle for status, for social prestige, for the approval of inclusive publics which form the spectators for such contests (p. 243).

The Apple and Android battle is a matter of brand community members proving their supremacy as individuals and as a group parallel to the aspirations of the economic aspirations of the companies. Before discussing the competition between Apple and Android within the mobile operating system market, it is best to first glance at the competition in marketing literature as a guide to this specific discussion. When we go further back to analyze the history of competition literature in marketing, we notice a rise in the complexity of how competition is explained and we realize that consumers are still mostly objects of marketing efforts rather than stakeholders or active participants in the competitive system. In their analysis of the state of marketing literature, Wind and Robertson (1983) drew attention to the fact that the sphere of competition was rather unexplored in marketing. They proposed a more integrated approach to marketing strategy by focusing on strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the competitive environment, along with analyzing segments, positioning based on segments, possible synergies among segments, and corresponding portfolios that these segments will be offered. The authors were wary about the lack of literature in this area and the fact that the competitive strategy approach of Porter (1991) was not adequate to define a marketing system that had multiple facets and components. Porter, surely a major scholar in that era, examined the antecedents, elements, and consequences of competition. His main approach to the competitive environment describes the five forces model that comprises five main factors affecting the competitive environment of firms: the threat of new entrants, the bargaining power of customers, the bargaining power of suppliers, the threat of substitute products, and the jockeying for position among current competitors (Porter, 1991). In addition, he delineated the competitive advantage of a firm based on two axes: strategic target (mass or a particular segment) and strategic

advantage (uniqueness or low cost). Accordingly, firms had three major options in positioning themselves in the competitive environment: differentiation, cost leadership, or focus. The author further developed the value chain approach as the main focus to gain advantage over rivals, and that competitive strategy should be embodied at the business unit stage rather than corporate level (Porter, 1991). The role of customers in these articles is defined as the main buyers of the products or services in the industry rather than the consumer communities we talk about today. Porter discusses buyers pointing at their priorities of price and quality, and the share of wallet the product or service gets. Consumers are objects of marketing transactions in their competitive business environment.

Similar to Porter, many scholars deliberated on competition and marketing strategy, mostly with a business process approach. Market orientation (MARKOR) is one of the most cited business process-based constructs that is still widely used today as a critical factor to build competitive advantage, long term profitability and business success. MARKOR, introduced by Kohli and Jaworski (1990), was based on three processes: generating market intelligence, disseminating the intelligence across departments, and building organization-wide responsiveness to this intelligence. Narver and Slater (1990) proposed slightly different dimensions for MARKOR and defined it as a construct to deliver long term profitability enclosing processes of customer orientation, competitor orientation, and interfunctional coordination. Again, these are parallel to intelligence gathering and dissemination processes but with a greater focus on the competition and customer fronts. Moreover, Srivastava, Shervani, and Fahey (1999) look at the role of marketing in the competitive environment as increasing shareholder value through strategizing on the three core business processes of product development management, supply chain

management, and customer relationship management with a focus on accelerating and enhancing cash flow as well as reducing risk. In the business process mindset that commenced with the value chain approach of Porter (1991), the major attention in competition is how to augment the specific business processes to gain competitive advantage and these processes are usually internally driven and the customers are an end to the means rather than a part of the entire system.

Another line of research that endeavors to decipher the stance of firms in the marketing system is the resource-based view (RBV) of the firm. RBV argues that the firm's competitive advantage lies in the resources it has that are not easily imitable or substitutable without great effort (Barney, 1996). Srivastava, Fahey and Christensen (2001) further develop this perspective by listing relational and intellectual assets of the firm as the main resources that feed the customer value creating processes of innovation management, supply-chain management, and customer relationship management. Relational assets are the external relations the firm has with its channels, customers, networks, and eco-systems, whereas intellectual assets are internal capabilities that derive knowledge. Both relational and intellectual assets derive the capabilities of the firms that result in financial performance. Partly based on RBV, a similar approach to define competition and the role of marketing in competition was taken on by Hunt and Morgan (1995), who put forward the comparative advantage theory of competition. The authors developed this standpoint due to the shortfalls of the neo-classical economic theory of perfect competition and long-term equilibrium in explaining the actual rivalry in the marketplace that display abundance and diversity, unlike the assumptions of perfect competition. They base the new comparative advantage paradigm on imperfect information acquired by both the consumers and the firms, on heterogeneous demand and resources, unlike the

homogeneity in neo-classical realm, and on superior financial performance rather than profit maximization. Competitive advantage occurs when the firm can have relatively lower resource costs compared to its rivals and can create superior relative resource-produced value for its customers. Otherwise, in instances of parity or competitive disadvantage, the competitive position of the firm is unconstructive. According to Hunt and Morgan (1995), the most effective way to become an advantaged competitor is by innovating a major new resource rather than imitating or substituting to deliver superior results. Later, in their study of relationship-based competitive advantage (Morgan and Hunt, 1999), the scholars endorse relationship marketing as a means to gain resources that will facilitate superiority in the marketplace. Accordingly, relationship marketing can provide access to financial, legal, physical, human, organizational, and informational resources that can deliver sustainable results in their competitive markets. Finally, Varadarajan and Jayachandran (1999) recap the streams in competitive advantage literature as strategic planning perspective, game theory, signaling, and managerial perceptions. While strategic planning perspective considers the market structural characteristics and competitive position of the firm in this market as the main drivers of competitive strategy, game theory approach studies the interdependence of firms that make rational and intelligent choices by considering the possible moves of their rivals to play long term games and reach Nash equilibrium. Signaling literature studies on how the imperfect information environment and the possible actions signaled by competitors form the competition in the market and finally, a managerial perceptions approach brings a different angle to the discussion by pointing out the role of managers, who influence the maneuvers of their companies while trying to maintain an objective stance with an effort to read signals and assess the environment in the

best possible schemes. At the end of the millennium, the authors still point to the same inadequacy in the competition literature, which seems to be obsessed mostly with competitors and the environment.

When current literature is considered, there is important progress in the sense that more focus is placed on the role of relationships and networks (Achrol and Kotler, 1999), service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), and customer centric sustainability (Hult, 2011; Sheth, Sethia, and Srinavas, 2011). Yet, the element that stays missing in all these works is that the customer is a target, an end to a means in these models, and not regarded as an antecedent in competitive paradigms. Previous works in competition do not thoroughly cover what the industries face today concerning their consumers and the influence consumer communities have on competition. Naturally, this is also due to the considerable increase in the power of consumers in the digital age, which was lacking before the previous decade. Yet another issue is that, even though there is significant production in the field of consumer culture theory as a separate stream, this stream is not entirely integrated with the business strategy and competition literatures. The two streams progress rather independently. One of the aims of this study is to incorporate the results of the online competitive consumer culture of Apple and Android brand war into business strategy to develop a business oriented approach encircling brand and consumer communities.

The competition among Apple and Android seems to be mainly based on becoming the market leader, intellectual property-related lawsuits, and the IBCC that has emerged as a result of their loyal fan and hostile foe camps. Even though IOS and Android are not the only players in the smartphone market, the reason they are focused on in this study is that they both have global brand communities that make

the fight between the two companies both influence and get influenced by the communities. When global mobile phone sales are considered, the top three players are Samsung with 24.6%, Nokia with 13.9%, and Apple with 8.3% market share (see Table 1). The operating margin of Nokia, which was actually the market leader a decade ago, does not even break even. In terms of profitability, Apple has been ahead of the competition with its premium-priced iPhones for a long time now. However, its market leader position has been challenged by Samsung, which has already surpassed all players in terms of its market share based on units sold and almost caught up with Apple in the second quarter of 2013 based on its profitability (see Table 2).

Table 1. Global Mobile Phone Sales by Vendor in 2013, Source: Gartner (2014)

| Mobile Units Sold by OEMs (in thousands) | 2013 | 2013 Market Share (%) | 2012 | 2012 Market Share (%) |
|---|-----------|--------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|
| Samsung | 444,444 | 24.6 | 384,631 | 22.0 |
| Nokia | 250,793 | 13.9 | 333,938 | 19.1 |
| Apple | 150,786 | 8.3 | 130,133 | 7.5 |
| LG Electronics | 69,025 | 3.8 | 58,016 | 3.3 |
| ZTE | 59,899 | 3.3 | 67,344 | 3.9 |
| Huawei | 53,295 | 2.9 | 47,288 | 2.7 |
| TCL | 49,531 | 2.7 | 37,177 | 2.1 |
| Lenovo | 45,285 | 2.5 | 28,151 | 1.6 |
| Sony Mobile | 37,596 | 2.1 | 31,394 | 1.8 |
| Yulong | 32,601 | 1.8 | 18,558 | 1.1 |
| Others | 613,710 | 34.0 | 609,545 | 34.9 |
| Total | 1,806,965 | 100.0 | 1,746,176 | 100.0 |

Table 2. Global Mobile Vendors Operating Incomes in 2013, Source: Hughes (2013, November 14)

| Mobile Device Business Performance (in million \$) | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | Q113 | Q213 | Q313 |
|--|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|------|------|------|
| Apple Operating Income | 600 | 2421 | 5249 | 10482 | 26723 | 35903 | 8034 | 5991 | 6487 |
| Apple Operating Margin | 28% | 28% | 33% | 35% | 44% | 41% | 35% | 33% | 33% |
| Apple Value Share | 4% | 14% | 35% | 44% | 65% | 69% | 58% | 53% | 56% |
| Nokia Operating Income | 117 | 9586 | 4905 | 4418 | 2347 | -905 | 5 | -42 | -63 |
| Nokia Operating Margin | 20% | 18% | 13% | 11% | 7% | -4% | 0% | -1% | -2% |
| Nokia Value Share | 67% | 57% | 33% | 19% | 6% | -2% | 0% | 0% | -1% |
| Samsung Operating Income | 1561 | 1754 | 2246 | 3465 | 7078 | 17458 | 6019 | 5632 | 6125 |
| Samsung Operating Margin | 10% | 9% | 9% | 10% | 15% | 21% | 22% | 19% | 20% |
| Samsung Value Share | 10% | 10% | 15% | 15% | 17% | 34% | 43% | 49% | 53% |
| BlackBerry Operating Income | 809 | 2554 | 3219 | 4408 | 2996 | -230 | 17 | -143 | -426 |
| BlackBerry Operating Margin | 21% | 33% | 27% | 30% | 20% | -3% | 1% | -7% | -55% |
| BlackBerry Value Share | 5% | 15% | 21% | 19% | 7% | 0% | 0% | -1% | -4% |
| Motorola Operating Income | -688 | -1458 | -925 | -198 | -126 | -604 | -236 | -218 | -292 |
| Motorola Operating Margin | -4% | -12% | -13% | -3% | -1% | -8% | -23% | -22% | -26% |
| Motorola Value Share | -5% | -9% | -6% | -1% | 0% | -1% | -2% | -2% | -3% |
| Sony Operating Income | 2110 | 32 | -1430 | 214 | -287 | -602 | -23 | 72 | 0 |
| Sony Operating Margin | 12% | 0% | -15% | 3% | -4% | -8% | -1% | 3% | 0% |
| Sony Value Share | 14% | 0% | -10% | 1% | -1% | -1% | 0% | 1% | 0% |
| LG Operating Income | 658 | 1188 | 1017 | -575 | -254 | 48 | 123 | 55 | -73 |
| LG Operating Margin | 8% | 11% | 7% | -5% | -2% | 1% | 4% | 2% | -3% |
| LG Value Share | 4% | 7% | 7% | -2% | -1% | 0% | 1% | 0% | -1% |
| HTC Operating Income | 0 | 908 | 725 | 1452 | 2329 | 640 | 1 | 35 | -118 |
| HTC Operating Margin | | 20% | 16% | 17% | 15% | 6% | 0% | 1% | -7% |
| HTC Value Share | 0% | 5% | 5% | 6% | 6% | 1% | 0% | 0% | -1% |

This was even reflected in popular technology sites as Samsung having surpassed Apple's profitability in the second quarter of 2013 according to news on *Forbes* (Worstall, 2013, July 27) and *Business Insider* (Danova, 2013, October 31), which created a great excitement among Samsung fans. However, this news was later declared untrue by *Fortune Magazine*, as the calculations had been based on wrong assumptions (Elmer-Dewitt, 2013, July 28). Even though there is a tough fight regarding profitability, Android and Samsung in particular have drastically outstripped Apple in terms of market share, with Android having gained 78.4% of the market, 31% of which is made by Samsung, while Apple is at 15.6% (see Tables 3 and 4). The fact that two smartphone producers target different consumers is a

crucial point since Apple positions itself as a premium product and a prestige brand, whereas Android devices range from commodity mobile phones to top notch smart phablets with the highest technology offering a product portfolio to all segments of consumers.

Table 3. Worldwide Smartphone Sales to End Users by OEMs in 2013, Source: Gartner (2014)

| Smartphone Unit Sales by OEMs (in thousands) | 2013 | 2013 Market Share (%) | 2012 | 2012 Market Share (%) |
|--|---------|-----------------------|---------|-----------------------|
| Samsung | 299,795 | 31.0 | 205,767 | 30.3 |
| Apple | 150,786 | 15.6 | 130,133 | 19.1 |
| Huawei | 46,609 | 4.8 | 27,169 | 4.0 |
| LG Electronics | 46,432 | 4.8 | 25,814 | 3.8 |
| Lenovo | 43,905 | 4.5 | 21,699 | 3.2 |
| Others | 380,249 | 39.3 | 269,527 | 39.6 |
| Totals | 967,776 | 100.0 | 680,108 | 100.0 |

Table 4. Worldwide Smartphone Sales to End Users by Operating Systems in 2013, Source: Gartner (2014)

| Smartphone Unit Sales by OS (in thousands) | 2013 Units | 2013 Market Share (%) | 2012 Units | 2012 Market Share (%) |
|--|------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Android | 758,720 | 78.4 | 451,621 | 66.4 |
| iOS | 150,786 | 15.6 | 130,133 | 19.1 |
| Microsoft | 30,843 | 3.2 | 16,941 | 2.5 |
| BlackBerry | 18,606 | 1.9 | 34,210 | 5.0 |
| Other OS | 8,821 | 0.9 | 47,203 | 6.9 |
| Total | 967,776 | 100.0 | 680,108 | 100.0 |

What made this battle between Apple and Samsung almost like a popular TV series with its audience waiting for the new episodes impatiently were the legal affairs between the two companies after the release of the Galaxy series in 2010. One of the vendors critical of Apple, Samsung, seemed to have ripped off the design of iPhone and emerged as their competitor in the smartphone market. With the claim that this was a patent infringement, Apple sued Samsung on April 15, 2011 in the US for creating a very similar design to the iPhone and was countersued by Samsung on April 22, 2011 in many other countries. The two companies still have a lot of unresolved court cases regarding their mobile and tablet devices; however, Apple

was not successful in deterring the sales of the Samsung phone even in the US market (Eichenwald, 2014).

Due to these controversies and the significant market share of the Samsung Galaxy series smartphones, a lot of people also see this conflict as a battle between Samsung and Apple rather than Android and Apple. Yet the Android brand community already includes Samsung fans and is not solely based on Samsung users. Therefore, limiting this research to a Samsung-Apple war would have missed many of the rich content dependent on the philosophy of the open-source platform of Android, which is much greater than the brands of Android devices. According to Gobble (2012, November 1), this war is not exclusively about Samsung, but rather another missile to Android as well:

Some observers see the Samsung suit, the suit against HTC that Apple lost last year, as proxy wars against Google's Android operating system, which Steve Jobs saw as a blatant knockoff of Apple's IOS. Jobs told his biographer, Walter Isaacson, shortly before his death in 2011, 'I'm going to destroy Android, because it's a stolen product. I'm willing to go thermonuclear war on this' (p. 4).

Having discussed the context of the study, the next chapter explains the methodology used to study IBCC in the context of Apple and Android brand competition.

CHAPTER IV

METHODOLOGY

In this dissertation, IBCC is studied with two qualitative methods: netnography and in-depth interviews. As IBCC is a construct that needs definition and exploration in the specific case of the Apple and Android brand war, qualitative techniques were preferred in order to understand various the components of the formation and amplification of IBCC.

Qualitative Approach

The epistemology of social sciences was mostly shaped around positivism (Anderson, 1982) until the acknowledgement of qualitative methods around the 1960s (Bryman, 2003). Qualitative methods in managerial sciences has brought along an ontological, epistemological, and methodological divide between quantitative and qualitative research streams and researchers. Ontology discusses the nature of reality and qualitative research embraces the existence of multiple realities, as individuals all have different experiences and therefore different perspectives (Creswell, 2013). In quantitative research, there is only one reality, and research tries to come close to and picture this ultimate existence (Hunt, 1976). In terms of epistemology, subjective evidence is the main source of driving ontology in the case of qualitative approach, but researchers try to embed themselves as much as possible

in the research field to lessen their own subjectivity and create a holistic account of the nature of the research question. In addition, the researcher uses induction to derive theory and later deduction to collect evidence for the inducted theory, rather than leaning on sole deduction, which is the main tool in quantitative research (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013; Creswell, 2013).

Regardless of methodology, contribution to theory is based on the extent to which the what, how, and why questions in the research area are addressed (Whetten, 1989) and qualitative research is especially powerful in explaining the relationships between constructs, antecedents and consequents, and therefore revealing answers to the "why" questions in research (Bacharach, 1989; Belk, Fischer and Kozinets, 2013). The main strength of qualitative methods is the exploratory approach that gathers, analyzes, and interprets unstructured data through the lens of actual experiences of subjects in order to reach rich and powerful knowledge, while the aim of quantitative methods is the production of law-like generalizations through numeric data collection (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013; Bryman, 2003; Creswell, 2013; Hunt, 1976; Sykes, 1990). Both quantitative and qualitative research are interpretive according to Belk, Fischer and Kozinets (2013), as they interpret quantified observations or recurrent patterns in content, context, and actions. The data in qualitative research is rich and based on recordings of visual and verbal phenomena specific to the case and context studied, whereas quantitative research bases its results on numerated responses and seeks for generalization. As the name suggests, qualitative research may be less quantitative, but the analysis component of the collected data is very fundamental, and qualitative researchers need to be able to analyze the results through coding data appropriately to realize and match patterns to lead to theory creation (Griggs, 1987). While qualitative research seeks the natural

environment of the subject, quantitative approaches control and manipulate the settings to reveal causal relationships (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013).

Additionally, in qualitative studies, researchers are an embedded part of the study through their existence, while in quantitative research, researchers are expected to be as invisible as possible. This obliges the qualitative researcher to be as objective and at the same time creative as possible to gather data without directing the subjects in the study.

One of the issues that qualitative researchers face is the argument that qualitative research lacks validity and reliability from the standpoint of the quantitative discipline, which places more emphasis on standardization of information through replicability. However, replicability is neither the aim nor the concern of qualitative research. Qualitative research is context based and the main issue is to explore the research question in hand without the limits or bias of current knowledge, which quantitative research lacks in its nature, as the constructs need to be predefined in order to collect data to support theoretical models (Bryman, 2003; Sykes, 1990). The qualitative approach draws on previous theoretical perspectives by utilizing existing phenomena or combining concepts to support new concepts to build new theories (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013). Nevertheless, it should also be stated that qualitative methods provide more theoretical validity compared to quantitative approaches in any case, and therefore, small samples or specific cases - in other words, theoretical sampling - are perfectly applicable in the qualitative realm (Sykes, 1990). On the other hand, the point that qualitative research is not replicable does not mean it is completely free formatted. Qualitative research is based on protocols that define the method, be it ethnography, focus groups, interviews, or any other type of qualitative approach.

The main traditions in qualitative research methods are narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study (Creswell, 2013). Narrative research is based on the stories of individual experiences based on series of events or actions. Interviews, observations, documentation, and visual evidences can all help the researcher to derive a chronology regarding the experiences of the subjects. Biographies, auto ethnographies, and life histories are all examples of narrative research. A second tradition is phenomenological research, which focuses on the phenomenon that subjects of a study experience individually and in common. It is the philosophical discussion of the concept or phenomenon that is described as a result of the study. According to the examples of Creswell (2013), grief, professional growth, and a caring relationship are phenomena that can be defined through individual experiences. Hermeneutics is a method that is used in phenomenology, and it is the interpretation and meaning-making of data to reach a coherent explanation or the essence that covers the commonalities discovered in the text or the object of analysis. It uses both inductive and deductive approaches to first induce a common meaning and then re-read and re-analyze the data to understand if the parts fit to the whole in terms of derived meanings and explanations (Kozinets, 2010a; Sykes, 1990). Phenomenology has its roots mostly in philosophy, psychology, and educational studies (Creswell, 2013). Grounded theory is another stream in qualitative research, developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) whose aim is to create theory rather than descriptions, as in the cases of narrative and phenomenological research. It seeks to delineate a theoretical explanation through the analysis of grounded data coming from the experiences of various subjects and processes in the research field. Open, axial, and selective coding methods are used to theorize in grounded theory methodology (Creswell, 2013). Ethnographic research is different

from grounded theory in the sense that it studies the culture of a group with the researcher immersed in the life of a group of individuals to observe and participate in their actions, interactions, sharings, and beliefs with the aim of deciphering the complex culture they co-create. Patterns are sought regarding the behavior and thoughts of this closely scrutinized group to derive cultural interpretations.

Participant observation and interviewing are the major tools used in ethnographic studies and a lot of its background is drawn from the fields of anthropology and sociology (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013; Creswell, 2013). The fifth and final tradition in qualitative research is case study, which explores a specific case or cases within real life that is investigated through multiple sources of information such as observation, interviews, documentation, reports, etc. to provide in-depth understanding of the unique situation within the case. Themes recurring within the case or across various cases are examined to derive theoretical contributions (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2013).

The approach of this specific study is based on netnography supported by in-depth interviews, deriving its methodology, in a way, from all these five traditions in terms of its structure, data collection, analysis, and theory building means. As IBCC is a novel concept that needs exploration, and as the aim of this study is to provide a conceptual discussion to develop new theory, we need methods to reveal the richness of such an unexplored and open-ended construct. Qualitative approaches are especially critical in exploration and theory development; therefore, analyzing the IBCC construct through such methods seems appropriate for this dissertation.

Netnography

Netnography is first introduced as a term and methodology by Kozinets (2002b; 2010a). Even though the name suggests that it is mostly based on the methodology of ethnography, it incorporates many of the features discussed in the five main traditions of qualitative research. It is the online ethnography of virtual communities to understand social behavior reflected in digital platforms, which tries to explain the phenomena that are witnessed in online social gatherings and aims at producing grounded theory flourishing from the online field. Most netnographies investigate specific cases of brands or communal sites to generate theory and many narratives of online personas are present in its content. Kozinets (2010a) described netnography as the participant observation of the online field where online data becomes the source of understanding online phenomenon and explaining online culture (p. 60). Having inspired many works in online community literature, the course of netnography itself has progressed along the way together with the scholars practicing it and along with the new ways of social interaction online. Kozinets (forthcoming) now defines netnography as follows:

Netnography is the name given to a specific set of related data collection, co-creation, creation, and analysis, ethical, and representational practices, where a significant amount of the data collected and participant-observational research conducted originates in and manifests through the data shared freely on the Internet, including the myriad of mobile applications. This emphasis on significant amounts of Internet data differentiates netnography from approaches such as digital ethnography or digital anthropology.

Netnography does not necessarily explain only the online culture. It is the means to interpret what the Internet and social platforms offer us as a field to actually define real-life phenomena by combining the methodology with other techniques:

[...] the notion of significant amounts of research data originating from the Internet absolutely does not preclude extending netnographic data collection to interviews conducted via email, Skype, in person, or using other methods. It does not obviate the need to ground, emplace, and contextualize data through analysis of other related archives and sites, including ones that

include fleshy contact on grass and on stone. It opens up the possibilities of incorporating and blending computational methods of data collection, analysis, word recognition, coding, and visualization. It most certainly does not limit analysis to content analysis. However, netnography's focus and forte has always been intended to include the myriad communicative acts and interactions flowing through the Internet, visual, textual, graphic, photographic, audiovisual, musical, commercially influenced and sponsored or not, collectively or individually produced, and situated in and through single or multiple sites and formats. Netnography begins and ends with an explicitly human window into the rich communicative and symbolic world of the Internet, the Web, and social media (Kozinets, forthcoming).

So netnography is not only limited to discovering a specific culture online, but it can actually expose phenomena and relationships that are relevant to both online and offline worlds and interactions by analyzing the online portion of these exchanges. Kozinets (2010a) defines the role of netnography in "online communities" and "communities online" as the main method and a supporting method respectively. The difference between online and offline cultures diminish further every day with more socially connected consumers; and so does the distinction between online and offline qualitative studies, augmenting the value of netnography further in research.

The level of pure ethnography and pure netnography as well as active participation and observation level spectrums may vary depending on the study (Kozinets, 2010a). Yet both interaction with the people in the communities and immersion in the culture are keys in netnography (Kozinets, 2010a, forthcoming). The immersion in particular is like "a dip in an aquarium," says Kozinets (forthcoming) as the netnographer spends some time in the online world of the netnography going back and forth to real life while digging deeper into the culture subject to investigation.

Netnography follows the four main stages of *entrée*, data collection, analysis and interpretation, and supplying ethical standards (Kozinets 2002b; 2010a). The *entrée*, which is the initiation part of netnography, concerns choosing the right

community to observe. Kozinets (2002b; 2010a) recommends sites with high traffic and interaction for netnography to extract enriched and detailed data. Apart from the interactivity of the site, it is crucial for the researcher to be an active participant in the site and act as a citizen of the virtual world in order to understand the culture and the motivations at work. While there is an approach of pure observational netnography (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry, 2003; Langer and Beckman, 2005), a participant-observational netnography (Kozinets 2002b; 2010a) is more instrumental in terms of familiarization with the community to reveal more resonant perspectives.

Data collection in netnography is basically the downloading of online content that will be analyzed for theorizing purposes. This online content may contain text, videos, photos, chats, mobile data, applications, etc. The analysis follows qualitative analysis for building grounded theory where coded data is first abstracted and compared, followed by a generalization and refinement process leading to theory building (Kozinets, 2010b; Miles and Huberman, 1994). Coding is described as "aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code" (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). The codes are then combined and reduced into themes, which are several codes that accumulate into a common idea; and the "family" of themes with their "children" as subthemes and "grandchildren" as data get abstracted beyond codes to find theoretical meaning (Creswell, 2013). While reading the data and analyzing it into codes, it is especially critical to look for stories, metaphors, emotions, and motives which provide an immense amount of knowledge hidden in the qualitative data (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013). Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets (2013) consider the relationship and combination of codes into higher codes based on three rationales: first of all, they

may be dimensions of the same construct, fundamentals of a single phenomenon; secondly, they can be steps, phrases or stages of a process; and third, they can be conditions or outcomes of a phenomenon leading to explanatory relationships. Different scholars use different methods in terms of starting off with a wide range of codes that are then aggregated into more precise higher codes, or determining a few main themes at first, followed by a more detailed fashion of coding to elaborate these themes. Within the process of coding, whether to report the frequencies of appearance related to these codes is a question mark for scholars, but Creswell (2013) emphasizes that counting codes is a quantitative way of looking at qualitative data and qualitative findings do not have to have equal weight in appearance; therefore, he pleads that reporting code frequencies is not necessary for qualitative research, as it is theoretical sampling and searches for interesting traces to explain phenomena. Netnography uses these aforementioned techniques of qualitative studies for analysis and interpretation as well.

As a fourth step, an ethical approach throughout netnography is crucial to deliver healthy results and to prevent any invasion of privacy (Kozinets, 2010a). What is public and private is a major issue in online research, but sites that provide information and conversations without logging in are considered public information sources, as anyone can access them without any barriers. If the information resource is based on protected sites where members need to log in to access data, then these sites actually contain non-public information and getting consent to utilize information is critical to an ethical approach. It is also important to check with the members before revealing the findings in the study and get their feedback, not only in terms of ethics, but also for supporting and improving delivered ideas and theories.

Kozinets (forthcoming) has further developed the process of netnography into a twelve-step ladder which is more comprehensive than the initial research scheme. Accordingly, the stages of introspection, investigation, information, interview, inspection, interaction, immersion, indexing, interpretation, iteration, instantiation, and integration are followed in order to come up with a thorough netnographic research. The researcher starts with introspection to actually observe how the research question is a part of her life as a project or theme, followed by investigation of the research question that can be analyzed with netnography. The information, interview, and inspection stages are reflections of the *entrée* stage, where the researcher determines the people, the sites, and the specific topics to be focused on via thorough investigation with the assistance of initial search engine findings as well as initial interviews to select the field for netnography. Interaction and immersion is how the researcher participates in the field, whether there is minimal or significant participation in the online conversation and definitely a critical immersion to comprehend and become a citizen of the online environment studied as a netnographer. Indexing is the data collection stage, where interesting and quality data are collected to be used for the analysis of netnography. Kozinets (forthcoming) denotes this data as "small data" and the aim of data collection is not to find a massive amount of data, as in the case of most quantitative approaches, but rather data that sheds light on the research question through specific examples providing an enlightening perspective and *connoisseurship*. In terms of data interpretation, a mixture of qualitative methods is available and humanistic, phenomenological, existential, and hermeneutical methods are generally recommended by Kozinets (forthcoming). Iterations to refine the interpretations are critical to reveal sound and meaningful findings. Finally, the steps of instantiation and integration form the final

outputs of the netnographic study through representation of the data in various ways and integrating the outputs with the research questions to deliver knowledge and theoretical contributions for both academia and business world.

Many scholars have used netnography as a method to understand online communities or concepts that become associated with communities who are also present online. Apart from the marketing and business fields, netnographies have been conducted in the areas of "nursing, education, communications, women's studies, geography, political science, internet studies, game studies, addiction research, health care, anthropology, sociology, library sciences, and religious studies" (Kozinets, forthcoming). Marketing and business-oriented publications have included netnographies related to discussions about specific brand sites, virtual communities with interests such as technology, music, health, traveling, media, food, coffee, sports, games, cars, aviation, or social phenomena such as weddings, feminism, anti-consumption, boycotts, sexuality.

As suggested by Kozinets (2002b; 2010a; forthcoming), it is wise to complement netnography with other methods, and in the case of this study, in-depth interviews were utilized to complement the findings of netnography.

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews are utilized frequently in qualitative research, as they provide opportunities to dig with the informants deep into the phenomena of the research. They are great opportunities to gather different perspectives from various informants that have distinct levels of involvement and knowledge about the research topic. In-depth interviews usually last an hour or longer and have their own protocols

(McCracken, 1988). It is critical to have a variety of informants in terms of gender, age, and lifestyle in order to be able to touch upon varying angles related to the subject (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013).

The in-depth interview uses a protocol with a flow of topics that need to be touched upon rather than a survey-like list of questions; and the process needs to flow like a conversation without becoming diluted, getting dominated by the interviewees, or getting off the topic (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013; McCracken, 1988). For the interviewer, it is important to have adequate information about the culture of the informant so as not to interfere with their comfort in sharing information and to concurrently maintain objectivity by appearing ignorant so that nothing is assumed to be known during the course of the interview (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013).

Questions during the in-depth interview start off with general questions of "tell me about..." to get to know the informant, her background and culture, and personal details that will be related to the research area. After setting the stage and making the informant comfortable to talk, it is recommended to funnel the questions along the way to touch upon the objectives of the research. Probing becomes a great art in in-depth interviews, which improves with practice. As the informant gives out cues during the conversation for possibilities of valuable information via further discussion, the researcher should be able to probe instantly to get more details or go back to those cues during the discussion to expand on the thoughts, experiences, and beliefs of the informant. While probing, it is not advised to ask yes or no questions as they usually shut down the flow, and also why questions, as they might presume relationships in the information given or may sound threatening (Belk, Fischer, and Kozinets, 2013; McCracken, 1988). In addition, while listening to the interviewee,

the investigator becomes an "instrument" in the process, where she is able to imagine, see the patterns, and relate to what the informant describes, sometimes through her own experience and sometimes without being bound by the assumptions of her own experience in order to be able to decipher what the subject is providing. While keeping the instrument position during the interview, the researcher also has to keep being unobtrusive and avoid leading questions that may actually provide assumptions or wrong concentration points for the respondent (McCracken, 1988).

According to McCracken (1988), literature review and cultural background in the subject are critical for conducting the interviews. They are also necessary for preparing the relevant questions to be discussed during the interview and also at the analysis stage. During the analysis, the transcribed interviews are turned into observations, which later get connected to each other with the relationships realized between them and transformed into themes. The themes are later cross analyzed among the transcribed interviews and these are constructed as the outputs.

Having delineated the processes of both netnography and in-depth interviews, the next section describes how they were applied in the case of this study.

Current Study

The fact that netnography is a technique that builds upon online observations and participation in publically available forums in an unobtrusive but participative manner (Kozinets, 2010a) makes it a perfect choice to analyze the Apple and Android brand war between the communities, as most of the interaction between these two camps takes place online.

The researcher herself was quite involved in the topic of the study as she is a person that is interested in technology and utilizes the mobile phone as a very intimate device to organize her life in all aspects. She pre-meditates thoroughly before making any kind of buying decision - especially regarding the technologies that accommodate life in terms of efficiency, ease, and entertainment. She reads online reviews very frequently for decision making, and that is when it was realized that there were a lot of arguments and fierce discussions among fans of Android and Apple. The main research questions that came out during the inspection stage were:

(1) How do inter-communal interactions turn into conflict?

(2) Why do inter-communal interactions turn into conflict?

To be able to answer these questions, the field sites for netnography had to be determined to investigate interactions of the two brand communities. The Google search engine as well as Youtube were used with the keywords "Apple," "Android," "Apple community," and "Android community." Apple Support Communities under the official Apple site, MacRumors, MacForums, Apple Facebook Page, iPhone Facebook Page, Android Community, Android Central, Phandroid, Samsung Facebook Page, which are brand community specific, as well as technology review sites such as CNet, Techradar, Trustedreviews, TechCrunch, ExtremeTech in addition to video based reviews on Youtube as well as related posts on the newsfeed of the researcher's Facebook page related to the topic were all utilized as the main netnography sites to investigate IBCC due to their high traffic and interactions. The researcher was familiar with both Apple and Android operating systems as a user of a MacBook laptop, iPad, iPhone 3G (former mobile phone followed by a Blackberry), and Samsung Galaxy Note II (current mobile phone). In order to learn both platforms, the researcher chose an Android phone to get personal experience

and association along with her personal history with various Apple products. The familiarization stage to determine the research questions took a six months period to get to know the two communities to a certain extent and choose a mobile phone for personal use. The personal history of the researcher related to the topic actually goes back to 2008 when she first got her iPhone, then in 2010 when she bought a Blackberry as a result of many discussions in conversations with friends, followed by a second decision period in 2011, reading many online reviews on the topic as well as playful arguments with her close circle of friends.

Data collection covers various conversations of the period between 2009 and 2014, and the actual process of gathering the critical examples to reveal the results of this study were accumulated in three years and two months between August 2011 and November 2014. Data was gathered from the aforementioned sites by choosing the most popular threads where a new model or a comparison of models were present along with thread titles that looked related and had at least fifty posts. Trending threads were especially chosen in order to see interaction between participants and formation of actual conversation. Also interesting ad videos, user videos, pictures, comments on Facebook newsfeed coming from Facebook friends were all collected under the Facebook account by sharing them with "Only Me" as the viewer option. In addition, interesting news headlines were collected under the bookmarks of the Internet browser, and many friends who knew about the subject of this study kept sending personal emails when they came across interesting updates. A small portion of the data collection can even be considered as co-collected.

The data was analyzed with the Nvivo 10 qualitative research analysis software. The threads investigated were downloaded into Nvivo 10 to make them ready for coding. Initially, the researcher downloaded twenty five distinct threads

from various sites that were created in various periods related to the discussion of Apple vs. Android. This first set of data contained a total of around three thousand individual postings across more than thirty conversations that prolonged over months or years with more than fifty posts in each thread. The investigator had already done the literature review and kept some personal field notes, but the coding of the downloaded data was started from scratch without any predetermined codes or categories. The downloaded data was coded in the software without using the in vivo codes along the way, which created many headings to be analyzed later on to form recurring codes that seemed to be crucial for the research. Later these recurring codes were organized into themes, and the relationships between these themes were analyzed to deliver the possible dimensions of the Apple and Android brand war and IBCC. Hermeneutics was the main method of approach at this stage to see if the data fit into the available codes and whether there were any contradictions. The main themes were altered a few times and got refined along the second stage of data collection. The codes in NVivo were saturated at this point, which led to the second stage of data collection. The second stage of data collection was done by again looking at different sources of interactions in the netnographic fields, but these threads were not coded into Nvivo as in the previous stage. Only new phenomena were recorded in field notes, and the main approach was to find contradicting and supporting examples in the new threads investigated. Triangulation of netnography with other methods strengthens the findings through affirmation of the revealed ideas and delivery of more generalizable results. In this context, in-depth interviews were conducted as the third stage of data collection and analysis. The researcher had phone, online, and face-to-face interviews with eighteen individuals from various backgrounds reached through convenience sampling. Among these eighteen people,

eight identified themselves as Android users or fans, nine as Apple users or fans, and one Windows user. A summary of the interviewees is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Interviewee Profiles and Brand Choices

| Interviewee | Age | Occupation | Brand/System |
|---------------------|-----|--|-------------------|
| Berna Yeşilova | 39 | English Teacher / Dormitory Manager | Apple / IOS |
| Ece Uslu | 22 | Management Student | Apple / IOS |
| Melinda Vural | 21 | Management Student | Apple / IOS |
| Kaan Arslan | 20 | Management Information Systems Student / Musician | Apple / IOS |
| Andaç Cezayirlioğlu | 23 | Management Student / Digital Agency Intern | Apple / IOS |
| Kübra Gökçe | 19 | Genetics and Microbiology Student / Singer | Apple / IOS |
| Derya Güngörmüş | 32 | Computer Engineer / Sales Executive | Apple / IOS |
| Arda Akşit | 33 | Computer Engineer / Sales Executive | Apple / IOS |
| Wolfgang Kotowski | 38 | PhD Student | Apple / IOS |
| Doruk Kilitçioğlu | 21 | Computer Engineering Student | HTC / Android |
| Osman Ortaç | 62 | Civil Engineer / Hunter | Samsung / Android |
| Pelin Özdemir | 22 | Political Science Student | Samsung / Android |
| Ezgi Tanışır | 20 | Management Student | Samsung / Android |
| Stefan Koch | 43 | Professor of Operations Management | Samsung / Android |
| Ece Akgül | 23 | Computer Engineering Student | Samsung / Android |
| Mehmet Özel | 42 | Dentist / Network Marketer | Samsung / Android |
| Semih Solmaz | 21 | Management Student / American Football Player | Sony / Android |
| Mustafa Büyükkaya | 40 | Computer Engineer / Code Writer / Insurance Business Owner | Nokia / Windows |

Face-to-face interviews took place in public cafés and on campus. They lasted in a range between forty-five to a hundred minutes depending on the interest level of the interviewee on the subject. One of the interviews took place with two close friends simultaneously as they especially wanted to talk to the researcher simultaneously. Fifteen of the interviews were logged with a voice recorder in addition to the notes of the researcher, one kept in the history of Facebook Messenger, while two others were not recorded since they were done on the phone - only the notes of the researcher were used to include the findings of these two interviews.

The researcher used the long-interview technique of McCracken (1988) where she aimed to be as unobtrusive as possible without leading questions and with more general questions in order to have the respondent tell their unbiased side of the story. The questions of the interview protocol were as follows:

- (1) Grand Tour question: Could you please tell me about yourself? (Origins, education, family, occupation, hobbies, lifestyle, etc. were further probed)
- (2) Entry to discussion: (a) how did you get your last phone? (b) what do you think about mobile phones?
- (3) Can you tell about your history related to your mobile phone choices?
- (4) What do you think about Apple / Android? (usually already mentioned in the previous conversation)
- (5) Can you tell me about the conversations you had with people or you witnessed that people had related to this subject? (probe if there were conflict or disagreements)
- (6) What do you think about Apple users (fans) / Android users (fans)? (probe if differences between brand users were mentioned before)

With this protocol in mind, a lot of probing was used in order to dig deep into the thoughts and feelings of the interviewee. Later when the interviews were over, the researcher also got into a more informal chat with the respondents actively discussing the issue as a participant in the subject, which was inspired by the active interview method of Holstein and Gubrium (1995). As proposed in the active interview technique, the researcher did provide her own stance in the subject and what she has already come across to further motivate conversation about the subject of IBCC. After the interviewees reflected on this mutual conversation, the researcher also used it as an opportunity to show the preliminary findings to get their feedback on the findings.

All the recorded interviews were transcribed and the content analyzed together with the personal notes of the investigator and the recurring themes were compared with the netnography findings. The interviews themselves actually shed

further light into some areas of the study that netnography had not captured before. Therefore, the cumulative themes that appeared in netnography and in-depth interviews were further meditated to come up with theory related to IBCC and its business perspectives, and a model was constructed. The model will be presented in the beginning of the findings and each dimension of the IBCC construct as well as their relationships to each other will be explained in detail.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings of the study and discusses them in six main sections. The first section discusses the main motives for inter-communal interactions that eventually lead to IBCC within the context of Apple and Android brand competition. The second section explains the novel constructs of IBCC and brand soldiers as well as the rhetoric created within IBCC. The third, fourth, and fifth sections explain the differences between the communities of Apple and Android that drive and elevate IBCC. The final section discusses the business implications related to IBCC and its drivers.

Motives in Inter-Communal Interactions

Apple and Android rivalry provides a setting to study IBCC, because people talk about their mobile phones and the engagement created around this topic witnesses many instances of conflict and fierce fights among opposing brand community members. As mentioned in the literature review, Dholakia, Bagozzi, and Pearo (2004) talk about purposive value, self-discovery, inter-personal interconnectivity, social enhancement, and entertainment value in engagement. In the case of Apple and Android conversations, we see involvement, innovativeness, need for self-

affirmation, and need for entertainment as the main drivers of conversations and inter-communal interactions.

Involvement is "relevance of the product to the needs and values of the consumer and hence interest for product information" (Zaichkowsky, 1986). A high level of involvement in the consumption of mobile experience is natural since our mobile phones have become a critical part of our daily lives in terms of communication, planning, entertainment, and real-time connection to the world. A lot of people care about the specifications of their mobile devices, what they do with them, and how they facilitate their daily activities. They are eager to talk about their mobile devices. Some of the interviews reveal the causes of the importance of the subject and the interactions around it well:

Nowadays, people spend most of their times with their phones and computers. They have become such a crucial part of their lives. They are like our companions. That is why this topic of mobile consumption is so important, and it is very natural that people search for the right choices and discuss about them (Kaan, in-depth interview).

I take notes, I check my emails, there is social media..., I study, I research, and I contact people; I do everything with my phone. I even use it in my dreams (Melinda, in-depth interview).

Osman, a 64-year-old civil engineer and hunter, admits that he resisted the idea of using a cell phone in the beginning but then he had to integrate mobile technology into his life due to many of his emerging needs and the faster pace of his daily activities:

My mobile device is beyond a phone for me now: it is a bank, a computer, a tool for presentations, a contacts list, and a news source. I really like using public transportation, and I can get any kind of information about bus schedules and I do my daily route planning on my phone. This is both time saving and economic. My schedule, maps, and traffic flow information is always available via my mobile phone. This is very important for me... The times for prayer are on my phone, holy books are on my phone. I use Dropbox very frequently to synchronize the photos and data on my phone and

my other devices. I have a lot of videos published on YouTube related to guns, hunting, gun safety, and shooting. I share these videos with others through my mobile Dropbox account, too. This is a great advantage... (Osman, in-depth interview)

These examples show how people integrate their phones to their lives based on their personal needs and priorities, and their involvement is what leads them to chat about their mobile choices.

The second main motive for people to engage and become active communicators in this topic is *innovativeness*, the inclination of adopting new products or services (Hirschman, 1980). Netnography and interviews reveal that communal discussions especially peak during new device or new operating system releases. The first commercial release of Android 1.5 software drew so much attention among its users that even one single community platform, Android Community, has several related threads, the most popular of which has more than six hundred posts created in a month. This is an indication of the fact that people with high involvement want to learn and keep themselves up-to-date about mobile technologies, which all point at the innovativeness motive. A lot of people enjoy having the most updated information on what is going on as it gives them the connoisseurship feeling. Two close friends who were interviewed simultaneously during this study, Andaç and Ece, mention that they sometimes discuss technology to "stretch" their minds to get different perspectives on the future outlook of innovations. Keeping oneself up-to-date and experiencing innovation in technology are also a part of the learning motive in these brand communities. Derya, who was a former Android fan that switched to Apple recently, describes herself as a technology maven:

Derya is a person who has been interested in engineering since childhood and has always loved to be involved in technology. Whatever I do generally

involves technology somehow. I started as a system administrator in the school lab, and then it was always technical positions I held professionally. I like trying new things and I reflect this to my personal life as well: I always feel the urge to use the latest and most updated software. This is something instinctive; for instance, if Microsoft Office is about to release a new version, I am always a Beta tester. Otherwise, I do not feel comfortable (Derya, in-depth interview).

Apart from new release periods, discussions climax when there is a plan to buy a new device and the buyer initiates the search process by discussing this online or offline:

Of course we talk about this. Whenever someone buys a new phone, this discussion comes up immediately. People in our generation talk about their phones, and they show a special diligence as if they are buying a new car... (Semih, in-depth interview).

People want to buy the most suitable phone for themselves; and naturally, their search for information, their likelihood to be involved in conversations, and their intention to receive as well as create WOM increase significantly during their buying process.

The third motive that is observed within these conversations is the need for *self-affirmation* in the co-construction of the self in a digitized market place (Belk, 2013). Mobile devices have become a critical part of our daily lives, a gate for the digital world, a technological savviness measure, and even a status symbol. Many people engage in dialogues about their mobile choices and the brands they use in order to verify their choices and feel good about themselves. However, this can lead to very subjective comments and negative attitudes towards other that do not have the same preferences:

I have friends who fanatically support Apple or Samsung in a blindfolded manner. They try to prove that they made the best choice. Totally instinctively...They want to show that they are good decision-makers (Ezgi, in-depth interview).

The conversations that have the motive of self-affirmation may sometimes become implausible as they are biased and self-sustaining. Pelin, who is especially active in wikis and social networks, disregards most of the opinions she reads online as most of them are written just to produce counter-arguments, to manage self-impression, and to create conflict. She admits that she really wants everyone around her to like what she likes and uses. Her evaluation of her own feelings is a mix of narcissism, self-verification need, and ego-satisfaction for being a connoisseur in the area of technology. Andaç also talks about how the brands he uses are important reflections of his personality and that the mobile devices he chooses from Apple are essential reflections of his personal image. The need to affirm mobile choices, or actually one's own self image, therefore, leads to conflict between different brand supporters to convince one another about their own decisions and be a part of the "winner" brand.

The fourth and final motive that can be observed in the conflict environment and actually in general online socialization process is *entertainment* (Peter, Valkenburg and Schouten, 2006). People have fun discussing these issues while trying to convince each other. Andaç and Ece admit that they have great time while having their fights about technology and brand choices. Even during the interview, they laugh and giggle as they tease each other about their preferences and ideas. The same outcome is supported by Derya. Derya and her colleagues end up chatting about mobile technologies during business meetings and lunch breaks, where everyone places their mobile phones on the table and someone in the group picks on a fellow colleague to start the discussion:

There are the Apple fans and the Android fans. They tangle each other in a cute way, casting aspersions. For instance, one says 'let me check my emails', and another immediately teases saying 'Oh, that can show your emails, too; it is that talented?!', and you end up replying with a laugh 'Of course it does! I

can even reply, see...' Then everyone takes out their own phones and starts showing each other the features of their phones (Derya, in-depth interview).

A lot of examples are also present in the threads where Apple and Android fans just bash each other to have fun rather than even create actual hostile conflict. They enjoy learning new things and interacting with each other even if they are members of opposing camps.

Having delineated the motives for inter-communal interactions, the next section explains how inter-communal interactions turns into conflict and defines the constructs of IBCC and brand soldierism.

Inter-Brand Community Conflict and Brand Soldiers

The IBCC phenomenon is a novel concept uncovered during this study. It is the competitive tension, hostility, and rhetorical fight that emerge during inter-communal engagement among members of rival brand communities. IBCC forms around many concepts such as cars, technology, sports, food and beverages, etc., but it was not a concept that could have become noticeable before the digital evolution and the dissemination of the Internet that made consumers gain a strong hand through their voices transcribed into permanent opinions on the web (Levine et al., 2006). Without the power of network connections and without the virtual milieu to raise their voices, communities were doomed to stay as small, temporal, and physically bound tribal gatherings. And the brand community would be a niche concept that is rarely available in the consumption realm. It would be unfeasible for brand followers to form vast and regularly interacting communities without the connective power of the social Internet. Thus, it is natural that IBCC has recently become a conspicuous

phenomenon with the rather recent ease for consumers to converge around brands and start discussions on them.

IBCC is different than oppositional loyalty which is discussed as the only construct related to inter-communal interactions in current literature. Oppositional brand loyalty is a construct that defines the attitude of consumers against other brands. IBCC, on the other hand, describes the actual clash between the communities that interact. It emerges out of elevated tension and fierce fighting among members of rival communities, due to oppositional loyalty based on communal differences and due to the lack of motives to find commonalities or celebrate similarities. The level of collective pride or group egotism increases the level of conflict among different communities as well (Ewing, Wagstaff, and Powell, 2013). Thus, IBCC is a distinct concept that captures the actual exchange between opposing brand communities and the factors that constitute its antagonistic occurrence.

IBCC emerges as a result of the accumulation of the actions displayed by brand community members that become a part of the brand competition through the rhetoric they generate in inter-communal interactions. Brand competition has become much more than a dyadic conflict between companies. It is a war between polarized groups made up of the brands, products, companies, and consumers. The conflict between brand communities is affecting the competition far more than it used to, because the stance of the consumers is much different than what it was in the past. Diamond et al. (2009) study the deep and broad brand of American Girl and propose that "a powerful brand is best understood as the product of a complex system, or gestalt, whose component parts are in continuous interplay and together constitute a whole greater than their sum" (p. 118). In accordance with the brand gestalt theory, brand communities are a significant part of the brand gestalt, creating meanings and

fighting as a counterpart to the companies during the brand war; and the empowerment of brand communities is beyond what was expected of the marketing systems. Jaffe (2008) highlights this new rise of communal power by noting that "you are the community you keep or rather the community that keeps you" (p. 217).

Until recent decades, consumer was only an object of the competition among businesses and it was a reactive party in the competition system as a *target*. As competition increased and consumers had the freedom to choose from alternatives, customer became the *king*, but still an object of the market transactions (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Later, through emergence of internet and social media platforms, with access to information and networking abilities, consumers became active creators of value in the co-creative, service-dominant market forums (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004; Vargo and Lusch, 2004), transferring their roles to *co-creators*. Today, the role of the consumer is even more powerful. They act as *volunteer brand soldiers* in the brand war, which is another new concept revealed in this study. As brand communities enacted through dynamic consumers become a part of brand wars, the arguments among rival community members become part of the guerilla war that contributes to the actual brand war. This phenomenon further augments the role of consumer to a volunteer *brand soldier*, and the role of the community to an *army*.

Brand soldiers are firm defenders of the brands they use. They utilize rhetoric to oppose rival brand users, they reflect some of the corporate brand strategies in their communication tactics, and they actively seek episodes of conflict to enact their personal stance on the issue. They are different than fans, evangelists, and advocates in the sense that they emerge within inter-communal exchanges and show hostility in their interactions. Their actions are not the results of sole brand loyalty or brand love.

Their attacks are also a means to depict one's personal brand, personal beliefs and mottos associated with the commercial brand as well as a means of belonging to a community formed around the brand. Therefore, the concept of brand soldier should not be considered as an agent role employed for commercial goals of corporations, either. It is a voluntarily self-assigned role and a phenomenon with motivational facets at the individual, communal, and social levels that are beyond commercial aspirations.

Brand Soldiers as Creators of Rhetoric

Brand soldiers are critical participants in turning inter-communal interactions into conflict with their conspicuous attempts to defend their brands through co-creating brand messages - even advertising, through active evangelism to convert other brand users, and through aggressive rhetoric to make non-users feel guilty or inferior for not using the product. It is natural that brand soldiers emerge as a new concept since their visibility and influence have increased with the possibility of disseminating their brand messages over social media with the evolution in digital platforms within the past two decades.

In the Apple and Android competition context, there are many instances where brand soldiers can be detected through their actions and communication. As a good example of a brand soldier, one of the interviewees Doruk, who is working on an Android application development project, acts as a "volunteer Google ambassador," in his own words, during his spare time. He is proud to have converted his mother to using Android, and is working on luring other iPhone users of his family to his own side. He employs a very delicate communication method to

achieve this; he prefers to talk to people very casually about their iPhones and acts as if he is curious why they buy iPhones, baits them to ask him why he prefers Android and gives a whole technical speech to convert them. Another interviewee, Osman, also takes pride in having converted one of his best friends to Android through his friendly teasers that he kept on playing until his friend could not resist any longer. Yet it is not only the Android people who act as soldiers. Melinda, an Apple admirer, also mentioned an Apple fan friend who ended up working at a Samsung launch event to earn extra money. She was asked about what made Samsung superior and she could not keep herself from telling people to go and buy iPhones while showing how her own phone was better than the Samsung phones she had to promote. Of course, she was kicked out of the campaign when she was caught red-handed by the management.

While there are brand soldiers for each side of the Apple and Android competition, there is also a group of unbiased enthusiasts, the technology lovers, who try hard to see the bright side of both camps. The members of a brand community usually show both attitudinal commitment and behavioral loyalty by repeat purchases towards their brands (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). However, members of multiple communities may display attitudinal commitment to all the communities they are a part of, but behavioral commitment to none (Thompson and Sinha, 2008). It is also possible to see this in the case of Apple and Android competition where certain members are double agents and are present for fair fights with their objective judgment as users of both brands.

In the Apple and Android context, the analysis of the inter-communal rhetoric reveals four types of overall profiles based on two main axes: communication strategies of mobile users that change with respect to their level of knowledge or

consciousness regarding the main topic of discussion (awareness) and their willingness and urge to be a part of the rhetoric related to the conflict (tension) (see Figure 2).

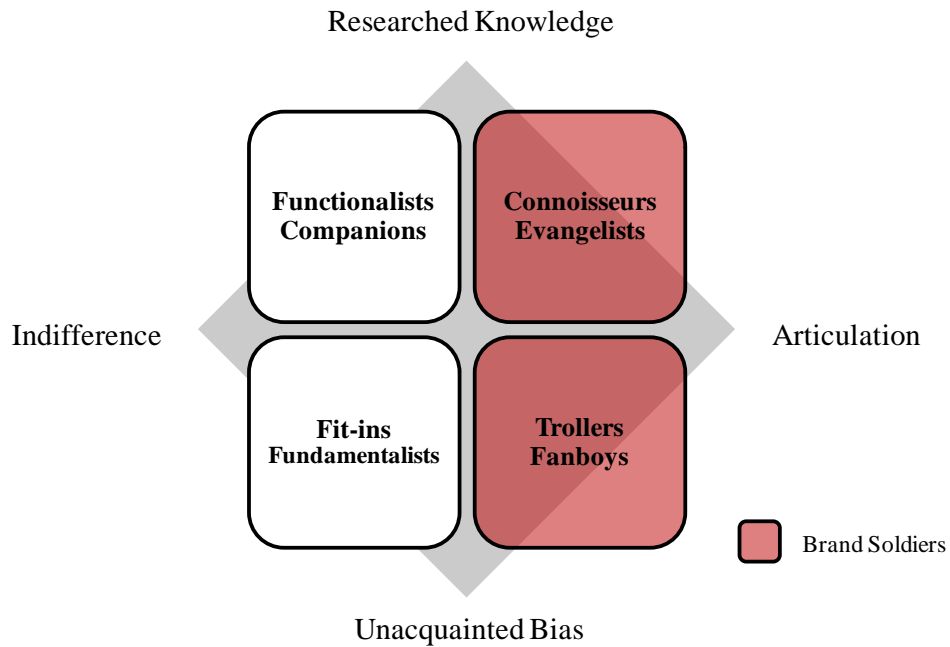


Figure 2. Typology of rhetoric in IBCC

Accordingly, in terms of awareness, contributors can vary in a range between a level of *unacquainted bias*, where the decisions are made not based on individually done objective research but rather on biased views gathered from their environments, and a level of *researched knowledge*, where the subjects master the topic at hand through various resources and form an impartial opinion about the topic by comprehending opposing perspectives related to the conflict. On the second front, the contributors may be reluctant to share their views with other members of the community due to their *indifference* to take part in the communal rhetoric, or they may feel the responsibility or pressure to show *articulation* in the communal playgrounds as ambassadors. Based on these two main axes, the typology of inter-communal

communication falls under four categories of participation. In the researched knowledge and articulation fragment, we see *connoisseurs* and *evangelists*. These people are active in both offline and online conversations to share their expertise and experience with other consumers. They are enthusiastic to share their technical or brand knowledge, and are usually objective in their judgments of opposing brands. Topic based knowledge leads to connoisseurship and brand based knowledge leads to evangelism. Conversations are fostered for the sake of knowledge dissemination rather than conflict; and if there is a conflict, this group engages in conversations to correct misleading opinions or complete missing information. They are critical actors in rhetorical discussions as they provide a sound foundation for information exchange and stop imprudent disputes that do not lead to conclusions. In a way, they fight to stop the destructive part of the IBCC. In the case of Apple and Android, this group is made up of technology lovers with or without specific brand attachments who share their technical knowledge on forums to further develop discussions. Those with brand attachment and loyalty act as the evangelists of their love brand. Even if they have the urge and tension to be part of the conversations, they provide objective judgments about both sides of the conflict and hand the superiorities or achievements to their competitors without unduly bashing them.

The second group that feels the need to articulate themselves in IBCC is the high articulation and low awareness group that act on bias, namely the *trollers* and the *fanboys*. This group is usually responsible for elevating the disputes between the communities, since they usually show aggression by trolling the conversations or infuriate others by their ignorant devotion that sometimes appears in the form of mob psychology. In the case of Apple and Android IBCC, the Apple fans who are in love with Apple products without actual knowledge, the mere trend lovers that use and

show off their devices as status symbols, and the Android fanboys that sabotage Apple threads for the sake of controversy are all examples of mischief makers. The two groups of connoisseurs, evangelists and fanboys, trolls act as the brand soldiers in IBCC due to their willingness to articulate their thoughts and feelings. While connoisseurs and evangelists add actual value to the rhetoric and help enforce corporate strategies at the consumer level, it is dubious whether the second group, the fanboys and trolls, actually do any good for the welfare of the brands they support, as they are the ones that draw criticism and antipathy.

The third group is also highly knowledgeable consumers that do their research when buying products but are indifferent to become a part of the conversation in IBCC. They are usually readers of the forums to get information but prefer not to contribute to the disputes between opposing fans. They do provide their knowledge when asked for their opinions but otherwise their involvement in the conversation is rather low. This group may base their consumption criteria on technology or the brands themselves; and no matter which is the central aspect for decision-making, buying decisions are based on personal investigation of information. Those who esteem technical details are usually the *functionalists*, and those who establish their decisions based on brand loyalty are *companions* of that brand. Both types of participants are present in Apple and Android communities. While this group is involved in the topic of mobile consumption and may act as brand loyalists, their part in IBCC is limited since they are unwilling to be a part of the communication process.

Finally, the last quadrant is made up of *fundamentalists* and *fit-ins*. The topic of conflict is neither central to these people, nor are the conversations engaging for them. They are simple users in the community who make their consumption choices

based on fundamental offerings that provide for their basic needs or through referring to their close circle of relationships to make a choice. Most mobile consumers who do not even use smartphones, let alone taking part in brand communities or IBCC, fall into this category. They own phones for calling and texting purposes and their decisions are based on price or the general consumption tendencies in their social environments.

The main issue related to inter-communal rhetoric is what factors end up polarizing consumers into clashing segments by elevating IBCC. The qualitative approach reveals three main differences that feed the discourse between Android and Apple users: *communal personality*, *company strategy*, and *brand legacy*. These three dimensions turn out to be the most important features that build the contrasts between the two communities and determine the conduit of IBCC (see Figure 3).



Figure 3. Drivers of IBCC

Netnography and interviews both hint at noticeable characteristic, strategic, and historical differences between the two communities that feed the conversations leading to IBCC. Emergence of communal personality will be discussed as the first essential contributor to the occurrence of conflict in the third section. Character traits, consumption norms, and communal identities of the two opposing communities will be delineated further to discuss the contents of communal personality. Company strategy will be the fourth section to understand how the approaches of companies in terms of innovativeness, communication, and ethics feed the conflict of brand communities. As the fifth part, the brand heritage companies pass on through their subsistence, the personal histories of their users, and the histories of communities will be underlined to discuss the legacy component of IBCC. Finally, business implications related to the findings of IBCC will be discussed as the last section of this chapter.

Personality

The communities of Apple and Android have very different personalities that create the blaze in this communal brand war, which is mainly due to the very different corporate approaches and strategies of the two brands and companies that support the brands. As mentioned before, Apple Company is very centralized in terms of managing its brand, its technology, and its community, and represents a closed system in its field, whereas the Android realm is fragmented in terms of the companies, the devices, the community's virtual outlets as well as the consumer segments that prefer the brand, representing the open-source systems. Thus, it is very natural to find contrasts in the general characteristics observed for the two

communities as a reflection of these differences. In addition, Vincent (1911) argues that the conflict itself helps shape the personality of groups as well: "In spite of much that is fallacious, irrational, even positively harmful, the group character is on the whole a product of repeated adaptation to a conflict or rivalry situation" (p. 244). Considering IBCC in the context of Apple and Android, the rivalry between the two groups also reinforces their contrasting personalities.

The communal personality construct is one of the main contributions of this study as it depicts the differences and similarities between the personalities of Apple and Android communities and portrays how these differences reinforce IBCC. The topic of communal personality will be analyzed in three sub-headings: the personality traits of the brand communities, which are generally opposite to each other; the consumption norms of these two different collective personas, which are critical for understanding their perspectives as consumers and their buying habits; and finally, the communal perceptions of Apple and Android, which turn out to represent mainstream and marginal impressions associated with these brand communities.

Personality - Communal Personality Traits

Communal personality traits are the general characteristics the members of a brand community display in general, but mainly during engagements related to the discussion and interpretation of the brands they support. The communal personality traits of Apple and Android are extracted based on the netnography and in-depth interviews and discussed in the coming sections (see Figure 4).

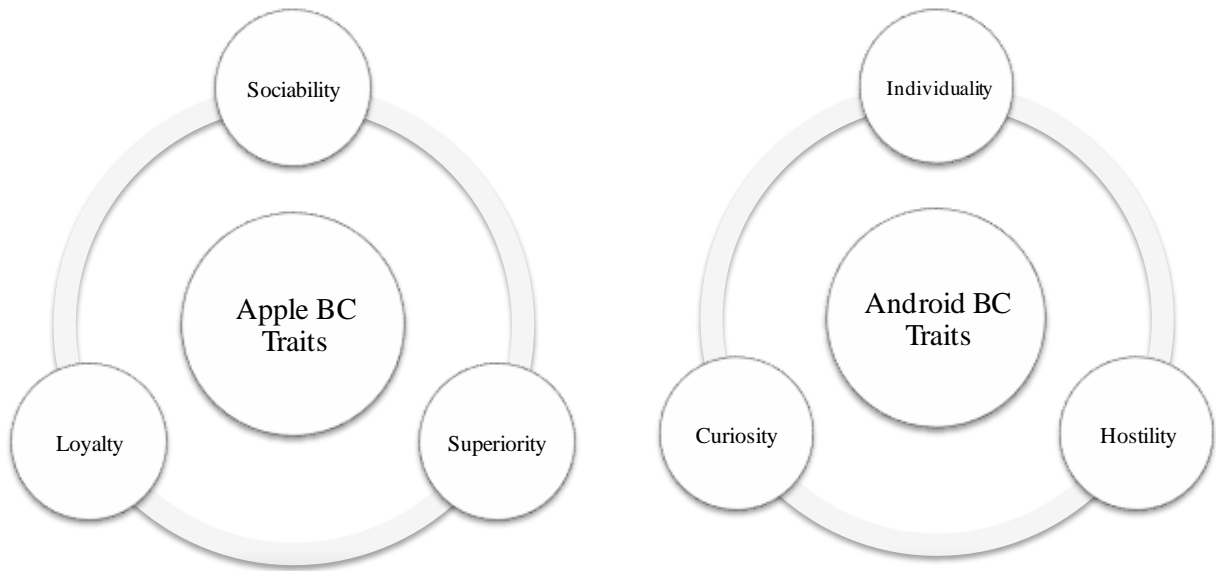


Figure 4. Communal personalities of Apple and Android

Apple Brand Community Character Traits

Apple brand community has evolved over time in terms of its philosophy and personality, and this study focuses on its current character traits formed around the trend-setter brand position of Apple in the mobile technology market. Netnography and interviews reveal that the current communal character of the Apple community is based on the traits of sociability, superiority, and loyalty.

Sociability

Apple brand community members generally place a high value on their social relationships. During the in-depth interviews, most of the iPhone users defined themselves as people who care deeply about their family and friends. Derya, for instance, first mentioned her close friends when she started talking about herself:

We are a very close group of buddies since high school. We have specific rituals: for example, whenever someone breaks up with a boyfriend, we meet and laugh about it rather than cry over it. We create funny stories about how it would have turned out if the relationship had continued, and we laugh. We need to find the good in bad things (Derya, in-depth interview).

Berna, who is also a fanatic Apple brand user, mentions her sons, her colleagues and her friends as the most important part of her life. She likes to socialize with people and attends latin dance nights every Friday night to meet with her friends. Fun and entertainment in social environments is what she cherishes the most in her life.

Melinda, who is also another interviewee that mentioned mingling with her peers as a major part of her life, defines herself as a socializer, "I define myself as an outgoing person. I reserve my spare time for my friends. I love going to the movies, having coffee, exploring new places with them." Mehmet, who has been a long time Apple fan but a very recent converter to Android, loves socializing and having fun, too; and in addition, he identifies himself as one of the central sanguine people in his group of friends, making jokes, and entertaining the crowd.

In addition to their affection, consumption of mobile experiences together with friends and family is a frequently mentioned aspect of their interactions. A lot of people talk about what they can do with their iPhones or the features and applications they discover in their daily conversations within their close circles. Many couples and friends experience the new iPhone release excitement together - waiting in the huge lines in front of Apple stores before new product releases or trying to order online for the whole family together. One of the recurring field notes the researcher has taken while visiting Apple stores in Istanbul was that people visited the stores in groups, as friends or family, be it tourists or locals. They enjoyed looking at Apple gadgets together with their friends, partners, and kids, showing each other the features of the possible future devices. Netnography also reveals many instances

during new version releases where people were trying to order online for themselves and their spouses with even small contests about whose iPhone will arrive sooner:

Wife: 6+/AT&T/Silver/64 - Coming on 9/19, Me: 6+/AT&T/Gray/128 - Delayed 7-10 days. Wife's order took about half an hour of clicking back from errors to get it to go all the way through. Mine took another 15 minutes (ugahairydawgs, September 2014, MacRumors).

Haha I'm in the same situation my mine and my wife's 6 Plus's, she's getting here's first while mine is 7-10 days (bnekic, September 2014, MacRumors).

Various jokes about the whole family using Apple products and its financial burden have been spread around many social networks as well.

Derya, who used to be a devoted user of Android, switched to Apple just because her close friends were using iPhones and lured her into their "Apple sisterhood" by letting her play with their phones every time they met. Another interviewee, Kübra, talks about how all her cousins use iPhones - especially the white iPhone 5s, and place them next to each other on the table when they meet up. In short, iPhone usage is a collective and social consumption for most Apple users and they enjoy sharing the same experience in their close social circles. Yet, this is one of the major issues that annoy Android users as they regard the collective social consumption of Apple a sign of mob psychology:

Millions of people will line up to get their piece of the pie. And probably less than 20% will actually know if the iPhone is the best phone for them. They will buy it because their friends are buying them (AntimonyER, August 30, 2012, Phandroid).

Apple users socialize and communicate among each other on Apple specific community or technical sites a lot, too. Most of the conversation is on how to use the products and in case of iPhone, it is about the basic usage of the main features of the phone such as its browser, camera, Facetime, maps, wi-fi connections, tethering, and

applications. The general tendency of the community is to help each other solve specific usage problems, pointing at the general altruism of the iPhone club. However, another characteristic of the community is that iPhone users seem to stay rather noncommittal in arguments with Android fans, and prefer to avoid clashes. In many technology review sites, one does not see a reaction from iPhone users as strong as the aggression coming from Android community when there is a disagreement, and Androiders try to dominate the discussions frequently. Even if Apple users join the conversation, they usually provide technical information or personal point of views and do not bother to engage in thorough conversations with the members of other brand communities. The most they do is they write condescending comments about Android and its users and leave the conversation. This was especially conspicuous in the earlier days when the Android brand was not very strong and had a rather low market share. Apple users did not seem to take Android very seriously and did not pay as much attention to their arguments. The reason for this avoidance of interactivity with Android fans, despite their general social character, seems to be due to the second trait they portray: superiority.

Superiority

A general finding related to Apple brand community members is that they believe Apple is a superior brand in mobile technology and by using and following of the brand, they become a part of a superior class of people with a certain taste. Semih, who is a whole-hearted Apple hater, explains this phenomenon as Apple creating a "high-end club" for its users. There are many reasons why Apple community behaves

like they belong to a club and sometimes show a conceited approach to other users:

Apple is the pioneer in the field and it is also perceived as a status symbol.

Apple is seen as a pioneer in consumer technology by its disciples and many consumers. Starting with the iPod as the first personal and mobile music device, revolutionizing the mobile industry with iPhone as the first touch screen and multi-tasking mobile phone, and continuing the trend with iPads brought along many "firsts" to the industry. Therefore, the term "innovation" is attributed to the Apple company by many. Apple fans want to continue using the company's products because it is the original creator of superior smartphone technology; it is tried and true; and it is not a copy-cat producer like most other devices that were released afterwards:

The iPhone survived so long because it reintroduced the concept of how a smartphone should be. Every other phone maker has adopted the iPhone path since 2007 (zosokm, March 2013, MacRumors).

In addition to being the pioneer in this field, it is also the best-known brand by the average consumer. Many Apple fans think that Apple is the market leader in the mobile phones industry despite statistics show otherwise in many sources. Its brand awareness makes most people assume that it is the winner product among other choices:

I think that many people just grab an iPhone because it has the best brand name recognition. This is the one huge advantage that Apple has over anyone else. My wife and in-laws wanted iPhones because they never heard of anything else. They don't even know what an iPhone can or cannot do compared other competing products out there (Stuntman, August 2012, Phandroid).

In addition to being a major player in the market, the Apple brand name has also been associated with prestige and its products have become wearable status symbols for a specific segment of people, especially for trend lovers. Most Apple users

believe that those who do not buy iPhones avoid it because it is not affordable. For those who can afford an iPhone, there is the assumption that it would be the wise and prestigious choice. They believe that Apple is envied and the only negative attitude to Apple products would be due to jealousy rather than rational thinking:

I just don't understand why people are so defensive about their phones, are they so insecure about their purchasing decisions that they have to put someone else down to make what they have sound better? Get what suits you better, iPhone doesn't suit everyone and android phones don't suit everyone. Apple is going through what Microsoft went through in the early 2000's if anyone is successful you have to hate them and tear them down, unfortunately it boils down to jealousy (RonDMC, March 2013, MacRumors).

The vanity of trend lovers and prejudice towards Android users sometimes appear in very condescending messages, too:

Android fan boys are just so envious, they criticize everything that apple do nowadays, without using their brain. (Aiden Chang, April 2013, TechCrunch).

Naturally, Android users are especially frustrated with this discriminating view since they defend the fact that iPhones are actually overrated and that Android provide better alternatives. In addition, there are many expensive Android devices which are preferred over iPhones for functional reasons, yet according to Android users' perception, Apple fans are completely ignorant of the alternatives in other brands due to their vanity and those who especially care about prestigious consumption do not even consider other sets of options:

The iPhone is an overhyped, underwhelming, and overpriced (for its capability, or lack thereof) device. It is marketed for those who are happy with the status quo of a ho-hum device from a performance standpoint, and see an I Device as a status symbol (jhtalisman, August 2012, Phandroid).

So both communities do point at the feeling of superiority in the Apple community.

Yet, not all of these are unwarranted. There may occur cases of actual envy towards

the Apple brand among Android users, too. The perception of envy and jealousy are not totally imagined by Apple followers, but the source of this envy might be actually created by the status aura attributed to Apple and its products:

I am about the last person who would ever buy an iPhone, but since 90% of the people in my office have one, I took a minute to play with the new 3GS. I have to admit, that thing is fast. really fast. i mean, really really fast... I still wouldn't choose the iPhone over the G1, but I would be lying if I said I didn't have a little phone-envy after playing with it (argylesocks, June 2009, Android Community).

Other than the actual pioneer position of Apple in the smartphone industry, the sociability of Apple brand community also elevates the trait of superiority.

Sociability brings susceptibility to peer pressure, which partially explains how Apple has grown to be the status symbol and the trendy choice. Using the applications on iOS together with friends and being able to co-experience the same ecosystem becomes an important part of co-consumption of the mobile universe. The fear of missing out becomes a criterion for people in making their mobile choices and becoming loyal to the Apple systems:

Now that I'm back home, I'm using Focus S again but am starting to wonder how long I can keep it up. Why? Let's call it peer pressure. Just like going out of town for a week made me realize how much I like using video chat to stay in touch with folks when I'm on the road, coming back home has made me realize how many of my acquaintances are iPhone users. And the fact of the matter is when so many of your close wireless friends are tied into iOS, you kind of miss out on a lot by being outside of the ecosystem (Noah Kravitz, 2011, TechnoBuffalo).

Some of those who stay out of the mainstream or hip choice of iOS, do unconsciously accept the secondary rank of not being Apple users themselves. Such consumers may even claim to be outcasts and minority by making different choices other than Apple, but they also feel upright that they are not a product of the peer pressure:

So go back to your iPhone. I'm one known for my stand out and bizarre choices; as such I've always found myself clung to the underdogs: Linux, WP7, etc. I believe in functionality, and as far as I see it, both OS are quite functional. This is a matter of preference and what suits YOU. Nonetheless, when I do see someone sporting an iPhone I can say for a fact that I do have my preconceptions: following his/her friends, ignorant of the options (may not be true in RARE instances-- the average Joe knows nothing of Tech). Alas, even in the tech world we can be persuaded to get something influenced by mainstream. Hence, as of now, I'm rocking an HTC instead of an LG (Andre, 2011, TechnoBuffalo).

In a way, what seems superior for one community may actually turn out to be the irrational or misguided route for the opposing community. Yet, this does not preclude most Apple users from assuming themselves as the superior brand owners with their rather pretentious tone during conversations.

Loyalty

The final most noticeable traits of the Apple brand community is loyalty. When the MacRumors forum is examined, most members list their history of usage on their profiles; and they are proud to be exclusive users of MacBook laptops, iPods, iPads, and iPhones. Many iPhone users are also owners of other Apple devices. Such users display a history of continuous updates regarding their Apple devices with the release of each new model (see Figure 5, downloaded from MacRumors community forum on September 22, 2014). While frequent update of new models can be considered a sign of loyalty, it is also a sign of fickle consumption and impulse buying habits of Apple consumers. Two Apple user interviewees, Derya and Ece, confess that they were mesmerized by the new Apple gadgets they have bought so far and that their buying processes were not deliberately calculated. Melinda, too, admits that she gets bored very easily and ends up upgrading frequently.

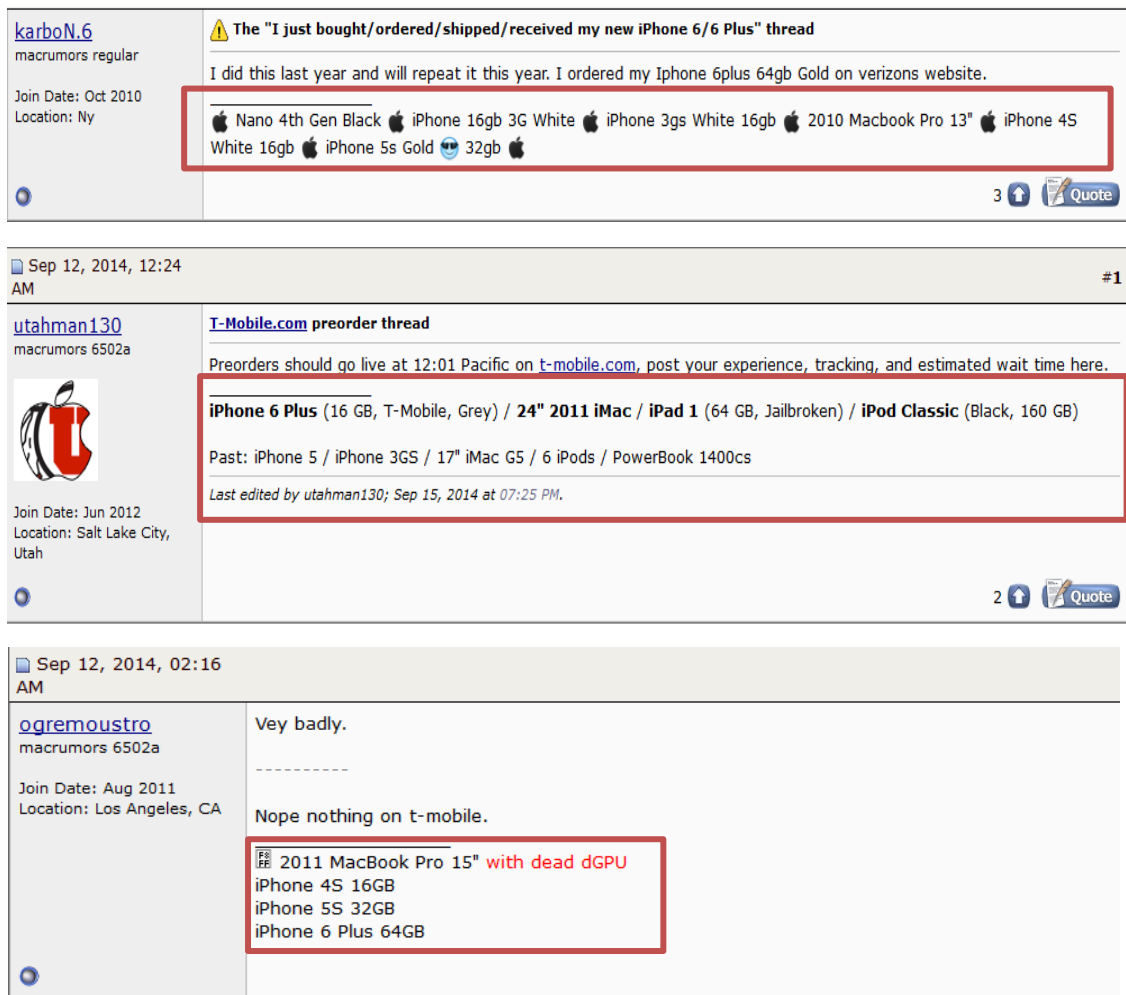


Figure 5. Examples of Apple usage histories

Yet many Apple users are also considerate about upgrading their mobile devices when there is actual need to improve the software and the capabilities of their phones, or when their devices actually stop functioning or start creating issues frequently. Wolfgang states that he and his friends, who are mostly iPhone users, do not consider upgrading till there is actual need to do so. Andaç, on the other hand, acquires the new models as soon as they are released, because he wants to utilize the high second hand retail price of the model he owns during the time of new releases: "Since I can sell what I have at a high price, owning a newer model with the latest technology seems like a good financial investment on my own account." Therefore, it

is not possible to label Apple users as impulsive or rational in their buying habits as both types are present in the set of general Apple consumers; but in the forums, there exist a lot of renewal stories without second thoughts, indicating the strength of loyalty in the Apple community.

Another trace of loyalty is that when users have issues with their iPhones, they do complain but do not consider threatening Apple or make comparisons by mentioning rival brands. Of course, there are many examples of conversion from Apple to Android and some become part of the Android camp once they switch. There are many complaints within the loyal fans of Apple, especially during software or device model changes. Users expect solutions from Apple, and they frequently try to reach out through their pleas, wish lists, and even prayer like call outs to the company with an expectation that Apple will become the savior of their troubles. For instance, when the iPhone 4 was released, the trouble with receiving proper signals when the device was grabbed at certain points, generally referred as the "antennagate" issue, created a lot of noise on Apple forums. It was annoying for most users that their calls were precluded due to how they held their phones. They eloquently explained their issues on forums, but did not mention leaving Apple as an option. No matter what, iPhone users prefer to consider Apple as the only choice and try to look for solutions within the iOS world rather than searching elsewhere.

The Apple community also has rituals to show loyalty towards the brand. The most eminent one is lining up in front of flagship Apple stores, especially the one in New York City. Once there is an announcement of a new release, Apple fans cannot wait to become one of the first owners of the new devices, and thus starts the camping out sessions in front of the stores. The camping period has been prolonged and fans have even started to build tents weeks before actual release dates with the

commencement of rumors. The iPhone 5 and iPhone 6 releases witnessed such extreme passion, which was even condemned by the members of the Apple community itself. The extremists were blamed for doing something too irrational that would turn out to be a waste of time. Defending their intentions, the campers mention that they keep camping out since they meet a lot of new cool people during the process and socialize with fellow Apple fans like themselves. Naturally, this extreme loyalty to Apple and the unquestioned quest for owning the latest products is immensely criticized and mocked by Android users. They call these kinds of devotees Apple sheep, iSheep, Sheeple, etc. and consider the group a blind mob. One Android fan hints at Apple fans becoming puppets of the company by stating: "your masters have trained you well, it would seem lies become the truth for sheeple like you" (usernaym, April 2013, TechCrunch). A lot of digital art is also produced to tease this extreme loyalty by showing Apple users with faces of a sheep.

Having discussed the three main character traits that show up very frequently in the Apple community, next section covers the Android character traits.

Android Brand Community Character Traits

For Android, the main traits are much different than, and mostly opposite to Apple traits. Communal character traits of Android include individuality, hostility, and curiosity.

Individuality

The most conspicuous character trait of Android brand community members is their individuality. Unlike Apple users, Androiders care about displaying their individual character rather than following the trends. They like being different from the mainstream consumer, and they take pride in their eccentricity. As a sign of their individuality, they personalize their mobile devices specifically for their own taste and needs as well as experience the phone as a personal companion rather than a means of social consumption:

I remember the day when you could get a phone that was different to everyone else's and better by paying more money. Now we have three to choose from, S4, 5s and 1020. I don't see the S4 or 5s as a big step forward and the 1020 only just moves us forward. I don't have time or need to play games on a phone and find android buggy with bad apps that say one thing and do another. Think I will go for a 1020 as no one else will have one and I can feel individual and have a good camera (Checkoutdude, August 2012, techradar).

Pelin, a junior student in political science, mentions an old Nokia phone, which she had stolen years ago, and remembers that the reason she felt especially frustrated in losing the phone because its color that was very rare and no other person she knew had the exact same phone. Exclusivity is the key in Android users. They enjoy being unique in their choices and controlling the contexts they function in, which points at their need for customization in many aspects of their lives. The joy in being able to adjust for individual preferences is one of the aspects that Androiders feel grateful for:

The iPhone 5 will be a thing. Android is a broad selection of things. Android is all about choice, so the main deal is that you can choose one that is right for your needs in power, storage and size, and carrier and budget. Plus, Android is more flexible out of the box, because your option allows you to choose from a range extending from plain Android to various manufacturer add-ons. My wife's phone and mine look nothing alike at face value, they're customized to our tastes, but under the hood both are Android, very flexible and plenty capable (Earlymon, August 2012, Phandroid).

The most common phrases in Android forums turn out to be "my choice," "my needs," and "what I want" - all hinting at the priority of individuality for this community in general. They also take pride in making their own choices as individuals and this is also reflected in their looking down on Apple users who are not as knowledgeable or aware. Actually, Android users appear snobbish in showing off their individuality, as they connect their status with higher taste, higher sophistication, and higher intellect as they are capable of doing more with their mobile technology with their own will.

Furthermore, Android community members are keen on being independent and unrestricted as part of their individuality. This is actually very parallel to the philosophy of Android open-source software, which is not restricted, unlike the centralized iOS platform. One of the interviewees, Stefan, for instance, mentions that the main reason he uses an Android device is that it is based on open-source code, which he believes to be an important quality for the progress of technology and is decisive in his consumption preferences as a philosophy.

Android community members are quite ardent in maintaining their individuality and eccentricity in their lives apart from their consumption choices as well. Many of the Android user interviewees – Doruk, Ezgi, Ece A., Osman, and Semih – describe themselves as calm people who enjoy spending time on their own or in their small groups of friends without necessarily intense socialization. They enjoy doing things alone and usually have hobbies that are self-sufficient. In addition, Android community members turn out to be proud of their individuality and do not want to be compared to other people in any sense. Ece A. mentions that she has never cheated on an exam in her life because of her complete confidence in her own intellect and in her own way of thinking. Similarly, Semih adjusts his

appearance and hair style in a way that does not look like the mainstream styles on campus, and takes pride in being himself in a comfortable fashion rather than following the trends. Osman summarizes his need to be eccentric as a means to having control over his life. He especially despises taking orders from others and hints at his fulfillment for not being a person who can be influenced or managed easily. In short, individuality along with its consequences of independence, eccentricity, and self-confidence turns out to be a defining character trait for the general Android brand community. After all, the Android users are the ones that took a leap to try out a rather newer software platform after the release of iOS, which was considered to be the pioneer in the smartphone industry. Yet this condition also brings along their other noticeable common character trait, which is their general hostility due to the frustration of not being completely appreciated or acknowledged by the ignorant and conventional fashion disciples in technology.

Hostility

During this study, the most recurring phenomenon was the general hostile attitude of Android users in forums. This is actually the starting point of the research as the researcher herself was reading the forums to find out the best mobile phone for herself when she realized the aggressive voice of Android fans and the general tension in the forums. It is then that the conflict concept was investigated to reveal a thorough understanding of this aggression. The hostility of the Android brand community is very opposite to the sociability of the Apple community and is mostly caused by the general vanity of Apple users considering themselves as belonging to a superior club in the technology market. Androiders are frustrated. They feel their

cause and choices are not understood, and that most people are actually making unaware choices. While the overall market share is higher for Android, they are contemplated by others, and even contemplate themselves, as the second player in the market. Sometimes they are even the underdogs if they are using Android devices that are not Samsung.

The most important sign of Android users' aggressive character is that they are usually the ones that start the verbal fights on forums or in daily verbal discussions. Sabotaging the Apple community pages with their aggression is also a very frequent assault on their side:

Android fans have overtaken these boards, and it's just sad. They should go to their own boards and talk about how much the iPhone sucks. But they have their panties all in a bunch and treat Android like a religion that they must 'convert' the Apple followers. I don't see huge numbers of Apple fanatics in Android forums. Says something about the Android fans inferiority complex. (bbeagle, March 2013, MacRumors).

These provocations are sometimes fun, with mere teasing among close friend groups, but in forums, sometimes they elevate into harsh debates with insults, curses, and swearwords by Android fans. Derya and Osman both affirm the fact that Android users are the discussion starters in real life, too, and they never miss a chance to tease an iPhone user. As a committed online review reader, Derya observes that when there is a basic question coming from an Apple user, Android fans start to grind that person down by explaining what a wrong decision using an iPhone is and that it would be natural to face issues with it. In the meantime, it would be much easier to just write the fix for the issue, but crushing down iPhone appears as the first priority of Androiders, hence starting the discussions that lead to IBCC. Similarly, Pelin, as an Android fan, confesses that she loves to tease one of her close friends, who is an Apple fan. The reason she commences discussions with him is not to show off that

her own phone is more powerful - and actually she declares that she does not care - but to see her friend sweat trying to defend his Apple. Pelin thinks this is fun, just like most Android fans that seem to enjoy crushing down their Apple opponents.

There is a significant group in the Android community that are also Apple haters, and who define themselves based on this hatred:

I hate Apple and everything they stand for and will NEVER purchase a product, but I love technology and hope they finally come to their senses (extremenerd, August 2012, Phandroid).

Osman also defines himself as an Apple hater. He does not even call the brand by the brand name "Apple," but calls it "Yarım Elma" in Turkish, meaning half an apple, while he calls Android users the "brotherhood." Unsurprisingly, a feeling as strong as hatred brings along hostile behavior in the Android front. Not only do these strong negative feelings towards Apple occur in verbal communication, but they are also reflected in fan art and especially in the reproduction of the Android logo with the green robot. In these logos, which may be found as profile pictures of community members in many Android forums, the Android robot is presented in an offensive attitude: eating an Apple, killing Apple in a fight, and even humiliating by peeing on Apple. Due to this hatred, clearly, the Android users do not want to be compared with Apple users and even take it as an insult. A review article on Apple Insider based on a comparison between Samsung SIII and iPhone revealed that Apple and Android users were actually not that different in terms of their habits in using their mobile phones as well as the applications they most frequently utilized. The Android users were furious about the similarity statement and wrote comments to denote the study as "bullshit," and the researchers as "utter retards."

Though it is mostly directed at Apple fans, Android users seem to be hostile in general, too. There are many traces of aggression among Android users

themselves, which shows that aggression is a general character trait rather than a sole reaction based on oppositional loyalty. In Android discussions, not only do Android fans curse at Apple people, but they also swear at each other when they get furious in cases of disagreement or when an Android user happens to criticize anything related to the operating system when they are actually trying to get used to the platform as a new user. In case of any disapproval, comparison with another system, or criticism, the "elderly" community members, who have been Android fans for a long time, end up virtually beating the presumptuous newbie with their scornful comments about his inexperience and ineptitude as an Androider. They roll their eyes by using emoticons at such misbehavior and also if there are any type of irrational comments by another Android user. Not only Apple fandom, but also any kind of irrationality is enough to tip them off.

The feelings of frustration that ends up in aggression are mostly due to the fact that Android users are curious researchers in the mobile market and they become fuming for the ignorance of iPhone users. The next section discusses the third general character trait of the Android community, its curiosity and how it leads to communal interactions and relationships in the communal threads.

Curiosity

Android users are curious and they love researching about technology in general. While there are highly tech savvy consumers who root their phones or jailbreak their software in both communities, the ordinary Android brand community member has more interest and experience in researching a broader range of developments than do his Apple counterparts. When asked to describe themselves, all Android user

interviewees started off by stating that they love innovation and technology. They were keen on learning new things about various kinds of options out there in the field, as well. They defined themselves as seekers and the researchers. One differentiating point between the two communities is that Apple users' curiosity is more brand based due to their loyalty and stays within the ecosystem of the Apple brand, while Android users keep researching to match technologies for their individuality. There are cases of Apple users converting to Android, and these stories all contain researching for better options after dissatisfaction with an iPhone.

For Androiders, it is important to discover what they can do with their devices and the specifications ("specs" in daily forum language) of their choices are discussed very frequently on the forums. Specs are very important for Android users: the capacity of Android devices are compared and contrasted among Android OEMs and also the iPhones. Arda, an iPhone user and a computer engineer, admits that he never cared about the specs of his iPhone and never worried whether it would be adequate for the operations and applications of his phone:

You know for sure that the phone will operate without getting stuck or frozen, so why should I ever bother to learn what is running inside, or what RAM the phone has, or what specs it contains... it just does what it is supposed to do (Arda, in-depth interview).

This specific attitude and comfort of Apple users is usually cursed and denigrated by the Android users, and regarded as a sign of ignorance:

It is typically anecdotal, but just about everyone knows at least 5 iPhone users that don't know anything about the product they have. I used to have a boss with an iPhone that would sing the praises of Apple (no seriously he would sing about it and off-key too), but didn't have a single app installed and never really did anything smartphonish with it (ofthedamned, September 2012, Phandroid).

Android fans claim that informed users become Apple people's nightmare as Apple

users cannot defend their choices as much as they want since Android users claim to have knowledge on Apple and its specs more than their actual owners. Pelin indicates that even though she is an Androider, she is well aware of the iPhone as a technical device and keeps herself updated with Apple related news to justify her phone choice and maintain her connoisseurship as a technology lover. Curiosity of Android users and the knowledge they build up as a result of curiosity also causes Androiders to be arrogant and confident during clashes:

Millions of people will line up to get their piece of the pie. And probably less than 20% will actually know if the iPhone is the best phone for them. They will buy it because their friends are buying them. This is what draws me to Android users the most. They had to actually make one conscious decision when they got their phone, which one to buy, which form factor. With android, at least on the outside, you got the phone YOU thought best fit you. Not the one that best fit your friend, or the head cheerleader, or class president (AntimonyER, August 2012, Phandroid).

Android users are not only curious about their phones; they seem to be inquisitive minds in general, trying to understand the reasons and mechanisms behind topics they are interested in or related to the hobbies they have. Their research journeys sometimes end up in quite philosophical discourses as well. For instance, Semih spends time on his own just to think about existential issues related to the world and universe in general. Also he loves being the know-it-all in his social circle and studies almanacs and Wikipedia to show-off his competence in providing data during conversations. The same inquisitive mind is observed in Osman's responses. He defines himself as a challenger and a curious mind, reads many books covering various religions and social formations around them. He is also a hunter and researches the topic and creates informative YouTube videos himself to enlighten the community in this specific hobby area. Ece A., on the other hand, foresees herself in academia constantly reading about cognitive science and physics, as learning about

science pleases her the most. One of her favorite philosophical dilemmas she examines is whether machines are actually alive and whether it is ethical to kill artificial intelligence created through these machines when they become obsolete. She discusses different viewpoints on this idea with her friends and enjoys how they cannot solve the living machines predicament. Fascinated by technology, Doruk reads technology sites developed by programmers to build his own applications; he loves being a part of an open-source culture and seeks ways to take part in it as an amateur developer himself. Finally, as a new convert to Android, Mehmet builds airplane models and constantly researches about aviation and reads monthly magazines on the topic to further his expertise around his hobby. These examples show the inquisitive character of the Android users in many areas. However, it does not mean that Apple owners do not have any hobbies or are not curious or intellectual. It is just an interesting finding that Android users prioritized their investigator character in defining themselves more than others, which is also supported by the curious and analytical discussions in many online threads related to Android.

The curiosity of the community reflects into its interactions as well. In the forums, a lot of questions are asked and details are demanded. The high frequency of probing results in more information exchange, more ideas challenged, and as a result a more intellectually interactive environment with engagements turning into relationships. This is similar to the intellectual and social value generation described by Seraj (2012) in the aviation forums. Android fans not only depict their curiosity in their own platforms, but also poke their nose into Apple threads and try to create discussions and divulge reactions over on the "other side," too. Multiple brand usage for various devices expedite this contagion as a lot of Android phone users may also

have Apple devices as pads or laptops, leading them to hang out in Apple forums as well.

Communal Personality Traits within Personality Paradigm

Apple and Android IBCC exposes reoccurring communal personality clues that appear to be possessed by a majority of the community members that interact online or offline on the issue of their mobile technology choices. As mentioned in the beginning of this section, communal personality is defined as the common characteristics that members of a brand community portray. Yet, personality has been a widely studied area in management science; therefore, it is critical to show how communal personality fits within the personality paradigm.

Brand Personality is the most widely utilized construct in the field of marketing. It is defined as "the set of human characteristics associated with a brand" (Aaker, 1997, p. 347), and it is significant in differentiating brands from their rivals as well as providing companies opportunities to build special bonds with their customers through their anthropomorphized brands. Aaker (1997) developed the Brand Personality measurement scale based on the five dimensions of sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness. The sincerity dimension consists of traits such as being down-to-earth, honest, wholesome and cheerful; the competence dimension includes being reliable, intelligent and successful; the excitement dimension is captured by traits of being daring, spirited, imaginative, and up-to-date; while sophistication dimension is defined by traits of being charming, romantic, pretentious, upper class and glamorous; and ruggedness dimension is built around traits of being outdoorsy and tough. While the first three dimensions are

parallel to human personality traits and can be intrinsic human personality traits, the latter two are usually desired states that are not necessarily innate. The stream of literature that includes Brand Personality also investigates the relationships between self-image, brand image, and self-brand congruency (Belk, 1988; Sirgy, 1982). Through their choices of brands, people signal part of their actual or ideal selves to the public (Aaker, 1996; Keller, 1993; Sirgy, 1982); therefore a match between personality and brand is critical. Consequently, it may be argued that the congruence between personality and brand personality should be reflected into the communal personality and brand personality tie since brand community is a natural amalgamation of individuals that relate to the same brand and have parallel imagery expectations that the brand offers. With this perspective, the communal personality traits of Apple and Android communities are compared with the dimensions of the Brand Personality construct to see the possible differences between the brand personalities of Apple and Android (see Table 6). The comparison table is prepared based on the descriptions used for each communal personality trait in the previous sections. These descriptions are matched with the Brand Personality traits in Aaker (1997) to show where the brand personalities of Apple and Android fall, based on the expected congruence between their communal personalities and their brand personalities. Accordingly, both Apple and Android brands reflect the brand personalities of excitement and competence, with a focus on different traits in these headings as well. The major points where the two brands diverge in terms of personality appear to be sophistication, ruggedness, and excitement. While Apple, as a brand, reflects more of the Sophistication traits of being glamorous, upper-class, and successful - which is expected based on the Superiority heading in the communal

personality trait analysis, the Android brand reflects a more rugged and excited spirit based on the communal traits of Individuality and Hostility.

Table 6: Communal Personality vs. Brand Personality in Apple-Android IBCC

| Brand | Communal Personality Traits | Brand Personality Traits |
|---------|-----------------------------|---|
| Apple | Sociability | Sincerity <i>Family-oriented, Friendly</i> |
| | Superiority | Sophistication <i>Successful, Glamorous, Upper Class</i> Excitement <i>Trendy, Cool</i> Competence <i>Secure, Leader</i> |
| | Loyalty | Sincerity <i>Honest, Original</i> Competence <i>Reliable, Secure</i> |
| Android | Individuality | Excitement <i>Independent, Contemporary, Unique, Spirited</i> Competence <i>Confident</i> |
| | Hostility | Ruggedness <i>Tough, Masculine, Rugged</i> Excitement <i>Daring, Spirited</i> |
| | Curiosity | Competence <i>Intelligence, Technical</i> Excitement <i>Daring, Imaginative, Up-to-Date</i> |

The mirroring of the communal personalities onto Brand Personality traits show that the brand personalities of Apple and Android are expected to be divergent, as their perceptions by their communities should be congruent with their communal personality traits. This differentiation in brand personalities could reciprocally augment IBCC by attracting and polarizing consumers that would be drawn to the brand personality traits of Sophistication versus Ruggedness and Excitement. Another argument would be that a change in communal personality could drive or necessitate a change in brand personality, since those brands that cannot keep up with the changes in their brand communities are doomed to failure (Hemetsberger, Kittinger-Rosanelli, and Friedmann, 2009).

The *Big Five* personality traits in psychological studies were especially influential in the construction of the Brand Personality Dimensions by Aaker (1997). The Big Five consists of openness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, agreeableness and extraversion. Openness to experience defines a profile that is curious and imaginative with interest in trying new things; conscientiousness is closely related to organization, reliability, persistence, and motivation in goal-directed behavior; neuroticism, on the other hand, pinpoints anxious, self-pitying, tense, touchy, unstable, and worrying people; and agreeableness is about being appreciative, forgiving, generous, kind, sympathetic, and trusting. Finally, extraversion is related to the interpersonal interactions and activity levels of an individual and extraverts are usually active, energetic, enthusiastic, outgoing, and talkative people (McCrae and Costa, 1989). Studies utilizing the Big Five Traits to explain brand community behavior are also available. To mention a few, Matzler et al. (2011) has found that agreeableness and extraversion in the Big Five personality construct influence people's identification with a brand community, which in return leads to loyalty; and

Doss and Carstens (2014) points out that brand evangelism, the highest level in brand community participation, is significantly related to extraversion, openness and neuroticism. The extraversion dimension is also present at the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)* personality test (Myers and McCaulley, 1985), which is widely used in management science and practice. Derived from Carl Jung's theory of psychological types, MBTI segments characters based on four functions: Feeling (F), Thinking (T), iNtuition (N), and Sensing (S); and four attitudes: Extraversion (E), Introversion (I), Judging (J), and Perceiving (P). While extraverts are oriented toward the outer world, introverts are focused on their inner world, ideas, and experiences (Goby, 2006). In the case of Apple and Android brand communities, it is observed that while Apple users are sociable in their lifestyles, their extraversion is less evident compared to that of Android users. Interestingly, while Android brand community fans are active with their online social personas, their general tendency seems more introvert in real life based on the results of the interviews. Goby (2006) confirms this finding as it reveals that introverts feel more comfortable interacting online than offline due to the lack of physical encounters, and their online activity is more prominent compared to extravert people. The link between individual personalities and communal personality is a critical area to be further studied as communities are aggregations of individuals that share common thoughts, beliefs, and feelings.

Findings in communal personality traits reveal valuable additions to the inquiry of personality construct in management science. It is proposed that the personality congruence in branding should be analyzed not only at the bases of individuals and brands, but also from a communal perspective since a community as a whole has more power of influence on both individuals and brands. The next

section analyzes the different consumption norms of the Apple and Android communities which is a direct reflection of the communal personality traits.

Personality - Distinct Consumption Norms

In line with their distinct personality traits, Apple and Android brand community members also have different norms for their purchasing choices. This is one of the most frequent debates in the forums as both groups try to persuade each other that their criteria are more valid for their purchasing decisions. The divergence in their norms is noteworthy; hence the very different consumption experiences in the two worlds. Apple community members very frequently talk about practicality, beauty, and safety as their main criteria for choosing iPhones; while members of the Android community claim customizability, functionality, and economy as their bases for using the open software system. Naturally, one may notice that their norms are quite relevant and parallel to their personality traits.

Apple Brand Community Consumption Norms

Practicality

The most prominent usage criterion of Apple community is practicality. All interviewees using iPhones and the Windows phone user who is planning to switch to the Apple ecosystem mentioned that they are people who consider themselves practical in life and looking for solutions that bring them convenience. There are three kind of qualities in Apple products that complement the practical needs of its

general community: ease-of-use related to the general software, various applications that facilitate daily life, and cross-integration within the Apple ecosystem.

One of the main attractions of iOS for Apple users is that iPhones do not need a lot of customization or fine-tuning to be used personally. They are mostly ready in their out-of-the-box state. Users want to make centralized decisions about their usage preferences to be applied to all the applications on the software without handling each application on its own, and the iOS software allows this through general settings. However, in order to make the system practical, Apple does not allow much customization, even in background views and sound choices. While this is annoying for most Android users, who are keen about completely personalizing their phones, iPhone users enjoy the lower number of decisions they have to make. Derya, for instance, converted from Android to Apple, mostly because it is a very practical device with very easy steps to make it personally adjusted. She believes that her life is already quite complicated with a lot of decisions to be made daily and just having a phone that does most of the thinking makes it much easier to use. Also, using some other iPhone or getting used to another Apple device is much easier:

What I've said before us iUsers like simplicity with their devices. Any iPhone user can pick up anyone else's iPhone and pretty much use it. And transition from iPhone to iPad is easier. Android phones are cheaper, sometimes have better hardware than the latest iPhone, and there's a huge variety to choose from. I think this confuses people too because every manufacturer has their own brand of android, and no two android phones are alike. Why investigate which device looks and works the best for me when I can just grab an iPhone? (Jove33, August 2012, Phandroid)

Ease of use is especially critical for iPhone users as most of them also define themselves as "lazy" for things they do not want to do, and short-cuts are important to simplify their lives. The many applications developed for iPhone are significant tools to facilitate iUsers' daily lives. Berna, for instance, loves how she organizes her

photos, which she keeps in her iPhone, iPad, and MacBook as she loves gazing at them herself or showing them frequently. The photo album application recognizes faces automatically, which she claims as a big time-saver and a great advantage when she is looking for specific photos. Similarly, both online and offline discussions show that applications of the iOS system are critical in leading users to Apple devices. Android users do not pinpoint the quality of applications as much as the fact that Android applications are free. For iOS fans, on the other hand, the practicality of applications are much more important than the fees they pay and most iPhone users do feel comfortable to pay for something that relieve them from any kind of hassle.

Another indicator of the practicality of iPhone users is that their laptops and all kinds of mobile devices can be integrated across the Apple ecosystem. Their calendars, photos, emails, stored data are present in all their devices no matter how and on what device they do the data entry. All Apple users adore this quality of the system and they also enjoy being able to access all their data through whatever device is handy at that moment. Andaç, for example, uses his MacBook, iPhone, iPad, and iPod all integrated to each other and he even enjoys having the last web page he viewed on Safari browser of his iPad to be readily available when he switches to using his iPhone. Derya owns two iPhones, one for work and one for personal use, and two iPads, one she uses herself and an older version she gave to her sister; and a MacBook. She really enjoys her multiple screen life that she can integrate across the Apple devices and declares that the practicality of the ecosystem is indispensable for her. The integration is great for people looking for practicality and after they invest in building the ecosystem of Apple devices, users also get reluctant to switch to another system leaving all their integrated applications behind:

If I were a first time smartphone user, there are chances that I would pick an Android, BB, or Windows device. All of those are great. But since iPhone got here first, I have invested a ton on apps and the difference is not night and day. Then there is no substantial reasons to switch (mac001, March 2013, MacRumors).

But the idea of an ecosystem may also be limiting to some others. A converter from Apple to Android describes the pluses and minuses of the Apple ecosystem as follows:

With iPhone you do get the whole Apple ecosystem experience: a physical store for tech help, lots of accessories, a fully cultured iTunes store for music, apps and video, the best integration with Mac computers and Apple TV. i.e. the walled garden. I can see why Apple has a lot of fans. That said, I left the Apple ecosystem because I found iOS to be too limiting. In order to get things like widgets and live wallpaper or file system access you need to jailbreak and install custom apps. Every iOS device (phone, tablet, etc.) has the exact same folder/app icon interface. It bores me and quickly becomes cluttered when you install over 20 apps. (I normally have 100 or more on my device.) And if you want to drop a few files for on the go use (like a video), you'll have a MUCH EASIER time doing it on an Android with file access (ravenas, August 2012, Phandroid).

To provide a seamless integration across devices, the iOS software depends on iTunes for its folder system, which simultaneously constrains the mobility and accessibility of various file types which cannot be opened via iTunes. Therefore, the practicality of the Apple ecosystem is negotiated among Apple and Android users very frequently.

In short, Apple users value practical propositions. They want to spend less effort to use their devices and integrate their iPhones into their daily activities and other technological gadgets as smoothly as possible. One button, single tap, single swipe solutions in the software are important and the less complex the system, the more satisfaction it provides.

Beauty

Design is the most frequent praise that iPhone gets. This is natural since Apple is a company that specializes in design and markets its products with an emphasis on their "magical" beauty, as heard in many of their advertisements. Users are especially mesmerized by the rich looking, polished aluminum case and the shiny metal bezel of the iPhone and they always compare it to the high prestige brands in other fields:

Have to admit I like the feel of the unibody metal versus plastic. Like a Rolex versus a Timex. (WhoKnowsWhat, September 2012, Phandroid).

I like 2 things about Apple: 1. Quality. The materials, construction and design are first class. You always pay a bit more. However you do seem to be getting a Porsche as opposed to a Volkswagen for your money. You may want to quibble with the way it works, but the nice thing is that they are engineered to work very well. (funpig, September 2012, Phandroid).

That iPhone is deemed as a premium product is very crucial for users as it can be presumed by the superiority characteristic of the community. And the design is the very factor for this ascription. The colors and the appearance of the icons on the software are also part of the complete iPhone look. The quality of the graphics on the menus as well as the picture clarity of photos is all details that recapitulate the overall guise of the iPhone. Kaan, for instance, mentions that he is obsessed with symmetry, and as an amateur musician, he cares about having an artistic device. His choice is iPhone due to its artistic style and beautiful appearance that makes Kaan feel more special with a much higher quality compared to other brands. Many Apple users comment on Android devices, especially Samsung phones, as "cheap crappy plastic," and they do not want to be associated with a product they denote as inferior.

Apple fans adore the gadget with a sincere affection for its beauty. Forums are full of remarks emphasizing the affection and adoration of iPhone users for their

devices, and the excitement skyrockets during pre-launch of new releases, with the impatience of seeing the new design. It is as if the phone is a pet for its owner. iPhone users embellish their gadgets with various colorful or chic cases in line with their own style. Berna declares that she is especially fond of the chic accessories of her Apple products and loves to adorn her iPhone and iPad. This is the most common and very rare customized aspect that is observed in Apple users. Another observation is that those consumers that use cases change them quite frequently, so it can be deduced that the cases are used as part of the mobile fashion and are definitely more than a protecting cover. Forums reveal examples of people using iPhones just for the sake of having more case options than what is offered for the Android devices.

The final aspect of beauty is also the ergonomics for the iPhone users. This is also an aspect for practicality since single hand usage of the device is a critical feature. They do not prefer bigger screens of the Android devices as they need to use both hands in texting. Also one of the frequent comments is that iPhone looks beautiful in the hand; and while talking on the phone it is more aesthetic to have a device the size of an iPhone. Apple fans make fun of the bigger Samsung devices and mention that they look "ridiculous" in people's faces while they are talking. A lot of photo-shopped pictures are created to humiliate the phablet outlook and the people who use them. Samsung users usually respond to these humiliations with a "size matters" statement to reverse the ridicule.

In short, for iPhone owners, style means a lot and their mobile devices are a part of their fashionable appearance with the beautiful and superior appearance in build-quality.

Safety

Many iPhone users are in the club for safety reasons. Its buyers believe that iPhone is a safe choice for the ordinary consumer who cannot or does not want to comprehend how the device works. Some fans state that it makes them feel safe knowing that they cannot interfere with the operating system and break it down by mistake. The centralized maintenance of Apple products through worldwide iOS updates and the limited access to the "brain" of the phone are actually great features that make the users feel protected. In addition, the virus-free OS systems are widely appreciated by consumers and reassures that the system will stay intact against attacks from outside, considering the amount of data received from other sources on mobile devices. Andaç and Ece U.'s main reason to become a part of the Apple world was their search for virus-free operating systems. Ece U. was especially careful about this when she was buying her second laptop, which ended up being a MacBook and sustained her trust in the iOS systems since then.

Secondly, iPhones are safe choices due to their high quality and sturdy build. Many drop tests are available on YouTube where enthusiasts or professional reviewers compare the results of abrupt drops of mobile phones, and they usually contrast different OEM devices with Apple phones. iPhones are known to last long due to their material quality and therefore durability. Even though iPhone is a high-end product with a premium price, some users buy it so that it lasts long and there will not be the need for a renewal for an adequate period of time, which makes it an economical choice for such people. Melinda confirms that she and her friends are not fond of changing their phones frequently and it is a wise decision for them to have iPhones since they will have new looking and trendy phones for a longer period of time.

The third aspect of safety in Apple system is the fact that the interface is quite the same in all Apple devices and various versions of the iPhones. The same goes for the switch between other mobile devices of Apple, be it iPods or iPads, which makes the whole ecosystem safe as well as practical. Therefore, people feel comfortable using other Apple devices that belong to their friends and family when needed:

What I've said before us iUsers like simplicity with their devices. Any iPhone user can pick up anyone else's iPhone and pretty much use it. And transition from iPhone to iPad is easier (jova33, August 2012, Phandroid).

Familiarity and staying in the comfort zone is attractive for such conventional users. Besides, when there is an issue with their phones, there are many others who are familiar with the iOS system that can fix the problem without even consulting any official parties:

My aunt recently switched from a dumb flip-phone to a smartphone (iPhone 4) and frankly, I wouldn't have been comfortable recommending Android for her. As you said, the iPhone is what most people buy. That means an instant tech support network just in case she needs to do something on her phone and can't figure out how to do it. Her son (who lives with her) has an iPhone as do most of her friends and countless nephews and nieces. Not everyone would be willing to hop on forums such as this to ask for help troubleshooting or even just using their phones. With the iPhone, if she can't figure out how to do something, there'll be plenty of people who could help or teach her (ruino-onna, August 2012, Phandroid).

Most members of the mature generation prefer Apple for its ease of consultation to the younger ones in the family. Or, vice versa, the younger generation advise their parents to become iOS users to better facilitate their usage. Mehmet urged both of his parents to become iPhone users when he was an Apple fan himself. With all this familiarity, customer service is bypassed in a co-creative manner in the Apple community, even without reading forums or consulting customer support.

Nevertheless, the customer service of Apple is the third feature in safety. It is praised a lot during conversations and there are fans that prefer Apple products for

the professional customer service that is reachable and accommodating. Kübra mentioned that even though she is not interested in mobile devices at all, she chose iPhone due to the worldwide guarantee of Apple products. She adds that knowing where to find your correspondence wherever you go in the world was a valuable benefit for her. In the case of Android, this is a bit complicated since the manufacturer of the device and the software are different parties, Google and a mobile phone manufacturer. Having more than one entity may be confusing for resolving issues with the mobile technology. Yet safety is not a top priority for Androiders since most of them brag about rooting their phones and creating their own customized mobile worlds. While there are jailbreakers in iOS, too, they are not as frequent as in the case of Android. With this said, the next section summarizes the consumption norms for the Android world.

Android Brand Community Consumption Norms

Customizability

The most imperative norm for the Android user is customizability. The Android community believes in the cause of open-source technology, at least the connoisseurs of the group do; and this philosophy has customizability and co-creation at its heart. Ece A., Osman, and Stefan all mention the open-source software as the main cause of their choice for Android.

I do not like Apple because Android is an open system and Apple has a completely locked-down solution, in Android that is not the case. For the open-source, at least you have the option to continue in it on your own in a different way. There will always be somebody to continue the software. If Apple now decides to turn it off something, then they turn it off, and that's it. For any kind of open-source product, that is not possible. I think it's the

flexibility, the openness and the fact that there's no control by any party on the continuing of the development (Stefan, in-depth interview).

Users can actually add or modify things in the open-source system and make it their own. Many of the technology enthusiasts that can write codes even root and completely personalize their phones. The regular users, too, can have custom-made experiences by adapting the operating system to their needs. Wallpapers, ring tones, widgets (little short cuts for applications), desktop, notifications, hardware, utilization of memory by the applications, and many other features of the Android phones can be adjusted according to personal needs and taste. There are so many details that are not provided in the iOS world that Android users really find useful:

Android is all about choice, so the main deal is that you can choose one that is right for your needs in power, storage and size, and carrier and budget (EarlyMon, August 2012, Phandroid).

In my defense, I used to be an Apple fan. I guess you could say I was ignorant at that time and any Android gadget just makes me laugh because back then, the iPhone was the only smartphone I've ever gotten my hands on. The pain of not being able to customize the whole thing except for its icons and wallpaper was the smallest of issue to me. Until I bought my very first Android phone, the LG Optimus One P500; primarily because I couldn't afford an iPhone. Thank you, forces of the world, for introducing me to an Android phone. The Optimus didn't have the specs that the previous HTC models had but it was beyond decent. What mattered to me most was that it was incredibly customizable, kudos to Android. I can put widgets and decide which apps I want to see on my home screen. And the theme? Just download a theme client app and you're good to go. With an iPhone? You can't do any of this stuff! Sucks, right? (charaze ugmad, September 2012, personal blog page).

With iPhone Apple tells you what's good for you. With Android (which is an OS btw) you buy the phone you like with the specs you like (McBuzz, September 2012, Phandroid).

During the interview, Ece A. mentioned that before she switched to Android, she had an iPhone, she and all her roommates had to wake up with one of the iPhone tunes that went off as the alarm. For years they could not change to another tone, as the

iOS system did not allow such an operation. Finally, being the computer engineer she is, she jailbroke the device and wrote a code to upload just one song that they could all feel motivated to wake up with after a long time.

The customizability is also related to the options available in the market. iPhone has always been released as a single product each year until the concurrent launch of iPhone 5S and iPhone 5C in 2012, which was even a huge leap for Apple to introduce two products at the same time. The same is true for the iPhone 6 and 6 Plus releases this year, which actually ended up providing three different sizes of the Apple phone. The Android market, on the other hand, provides many different producers with many options to choose from. There are small devices as well as phablets that can even replace pads. The fantasy of some of the iPhone users to get bigger phones as well as the opportunity to steal some of the high end Android phablet users as profitable consumers finally led Apple to provide a bigger phone option for its crowd, but that also brought along some controversies related to the strategy of the company, which will be detailed in the coming chapter.

Within the customizable world of Android, creating efficiency is also critical to create the perfect user experience, which is discussed next.

Efficiency

Android users take pride in their phones, because they perceive them technically efficient. No matter which Android OEM brand is mentioned in the forums, the general titles for efficiency are top notch hardware, a software system that is not limited as in the case of iPhones being dependent on iTunes, open folder systems, and battery efficiency.

As mentioned under the curiosity heading, the specs of their phones are very important for Android users. And for them, having the most efficient and latest hardware is critical for a functional smartphone:

Androids hardware specs have been years ahead of iPhones. It's really about time apple catches up. LTE, larger screens, NFC, multiple cores, the list goes on and on. Granted, when apple finally gets these it will be "revolutionary" Some people prefer to follow the herd, but that's not me. If I'm going to pay for a premium device it better be cutting edge software and hardware and not repackaged crap with a large marketing budget to make up for it (Rxpert83, August 2012, Phandroid).

Hardware is like a tool box or a car. It will do well empty, but what you put in it is the important part. A Ferrari is nice to look at, but is rendered useless without a driver. A nice shiny tool box is great, but is pretty worthless without a standard set of tools inside it (OfTheDamned, September 2012, Phandroid).

The hardware dialogue is usually a compare-and-contrast discussion on Android phones having superior hardware with respect to iPhones. It is also frequently mentioned that Samsung, the biggest Android OEM, is also a supplier for Apple and that they would have the original and best hardware and drive the innovation in this area anyways. Paying for the highest technology available is also related to the value-for-money criteria Androiders have, which will be discussed in the next section. Yet in terms of hardware, Apple fans do not stay short of their own criticisms. They believe the actual performance means much more than specs. Many speed test videos are uploaded to YouTube showing that the iOS running on Apple hardware is slightly faster than Android, causing Apple fans to call the rival phones "lagroid." They, in a way, prove their superiority in this argument as well. One more significant point of discussion related to phone hardware is the possibility of upgrading the phone memories. As iPhones come with a built-in memory card that cannot be enhanced later on, consumers who want to be flexible related to their

hardware end up buying Android phones, which can be upgraded. Apple is also criticized in this area, as the prices of devices with higher memories are even more extravagant for the Android norms.

The second efficiency topic is naturally software. Android users support the idea of open-source software as discussed before. Another reason that they despise iOS is due to its dependence on the iTunes system for all kinds of operations related to applications and usage of various folder types; many basic functions are not attainable on iOS. For instance, while Ece and Andaç were discussing the software issue about their rival phones, Andaç admitted that he was envious of Ece's Samsung Galaxy Note II, as she could download anything to her phone and open or extract any type of file without being hindered by a central software such as iTunes. Andaç, on the other hand, had to extract zip files or convert certain unsupported files on another platform and upload to his iPhone through iTunes, which he really found inefficient. The folder system is another criterion related to the software running on the devices. While iOS has the music and photo files hidden, the Android folder system works exactly like the folder systems in computers. This makes it very difficult to reach the actual source of the music on iTunes or the photo folders on iOS. Android users especially look for simplicity and efficiency in these terms so they can customize the tree of files in their folders.

The final issue related to efficiency is charging the mobile devices. Being the most frequently mentioned criticism for iPhones, the owners of the Apple phone admit defeat in this area and most of them complain on forums as well. Of course, Android users never miss their chance for making fun of the short battery life of iPhones. Samsung even created an ad for the plugged users of Apple sitting on the floors in airports fighting for electrical plugs to charge their iPhones. The ad went

viral very quickly through the efforts of Android fans to mock iPhone users as efficiency in energy consumption is a criterion that Android users seek and choose their phones on. Another detail is that batteries of Android phones can be replaced with new ones, which is not an option in iPhones. As users cannot change anything related to the hardware of their iPhones, they are stuck with the initial battery they buy the phone with. Similar to the memory issue, this is frequently criticized by Androiders and is used as a mocking reason against Apple fans.

Efficiency of devices are scrutinized by Androiders based on the performance-price ratio as well, hence the next discussion on economy as a norm for the Android camp.

Economy

The final norm of the Android community captured is getting value for their money, which is denoted as "economy" in this study. Android devices are manufactured by many OEMs and there are many gadgets for all price ranges. Android users like this flexibility in choosing an Android phone that matches their budget, but the main concern is not spending money for mobile phones; the concern is whether the phone performance is equivalent to the price paid. It is critical to note that most of the popular Android devices are as expensive as the iPhone, and Android users find it unfair that they are treated by the Apple fans as inferior buyers that cannot afford premium products. A lot of them actually choose their products based on price, but it is also true that Androiders do not like to pay for the logo or for the marketing behind a brand; they want to pay for the actual technology. Most of them do not consider iPhone as a device that deserves their money:

I can buy 20 32gb iPhones right now if i wanted to with the surplus money i have, but i'm not going to and never will because i think they're crap imo. And that's the thing I don't like about some iPhone users. Some of them think you use Android because you can't afford an iPhone which is so far from the truth. I just don't like being ripped off with their over hyped products (Omar Days, August 2012, Phandroid).

This phone costs over \$500 and it is basically on par with android phones released a year ago. What a joke (candroid11, September 2012, Phandroid).

This is also one of the main features anti-Apple consumers despise about the fruit: they believe that most Apple fans buy it as a status symbol even if they do not have the financial means to do so. For instance, Mustafa is furious about people who buy an iPhone to reflect a better financial status than they actually have. He believes a cattle herder does not have to have an iPhone, but such a person he is actually acquainted with has saved up money to own an iPhone no matter what. Even some of the iPhone owners interviewed agree that Apple is cruel with its pricing and that its pricing is targeting affluent customers, leaving some of the Apple enthusiasts and music lovers that have been bound to Apple starting with their iPods as the victims of this pricing strategy.

The second issue is that iPhone users are stuck with the Apple Store and that they need to pay for the applications they download to their devices. Google Play Store, on the other hand, provides many free applications and Androiders prefer not to pay extra money for the applications. The discussions show that a lot of technology enthusiasts have both platforms with Android as their phones and Apple as their iPads to benefit from both systems. In general opinion, higher quality applications are produced on the iOS software. The first versions of applications are usually coded for iOS before they are converted into Android applications. Thread discussions show that this is mainly due to the fact that Apple users are much more

willing to pay for extra applications than Android users do. Still, Androiders believe that it is redundant to pay extra for applications and mock iOS users for spending money even after they have already been ripped off buying the iPhone itself.

Similar to the great discrepancies in personality traits, the two communities are completely opposite in their buying norms as well. While one side is enchanted with practicality, beauty, and safety, the other one is keen on making their decisions considering customizability, efficiency, and economy. The study also reveals that the actual behavior and profiles are quite distinguished among various types of community members. The next section delineates these behavioral differences in the conflicting realm of the two competing communities.

Personality - Communal Identities and Mainstream Discussion

With different personality traits and norms, Apple and Android communities naturally portray different attitudes and therefore reveal different identities. There appear five distinct identities within the IBCC realm of Apple and Android (see Figure 6). *Tech Lovers* are involved in inter-communal dialogue mainly for their enthusiasm in mobile technology without necessarily a brand of choice. Yet there are also tech lovers in both communities that base their brand choice on technological aspects rather than brand image and perception. *Apple* and *Android Lovers* are specifically concentrated on their affection for the brands and they have a clear preference for one or the other based on their personality traits and consumption norms. The *Apple Haters*, on the other hand, have a very strong negative attitude towards the Apple brand and their main reason for choosing Android is to avoid or oppose Apple. They can be defined as anti-consumers of Apple rather than admirers

of Android. Lastly, *Trend Lovers* are a group that specifically buy Apple products because they are trendy, and for this group, it is important to be a part of the hip mainstream club. It is interesting to notice that the Apple community is purely based on positive feelings toward the concept of Apple as a brand or as a status image, while the Android community's attitude is partially defined based on its negative attitude, even hatred, toward the Apple brand. It also shows that brand soldiers are enactors of their love and hate for brands or causes that are associated with these brands.

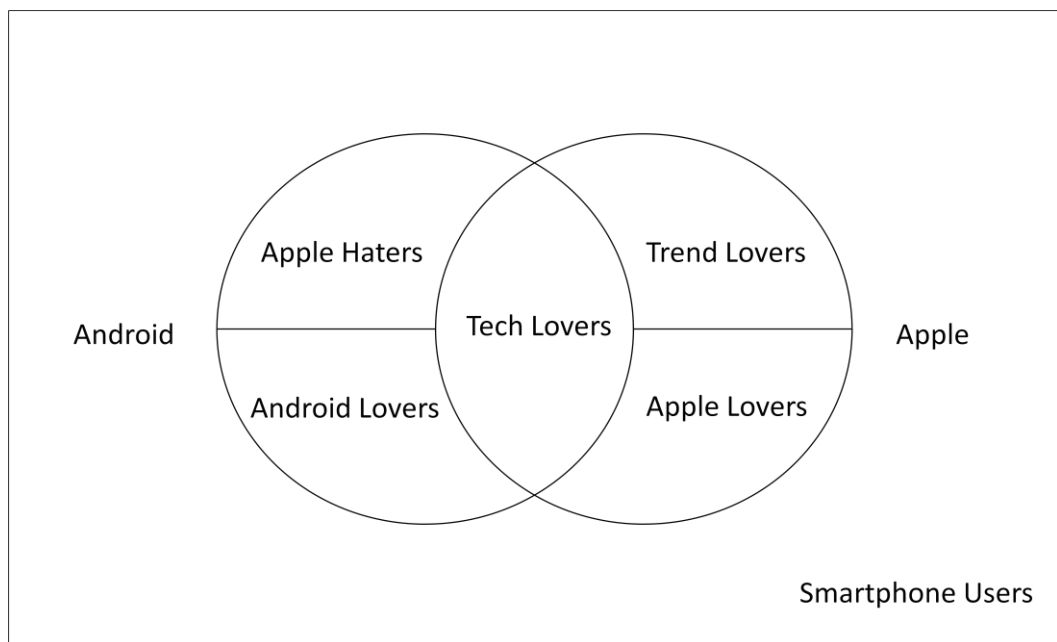


Figure 6. Communal identities in Apple-Android IBCC

The differences between these attitudes and the resulting IBCC actually hint at a deeper meaning than just two brand communities opposing each other. It is also a good example of how the wrestle and relationship between a mainstream and a non-mainstream brand started and evolved. A mainstream brand is what is known and accepted by the majority, and what has become popular in the mass consumer culture mostly through the influence of mass media. The commencement of the

conflict both at the corporate and communal levels placed Apple as the mainstream brand and Android as the unconventional and marginal newcomer to the market, as Apple was already the innovative leader in the field of smartphones. The corporate strategies and communal characteristics around these two brands were mostly formed based on these initial market positions of Apple and Android. Against the "winning" status of Apple, the Google, Samsung, and the Android community fought keenly as a syndicate of corporations and volunteering community members to alter the market order. Accordingly, Apple was perceived as the mainstream, the popular, the prestigious, the protagonist, the conventional, the conformist by the Android camp and for most of the Apple camp, whereas Android represented the marginal, the antagonist, the nemesis, the eccentric, and the avant-garde in the eyes of its beholders and its opposers. Many Androiders actually hate Apple because of its perception as a popular prestige brand targeting the mainstream. Semih explains this fact by pointing to an ironic twist in the definition of the mainstream and the marginal in this context:

The hipsters are using Apple products. They are the ones that are trying to stay out of the mainstream and build a marginal trend themselves. Ironically, the new stream they think they create has already become the mainstream itself. Some of them are really bizarre! You know those weird iPhone covers that look like old analogue phones. You put your little iPhone in those covers and then you need a huge bag to carry it. What kind of self-consciousness is that?! I understand that we are not living in archaic times and people have self-expression and actualization concerns other than their primary motives in life. But it is still weird that people treat themselves like billboards. I would not suffer carrying a 5 pound phone just to look interesting! This is the popular culture, and you can never find beauty or authenticity in popular culture (Semih, in-depth interview).

Semih identifies popular culture as irrational, fake, and even evil at some points, and he includes iPhones within the symbols of mainstream and popular culture.

According to Semih, Apple users obviously distinguish themselves as the unconventional consumer group, when they are actually perceived as the mainstream

crowd by their opponents. Osman, also reacts to the fact that iPhone is the prestige brand that people use to show off their status in society:

A lot of people buy iPhones because they are prestigious. I never buy anything to show off - especially things with huge logos or brand names on it! Why would I pay to advertise for a company? They should pay me to advertise them. Same with mobile phones. I do not pay for the brand, I pay for the technological benefits it provides me. I don't drive a Mercedes for example. I find it snobbish. Similarly, a lot of people buy Jeep Cherokees and those SUVs never even get dusty, let alone being used for off-road purposes. People buy it because it is prestigious. Same with the iPhone. I find most iPhone users ostentatious. I hate the fact that people buy brands for impression management. Android people are, on the other hand, down-to-earth regular folks like me (Osman, in-depth interview).

Unconventional buyers specifically try to avoid mainstream brands to sever such associations with their personal brand. They also despise others who are followers of the trendy mainstream and who judge the ones who cannot adapt to being fashionable or popular:

My Apple fan friend Andaç always comments on people's appearances and whether they look hip or not. I don't pay attention to what people wear and I don't care, don't understand why the hell he cares anyway. 'Others' are out of my context and I don't give a damn about what they think (Ece A., in-depth interview).

Ece A. keeps indicating and condescending her friend Andaç's fixation with impression management in general, which is common with what frustrates Semih and Osman about those who want to be trend-setters by creating popular or prestigious self-images. Derya, who is a convert from Android to Apple, confirms that the detestation of Android users towards iPhone is mainly due to its popularity. However, as an antithesis to how Android users validate their perspective, Derya believes that iPhone is righteous to be popular and that Androiders' prejudice against the idea of mainstream prevents them from actually experiencing and appreciating the device.

The Apple and Android IBCC is, therefore, a reflection of the negotiation between being mainstream or non-mainstream. Even though Android has critically surpassed the market share of Apple, and is becoming the cool product among younger generations, Apple still seems to maintain its upper hand in terms of brand perception. The perceptions that belong to the initial stages of this IBCC got attached to the communal personalities and souls of the brand communities so profoundly that even though the market structure changed with Android gaining most of the market share, initial communal perceptions of Apple and Android mostly stayed intact even for today. Consequently, the personality traits that got revealed based on the conversations between 2009 and 2014 not only represent Apple and Android communities specifically, they also portray the personas of mainstream and non-mainstream brand followers in general. The sociability, superiority, and loyalty personalities of Apple may be found in many other global and trendy love brands. Similarly, the individuality, hostility, and curiosity traits can be sought in all brands that challenge the mainstream and bring eccentricity to the market competition. It is possible to replace the brand names with other product categories in this context and still find congruent descriptions. A well-studied example could be Starbucks as the mainstream brand in coffee consumption and the coffee connoisseurs as the opposing anti-brand community to replace the Apple and Android names (see Figure 7). Considering the Starbucks-lovers community, instead of Apple, and the coffee connoisseurship community that believes in personalized coffee blends (Kozinets, 2002b) or local coffee houses (Thompson and Arsel, 2004), it is possible to come across the same personality traits in these two communities, too. Through its glocalised marketing strategy, Starbucks has transformed the "yuppie status symbol" (p. 631) into a commodity as a part of our daily lives (Thompson and Arsel, 2004).

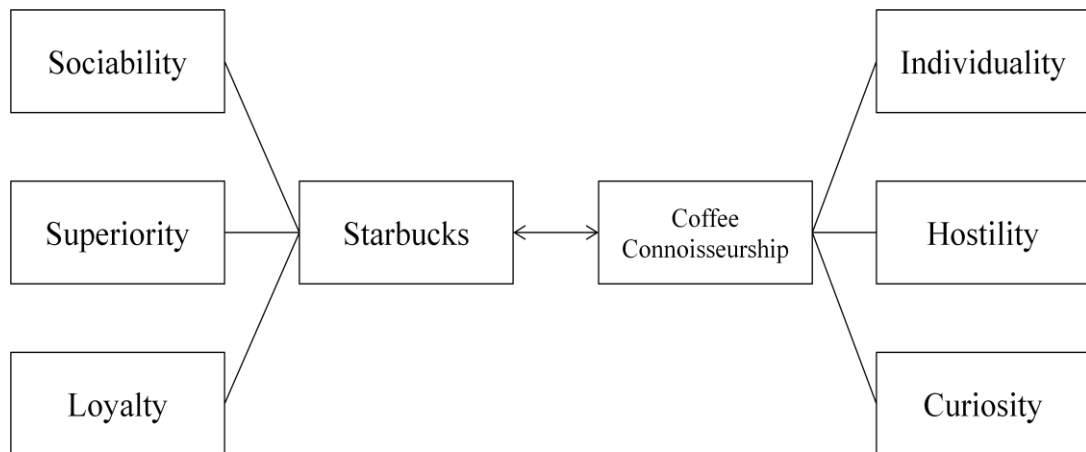


Figure 7. Mainstream vs. non-mainstream example

Thompson and Arsel (2004) define the global dominion of Starbucks over coffee culture through the introduction of a *hegemonic brandscape* concept, which is very similar to how Apple manages its lifestyle image:

A hegemonic brandscape is a cultural system of servicescapes that are linked together and structured by discursive, symbolic, and competitive relationships to a dominant (market-driving) experiential brand. The hegemonic brandscape not only structures an experience economy market but also shapes consumer lifestyles and identities by functioning as a cultural model that consumers act, think, and feel through (p. 632).

Within this hegemonic brandscape context, the Starbucks experience is an act of social consumption where people meet at Starbucks cafés to socialize and enjoy the coffee experience in the Starbucks store together, which would be a hint at the sociability of the Starbucks community. In addition, the public display of Starbucks paper cups with busy people carrying them around during the day as part of their extended selves (Belk, 1988) and their personal impressions (Thompson and Arsel, 2004) hints at display of superiority in making the well-known Starbucks one's own choice. Finally, the loyalty towards Starbucks flavors by mainstream consumers and the opposing curious search of coffee connoisseurs for the perfect blend and

preparation processes (Kozinets, 2002b) are also present in the coffee context as well. This commoditized and mass consumption of a product that is actually a unique and individualistic experience for the coffee connoisseurs (Kozinets, 2002b), or café flaneurs (Thompson and Arsel, 2004), causes frustration and hostility towards Starbucks in the coffee community (Kozinets, 2002b), emerging as oppositional loyalty to local shops (Thompson and Arsel, 2004) and as an anti-Starbucks movement (Luedicke and Giesler, 2008). Starbucks is criticized for lowering the colorful variety in coffee consumption into a homogeneous and banal menu around the world as well as deteriorating the business opportunities of the local coffee houses with long histories (Thompson and Arsel, 2004). An in-depth analysis to capture communal personality findings in the coffee context would surely add to the mainstream vs. non-mainstream discussion at hand.

The mainstream vs. non-mainstream discussion includes the opposition of brand and anti-brand communities as well. Holt (2002, p. 70) defines consumer activism as "global anti-branding movements," which are the global consortiums of consumers that converge against corporations and their actions. Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2010) regard the anti-brand communities as a critical part of the New Social Movement, which represents individualized and social transformations that involve advocacy for causes and group identity where "consumers can create their own consumption meanings, practices, roles, and identities" (p. 329). Anti-brand communities have a higher cause they believe in that leads them to become boycotters of brands. In the case of the Apple and Android conflict, the mainstream and non-mainstream argument is also backed up with the open-source versus closed systems and institutionalized ownership of technology. The anti-Apple opposition takes refuge in the brand of Android along with Android brand lovers who believe in

open-source principles. Other examples of the anti-brand community based conflict where hostility, individuality, and curiosity are displayed in the anti-groups may be listed as anti-Coke communities, where nationality and religiosity take role in their formation of anti-consumption (Varman and Belk, 2004; Yazicioglu and Borak, 2012); anti-Wal-Mart and anti-McDonald's confederations where counterfactual thinking, discursive storytelling, and non-compulsory observation are learned (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan 2006); and anti-Nike and anti-GE communities where the anti-brand community members despise the mainstream users as much as the mainstream brand itself due to their unawareness and indirect support to the strength of mainstream formation (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004).

A third milieu, where mainstream vs. non-mainstream personality traits could be considered for diligence is the mainstream vs. stigmatized communities. Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) study such a concept through their ethnography of Fatshionistas, who are style lovers representing the over-sized consumer group. Fatshionistas demand a better portfolio from the mainstream fashion companies to have more and better choices of consumption. In order to achieve their goal of being included in the mainstream consumption sphere, the stigmatized community follows three stages of encounters: they form a collective consumer identity coalesce to voice their unmet needs through digital platforms, they denote institutional entrepreneurs that will inspire them to take action, and they find support in other institutional causes to defend their own cause. Scaraboto and Fischer (2013) also define four types of profiles in the mainstream meaning making and negotiations related to the conventional culture: Stigmatized Seekers, where the fatshionistas belong, Comfortable Collaborators, who follow the mainstream offerings as they find the norms satisfactory and collaborate with the marketers for marginal changes;

Mainstream Malcontents who are not happy with the mainstream consumption due to their specific needs such as the music downloaders who want to alter consumption of music and intellectual property rights in the music industry as discussed in Giesler (2008), and Resistant Rebels who aggressively act on change to redefine market meanings. The Android brand community in this sense represents a mixture of Mainstream Malcontents and Resistant Rebels that goes against the offerings of mainstream to create an open-source technology market with companies that abide by the individual aspirations of their consumers. The communal personality traits would also fit to the mainstream vs. stigmatized consumption groups in that sense.

A final and interesting example where mainstream vs. non-mainstream personalities can be tested is the retrography of the PC vs. Mac story when Apple was actually the unconventional brand itself. In the 1980s and 1990s, Apple, with the "Think Different" slogan, was positioning itself against the mainstream usage of PCs that were IBM-compatible - whose slogan was "Think" - with the Microsoft software running on them. During that time, Apple was in the shoes of Android portraying a very different personality than what we discuss today. It was a cult-like marginal brand against the mainstream giants, and its users were more curious to try out new software, hostile against the Microsoft hegemony, and more individualistic in their technological usage (Belk and Tumbat, 2005). Yet with its new mainstream and market leader position, Apple is found to have lost some of its creative and crazy side, as discussed among many technology enthusiasts:

Any system or company that grows, changes. Apple cannot be the same company they were when the iPod or iPhone came out. They have become one of the biggest companies in the world-that changes everything. When you're that big, you have to grow up some, and can't just act like you are the crazy underdog anymore. It also becomes much harder to top yourself with each new release. Any new device will not have the same "wow" factor as the first one (Ictus75, October 2012, Mactrast).

In short, the three personality traits in the Apple and Android communities actually represent the communal identities of the mainstream and the eccentric brands respectively. This is another contribution of this study to the branding literature, and should be considered for other mainstream and marginality discussions in other contexts.

Strategy

The second major aspect that keeps IBCC going, apart from the differences between communal personalities is the variation in the strategies of the rival companies that get reflected in communal interactions. Communities scrutinize the *innovation* strategies and the *ethics* of the companies they endorse or oppose. In addition, they replicate the marketing *communication* strategies of the brands they support, which leads to the discussion and mirroring of the company battle into the inter-brand community interactions. These three areas related to corporate strategy that heighten IBCC will be explained individually.

Strategy - Innovation Strategies Matter

Innovation is a multi-faceted concept in the mobile industry, influenced by many stakeholders. The mobile technology is a product of the operating system creators, Apple and Android-Google in this context as the main players; manufacturers that design and produce the mobile devices, Apple and OEMs that produce Android phones (LG, Sony, Samsung, HTC, etc.); developers that partake in the mobile experience of the consumers through the mobile applications they create; voice and

Internet service providers that influence the pricing of the devices in addition to the monthly data charges; government and regulators that protect the intellectual property rights in the sector; brand communities and consumers, that co-create the brands and the innovation ideas together with their companies; and third-party technology reviewers such as technology news sites, review sites, bloggers that help the dispersion of innovation through their platforms of news sharing and discussion. All these stakeholders have systematic influence in the formation of innovation in the mobile industry, and brand community discussions take into consideration all of these influencers. Figure 8 illustrates the main players that brand community members include in their discussions of their consumption.

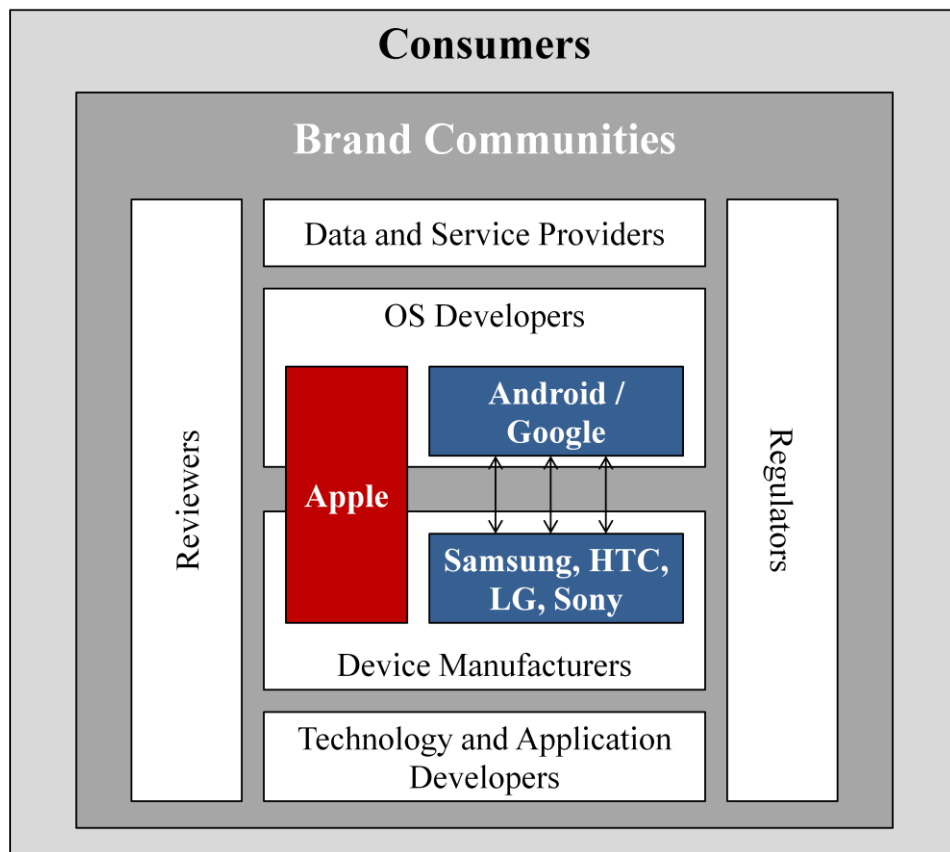


Figure 8. Stakeholders discussed in IBCC rhetoric

Innovation is co-created as a result of the many-to-many interactions in this system, and members of brand communities observe and discuss all aspects of the system. Yet the main discussion is again triggered by comparisons of Apple versus Android and Android OEM coalition. The main conflict that arises in these discussions is on the attempt to define what real innovation is and whether Apple, Android, Samsung and other OEMs are actually adept in delivering new innovation in their new releases with the changes they make in design, software, and hardware. Industry reports confirm that Apple, Google, and Samsung actually share the first three positions in being the most innovative global companies (Boston Consulting Group Most Innovative Companies 2014 Report), respectively. However, in communal conversations some consumers critique the current mobile technology for being boring due to the lack of radical advancement over the past years since the first introduction of touch screen technology. It can be deduced that mobile consumers expect to be surprised, and the disappointment in not being so drives many of the discussions and IBCC.

The first iPhone with the touch screen technology is always mentioned as a ground-breaking development that really facilitated the life of mobile consumers and it is taken by many as a revolution in mobile technology. Also the early adopters of the Android camp were very excited during the first commercial Android OS release, Cupcake, which was welcomed with a lot of excitement, as apparent from the long intra-communal discussions during that period. The discussions on what is revolutionary, what is adequately surprising, and what can be considered real innovation center mostly around the Apple, Android, and Samsung brands. They are the main decision-makers in the industry and the creators of flagship devices. The innovation cycles are usually annual and the innovation "seasons" are based on both

the software and the new devices released by these companies. Apple introduces a new version for its operating system annually, while Android evolved its platform a few times a year until the Ice Cream Sandwich release in October 2011. Since Ice Cream Sandwich, the releases are done more sparsely, almost annually, with a lot of partial updates along the year to the main release. The current systems are iOS 8, released in September 2014 and Android 5.0 Lollipop, released in November 2014. The new iPhone launches are again scheduled annually and are concomitant with the new operating system introductions in September, with actual distribution starting in October. Samsung's new device announcements, on the other hand, take place all through the year, as there are many alternatives differing in budget and functionality. Yet the two flagship devices of Galaxy S and the phablet-size Galaxy Note series marginally precede the new iPhone releases or follow them shortly, which hints at a retaliation-like strategy by Samsung to either capture the new phone buyers right before iPhone releases, or annex those Apple users that are not satisfied or thrilled by the new iPhone by providing an alternative shortly after the iPhone release. This rather loaded calendar of events from August till the end of November boosts discussions as well as the conflict among the two brand communities. The main themes in intra-communal discussions are the frustration of Apple fans not being able to get a new iPhone due to the piled up pre-orders and huge lines in the stores, and the impatience of Androiders waiting for the roll-out of the new version of their OS, which takes a different time period for all OEMs and data providers. There are playful and envious conversations among those who already have their new toys and those who do not.

This harsh software and hardware innovation competition also gets reflected in inter-communal rhetoric in three types of arguments: The Android fans plead

"Apple is not a real innovator," and Apple companions argue "Android (especially Samsung) is full of gimmicks running on copycat phones," while a part of each group makes up a rather skeptical crowd believing that "the phone revolution is over." The main stance of most Android users is that Apple is not actually innovating anything that Android has not already provided beforehand:

Apple's new iPhone 5 slogan: the biggest thing to happen to the iPhone since the iPhone. Uhh. Alright then. Seriously. If this doesn't make it clear that Apple is made entirely of hypes, I don't know what will. OMG, Facebook integration! Really? You can share pictures right on Facebook from your iPhone now? That is about 3 years behind time. OMG panorama. Oh come on. Give me a break. OMG turn by turn direction! About 2 years behind the times. Oh and it's got a taller screen. Oooh (yfan, September 2012, Phandroid).

According to the Apple foes, Apple keeps introducing technology that already exists in Android phones as revolutionary innovation via illusory marketing techniques, for which Apple fanboys fall for easily. This frustrates Androiders and causes them to insult Apple fans for their blindfolded devotion. Some of the Android user interviewees, Semih, Ezgi, Ece A., and Doruk, also join in these complaints about iPhones lacking actual innovative features. Many of the online dialogues hint at the fact that conversions from Apple to Android happen when users start to perceive inadequate innovative progress in between iPhone versions. Some of the Apple users themselves are disappointed by the lack of adequate innovativeness from Apple as well:

Apple, pull your finger out. It's embarrassing to not have some of the features this new S4 has. I'm a very loyal Apple devotee, but don't take my type for granted (davester, March 2013, MacRumors).

There are plusses and minuses of iOS 6 and of Jelly Bean 4.2.2, but there is no clear winner now - unlike a year or two ago. Android has made great strides, and iOS has... not. I eagerly await iOS 7 and hope that Ive has his way with it, because otherwise Apple will not be in a good spot (jsw, March 2013, MacRumors).

Similarly, one of the interviewers, Mehmet, mentions that when he realized the new iPhone 5 was not all that different from his iPhone 4, he decided to try out an Android phone in order to quench his desire to play with something new.

Apple fans question the practicality and usability of novelties that Android phones, and especially those of Samsung, offer to consumers. They believe Samsung is trying to gain attention through introducing features which for many are only useless gimmicks. No matter what, Samsung is the copycat phone producer which seems to counterfeit all its technology from Apple, and there cannot be any legitimate argument to convince Apple fans that Samsung is a pioneer in innovative technology:

Anyone posting cr@p about Samsung is really, well, a child! This is not football. This isn't Chelsea's better than Arsenal! Or my dad's bigger than your dad. Facts - Apple is the world's most valuable tech company. Purely because of iTunes and their devices. Samsung are world leaders in tech, particularly lcd / led screens. They are not innovators. They have copied almost everything their phones have, from Apple or HTC (A_Dose_Of_Reality, March 2013, TechRadar).

Mustafa, the only Windows phone user among the interviewees, also mentions that Samsung is producing all types of mobile phones with various quality levels to guarantee satisfying all segments with at least a device or two. Apart from being a copy-cat producer, the company is blamed for not having a specific posture for a designated set of segments and trying to saturate all possibilities in the market.

A third group is reluctant about which brand is superior or not, they are just pessimistic that the mobile evolution has reached its peak and that there will not be startling technological improvements from this point onwards. Some even find this naive expectation as superfluous:

I think overall people expect too much. There are a lot of new features both tied to new/better hardware. Some are gimmicky and some might only get used here and there. But overall - it's a SOLID phone. It's got good specs and assuming it performs well with those specs - it will be a good choice. That and the HTC One. And the 5S will no doubt be a great choice as well. I really don't know what people expect anymore to WOW them. Are some just "spoiled" in their thinking and expect too much (samcraig, March 2013, MacRumors).

There's nowhere really left to go with phones. The revolution is over. We're at the "supply chain management" stage of the game until they are superseded by an entirely different form factor (damir00, March 2013, MacRumors).

As much as Android is a great alternative, it's never enticed me as something that is awe-inspiring or life changing -- it does some things better than iOS, some things worse, but doesn't revolutionize. I'm waiting and hoping some company (Apple, Microsoft, HTC, Google, Samsung) will do that, but maybe they won't and damir00 had it right (incoherent1, March 2013, MacRumors).

The innovation in the mobile industry is immensely influenced by the opinions of the pro and con camps of consumers. Every consumer that is willing to publicly share their reviews about new releases and technological changes, or in a way have the tension to be a part of the rhetoric, becomes an opinion generator. Consequently, the whole mass of communication around the topic becomes a co-created opinion leadership for the opinion seeker consumers and the companies. Both Apple and Android take the word-of-mouth generated about themselves seriously. They are both trying to please and steal the disciples of the other camp, and this has become particularly apparent as the two systems and the devices that support these systems started to look and feel more like each other. The iPhone 6 and 6 Plus are especially very close to most other Android phones in their ergonomics today. And the Android flat design is getting closer to the iOS look and experience in each version. This raises the question whether decaying discrepancies would actually loosen the fidelity of the community members as they will slowly lose their ability to

distinguish themselves from one another? Could this convergence of the brands leading to a decrease in IBCC actually diminish the hype in mobile sales? The iPhone 6 is sold-out everywhere during its first weeks in the market, but was this move not an admitted defeat about the size argument on Apple's front - that Android sizes were actually more apposite? Would Steve Jobs ever agree to produce an image that becomes the copycat itself in the eyes of the enemy? Could this maneuver hurt Apple's posture in the future by diluting its pioneer image for the Apple fans? These are all questions that need to be analyzed for the innovative strategies of the firms in all kinds of markets to stay exciting and maintain long term success.

While legitimate innovation is a closely scrutinized issue in feeding IBCC, so is the communication strategy of the companies playing in the field. The reflections of corporate communication patterns on IBCC are discussed next.

Strategy - Communication is Mirrored

Firm communication strategies, especially advertisements, are critical for brand community members and brand soldiers, as company-driven messages are critical in defining the brand and community members like to discuss and interpret these messages from their own perspective (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Not only do they interpret the producers' communication, but they also co-create a noteworthy amount and disseminate it through social media channels. Muñiz and Schau (2005) define this self-appointed promotion driven by brand communities as vigilante marketing, which is unpaid and assumed as a mission by brand community members for the sake of the brand. In their inter-communal rhetoric and co-creation activities, community members and especially brand soldiers mirror corporate communication

strategy styles in their personal and communal reflections as well. The communication strategies of Apple and Android, which get reflected in the communal rhetorical strategies of their consumers as well, are very different from each other.

Apple's Communication Strategy: Centralized, Ignorant, yet Caring

As mentioned earlier, Apple manages its products, its image, its application developers, and its community with a very centralized approach. The products cannot be altered, the applications have to abide by very strict standards, the management takes a critical role in the marketing events themselves, and the community is congregated around the Apple stores, company website, and an integrated ecosystem of products. In short, Apple has control over every aspect of its brand gestalt. The communication strategy is also very self-centered in essence, where the superiority of the brand is fundamental in all messages. The keynote events and the advertisements are focused on the supremacy of Apple products and how the company has been able to understand the actual needs of its consumers and to surpass expectations. Andaç, the loyal Apple user he is, gets very excited that a company can attract such an attention during new releases, and is proud to be associated with such an influential player. On the contrary, Ezgi, who despises Apple for its marketing communications, states that whenever she comes across Apple keynote events during product launches, she hates the way Apple presents itself as a life changer, and she finds herself questioning what good their new product does to the world anyway. Most Android users find the conceited tone of Apple irritating and they find ways to ridicule its vanity, even through playing games among themselves:

I used to have friends that would watch Apple announcements like a drinking game. You had to take a shot every time someone said 'innovative' or mentioned anything 'magical'. (OfTheDamned, September 2012, Phandroid).

In its corporate communication, Apple has not mentioned the competition regarding its mobile devices until this year. This has been a clear sign of not recognizing other rivals as competitors in the field of consumer technology. This is, of course, very different from the historical communication tactics the company had used: the 1984 ad and the Mac vs PC ads were directly targeted at the competitors, but during that period Apple was not the market leader. In addition to the theme of supremacy, another main theme in Apple's communication strategy is that the company "talks" to its consumers. We see direct call out to the consumers in all keynote events, the words "we," "our consumers," and "you" are the most common words one can hear. It can be deduced that the company sees itself and its consumers as a team that shares the same vision. The communication strategy of Apple gets directly reflected by its consumers. Apple users and fans spread the word that Apple is the only suitable option in the market, and their ignorance of the competition is actually a mimic of what Apple has been doing along the way, ignoring that Android could actually be a major competitor. The superiority messages are repeated by Apple fans just like they are conveyed by the company; they are mesmerized by their Apple products. Similarly, the threads show a lot of examples where Apple consumers "talk back" to Apple in their comments and messages. They directly call out to the Apple company in their comments with the confidence and knowledge that they will be heard out. The conversation between the Apple company and its consumers is very strong and exchanged through various online and offline environments, including keynote events, Apple stores, and Apple brand community sites.

An interesting phenomenon is recently witnessed through the new generation of mobile devices introduced in 2014. The competition is getting fiercer, with the Android numbers skyrocketing and the profitability of Samsung getting close to the fruit, and there is a subtle shift in the communication strategies of both the company and the consumer community. There is still the strong message of supremacy in Apple advertisements, but their awareness and recognition of the competition getting stronger has leaked into their marketing communication as well. For instance, on the company webpage, this note is quite striking, as Apple never before associated itself with Android (see Figure 9, downloaded from www.apple.com/iphone on November 22, 2014):

Nothing should hold you back from getting the phone you want. We've made it easy to change from your Android phone to your new iPhone. You can visit an Apple Retail Store where a Specialist can help you, or you can do it yourself (Apple/iPhone webpage, September 2014).



Figure 9. "Upgrade to iPhone" ad

The ad again emphasizes the dominance of Apple with the word "upgrade to," and clearly displays its intention to convert some of the Android users into its own realm. The customer service has been trained as "specialists" to do the conversion, and it is suggested that by preferring iPhone, they will belong to a higher club, and with the bigger size options, Android users can now find choices for themselves under the

Apple roof as well. Parallel to the very cool yet challenging tone of Apple towards the competition without direct attacks, the community has also started to take Android fans more into consideration and they talk back at them more during communal discussions rather than mainly ignoring their criticism against Apple. Apple community members also feel the urge to defend their brand and keep explaining why iPhones are more practical and elegant choices for all, so the mirroring effect of Apple's shift in its marketing messages is present in the community's actions as well.

Android's Communication Strategy: Fragmented, Aggressive, and Teasing

Unlike Apple, the presence and the communication strategies on the Android side is quite complicated, with the Android brand ownership dispersed to many players in the market. A lot of interviewees got confused during the conversations whether to use Google, Samsung, or Android as the main brand name, but Andaç and Mustafa specifically mentioned that they are not Android users because they associate the Android brand with Samsung and not Google, which they actually love as a brand. However, they do not relate to Samsung as a brand they want to associate with themselves as part of their own self-image. Unlike the centralized presence strategy of Apple, the identity commotion on Android camp becomes a hindrance to the strength of its communication:

Android phones are cheaper, sometimes have better hardware than the latest iPhone, and there's a huge variety to choose from. I think this confuses people too because every manufacturer has their own brand of android, and no two android phones are alike. Why investigate which device looks and works the best for me when I can just grab an iPhone? (jova33, August 2012, Phandroid)

In terms of marketing communications, the Apple-Samsung war is more eminent than the general Apple and Android discussion, as Samsung invests a lot in the advertising of its mobile devices and the patent war between Apple and Samsung has received vast publicity. A very evident aspect of Samsung marketing is its direct attacking and mocking of Apple in its own advertisements. Samsung has created many ads that specifically target the weak points of Apple. In one ad, people who are lined up in front of Apple stores, excited for new features, get confused when they see that Samsung users that pass by have already been utilizing these features for sometime without the need to queue up. Both the late innovation and the lines to enter the stores during release dates are ridiculed. In another ad, Samsung mocks Apple phones for being used by older people and that the young generations find the Samsung devices much cooler. A third one takes place at an airport where Apple users are waiting for electrical plugs to free up for their charging units due to the easily drained batteries of iPhones. They are denoted as the "Wall Huggers" in the ad. This strategy again gets reflected in how Android users deal with their Apple user opponents. The hostility personality appears as a mimic of the attacking strategy of Samsung against Apple, and Android users love to tease iPhone admirers. A huge collection of humorous art and videos have been co-created by Android brand community members, be it consumers themselves or third party businesses that are associated with Android. They act as volunteer brand agencies along with the mother ship companies in order to back up their competitive strategy. One of the most frequent messages is that iPhone buyers are paying a lot of money for very bad technology and a lot of digital art is co-created to tease the appalling buying habits of iPhone users.

Another popular tactic is to ridicule the new releases of iPhone by focusing on the weaknesses that get revealed after the first round of actual user experience. Before the launch of iPhone 5 series, Samsung had started the campaign with the motto: "The next big thing is already here." This was well embraced by Samsung users and utilized as an attack slogan during the communal discussions about what was expected for the new generation of iPhones. For the iPhone 6 and 6 Plus releases, the main message was that Apple was able to catch up with much older versions of Android phones; and besides, its aluminum case that was reported as getting bent by many buyers was picked on very frequently. Androiders were very quick to create art on the stale technology introduced as innovation in addition to the bend test videos that got viral instantly. Anonymous user-created ads focus on comparing the newest technology of iPhones to earlier Android devices showing the fact that Apple products are at least a generation behind the novelties in Android. While this sarcasm in all company ads and in co-created art may lead some iPhone users to reconsider, the hostility drives away many others as well:

As long as Android devices keep telling me how much better they are than iPhones, I'll stick with iPhones. Once Android (or whoever for that matter) start saying how much DIFFERENT they are than an iPhone, I might get more interested (Mac001, March 2013, MacRumors).

Yet it is also important to note that Android users are not only cruel in their judgment of Apple marketing, but also brutal in their evaluation of Android brands when they fail to deliver the expected as well. The Galaxy S 4 keynote performance, which was mostly described as an embarrassing circus show by Samsung, was also harshly criticized by both camps, even more so by Android users.

In conclusion, marketing communication strategies are scrutinized and used as sources of rhetoric during inter-communal interactions by community members. In

addition, brand communities and especially soldiers have the tendency to mirror these communication strategies in their rhetorical engagement in the brand war. The next sub-section discusses how consumers also watch over the ethical approaches of the companies and how these approaches also take part in elevating IBCC.

Strategy - Ethics: Consumers Are Watching You

The third strategy topic that gets to feed the inter-brand community dialogues is the ethics issues related to the companies that manage the brands. A lot of brand community members are careful about whether companies in this battle follow ethical standards, be it the brand they rally for or the brand they fight against. The general tendency is that the opposed brands are usually critiqued more frequently, which increases the feelings of frustration and IBCC. There appears to be two main issues in the ethics discussions within and between the two communities: whether the companies are ethical in managing (1) the consumers and (2) the competition.

Excessive Demand Creation is Questioned

The discussions related to managing the consumers is mainly concerned with the ethics of the demand creation process and the pricing of the technology purchased. The demand creation process is questioned for all the players in the market as the mobile technologies get updated very frequently and companies pump their marketing activities during launch events to goad consumers that they need the latest versions of the devices offered and encourage them to upgrade:

I love Apple, but I find their new release strategies to sell more units compelling. For instance, you could not record videos in 3G and they

marketed 3GS based on its ability to capture videos. I believe they retain some of the novelties to be released in the next version so that they can create further demand. Then they expect consumers to adapt themselves to be up-to-date with their technology. This is not ethical from consumers' point of view, but it is very rational for them since their aim is profit maximization (Ece U., in-depth interview).

Samsung releases new phones in both spring and fall. They try to consume your resources and force you to buy their new phones in my opinion. I am repelled by this kind of marketing (Melinda, in-depth interview).

These companies have turned even the pure technology lovers into latest trend enthusiasts through marketing. This should not be the case! This is wrong in forming the habits of the new generations and how their souls are manipulated (Ece A., in-depth interview).

Other than releasing new devices, the operating softwares are also updated frequently that leave older devices people own futile and compel consumers to buy new phones:

Their claim was that this was Apple's way of forcing people to upgrade without looking like it. Tell people the newest OS will run on their device.... but then don't include all the features and make it laggy.... and soon they will upgrade to the newest device. Tim K, September 2012, Phandroid).

Even the most devoted fans find this strategy unethical as it creates a social loss for the society while it creates a surplus for the companies. Many forum authors and interviewees find it especially evil that these global giants mangle with the desires, self-image standards, and identities of consumers through subliminal messages; and the corporate prosperity created through these manipulations is selfish and does not get reimbursed back to adequate research and development to actually benefit consumers with real innovation. Based on this notion, the pricing of premium products in the market, especially iPhones, is exceedingly disparaged as well. The audacity to charge such high prices for marginally improved technologies infuriate a lot of buyers and build an even more dishonorable image of the corporations:

I refuse to continue giving apple my hard earned money if this is the way they're going to treat users. Maybe others could care less but I'm not one of them. Apple owners are being taken advantage of & people need to complain, Loudly.!! Plus, isn't anyone sick of how the phone hasn't really changed in 2 yrs. (Lancelot9201, May 2013, TechRadar)

People need to punish Apple by not buying their products in order to decrease their prices. This is what I expect from a proper consumer community, because the cost of production does not verify the prices charged. If I can buy a phone that can do the same things as an iPhone, for less than half its price, this is inexplicable (Semih, in-depth interview).

Most Android users not only question the price of Apple products, but also the fact that there is additional costs to buying applications of any kind while they are mostly free on the open-source platform of Android.

A Fair Fight is a Must

The second main ethics issue discussed is how companies place themselves in the competitive environment and the two repetitive topics regarding this issue are the patent war between Apple and Samsung as well as the attempts of monopolizing the system. The patent war is already described in the Competition section of this manuscript. Apple sued Samsung for stealing its iPhone design and the two companies have been threatening each other back and forth with patent issues. The legal victory was a triumph for many Apple fans. Andaç confesses that when Apple won the legal battle and Samsung had to pay a billion dollars, he was so happy that he felt as if he had won a fight himself. The rumors about how Samsung paid the money in all pennies disturbed him further since the opposition had found a way to ridicule Apple even in its rightful battle for intellectual property. As Samsung is also a vendor for Apple, this legal enmity between the two major competitors became a

thrilling match for the consumers as spectators; while some watched it in a highly critical attitude, some had fun witnessing the evolution of their rivalry:

Oh and Samsung will immediately file suit if Apple announces LTE. Those fireworks make the iPhone5 announcement a truly popcorn moment (ravenous, August 2012, Phandroid).

As a defense, most Apple haters believe that Apple created this patent turmoil since the competition was getting too close and even surpassed Apple in terms of bringing novelty to the marketplace:

If you were to examine closely, why would Apple file this lawsuit now? Just when Samsung has started creating the perfect ingredient for the evolution of smartphones, Apple looked at this as a threat or a signal that they're not #1 anymore. Of course, I can't blame them. Any business would put in their best efforts to if their competitor is starting to take them down, literally (charaze ugmad, September 2012, personal blog page).

Apple has fallen way behind and the only way for them to catch up now that Jobs is out of the game is to play the blame game and point fingers at anyone and everyone whom they believe infringed upon their patents (hairypiglet, September 2012, Phandroid).

The patent war is actually a part of the bigger issue of monopolization debate. Some users express their discomfort that patenting every bit of design and knowledge would do nothing but hinder the progress of science and technology, creating monopolistic companies that own knowledge needed by many but supplied by only one. Apple's actions in the marketplace are taken as monopolistic by those who oppose the brand. However, others believe that if there were no patents, companies would not be motivated to develop top notch technology at all, hence supporting the legal stance of Apple. This issue furthers the IBCC through the ethics discussion related to the monopolization of the market and the power of firms that transcend the right of consumers. During the interview, Doruk mentions that Apple dominating the consumer electronics market disturbs him very much since increase

of corporate control over the industry means less consumer power to determine the choices and the pricing. This is what mainly leads him to open-source software and Android devices. He believes Apple needs to have strong competition not to become a monopoly in the market. This point of view has also been proliferated in the marketplace by Google management in 2010 saying that Apple was the Big Brother of the new era. In 2014, during Apple Pay's introduction, Apple's CEO, Tim Cook, announced that they were not controlling what their users were searching, reading, or buying online; with a statement that "we'll leave that to others," hinting at Google being the actual Big Brother in the market. Yet, both brand communities are involved in the discussion whether the Apple company has become the "Big Brother" of the consumption realm:

I think the fact that there's their dominant position possessing the market has several problems such as becoming a monopoly, deterring information access etc. Well, that's a problematic aspect of them but otherwise it's a successful company (Stefan, in-depth interview).

Apple no longer thinks different. They are all about thinking the same. Think back to the 1984 ad they ran. What was the message? Think Different. How everything was the same. Now look at Apple. Selling one device to the masses. Hundreds of millions of the same device. No choice at all. The screen is the same on every device for the last 5 years. And you know that same thinking will just continue on. Why would anyone want to be part of that? Not me (alexalexzander, September 2012, Phandroid).

Apple is like a republic on its own, it is like a government, a huge company! 5 out of 10 people on the street own Apple products. As if they own half of the world. Apple products are very expensive, and in addition, I feel as if whatever I do is being tracked all the time through my iPhone (Kübra, in-depth interview).

It appears that regardless of the brand preference, many consumers are concerned about the monopolistic establishments in the marketplace. Some base their buying decisions based on it and try to create anti-consumption awareness, while others,

either with awareness or without the slightest concern, detach the issues of ethics and consumption to proceed with whatever fulfills their needs.

Legacy

A critical input in IBCC is the stories related to the brand inherited by the brand communities and used a context in intra and inter communal debates. This construct is named as *Legacy* as it is the sum of what the communities inherit from the company and the brand, named as *brand heritage*; what individual members of communities have experienced with the brand as *personal history*; and what events and changes the community has gone through together, defined as *communal history*. In a way, legacy is the accumulated stories of the brand, the individuals, and the community.

Legacy - Brand Heritage

Brand heritage is formed through a brand's story, history, its durability through time, its organizational values, its status and social class, and the symbols associated with it (Urde, Greyser, and Balmer, 2007; Wiedmann et al., 2011a). Through their journey, brands with heritage get strong associations with certain values, promises, and symbols such as the links of Volvo with safety, Ford Motor with sustainability and consistency, and Disney with ideal communal life (Urde, Greyser, and Balmer, 2007; Wiedmann et al., 2011b). Urde, Greyser, and Balmer (2007) differentiates "brands with heritage" and "heritage brands" in the sense that a heritage brand positions itself based on its history and heritage such as how Patek Philippe watches

base their brand status on history and legacy. Not all brands that have a heritage need to base their marketing strategy on heritage. Time is very critical for the emergence of heritage brands as consumers need to build bonds with such brands through experience, which are passed to the next generations. Aaker (1996) emphasizes authenticity, honesty, and familiarity as the main success factors for the longevity of heritage brands. However, brand heritage does not only consist of the past. Brands with heritage have significant histories that enable them to stay pertinent for the present and the future; therefore relevance to the contemporary era is critical for brand heritage to be maintained (Wiedmann et al., 2011b). As an example, Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry (2003) studies the brands of New Beetle and Star Wars, and shows how a successful retro-marketing maneuver is built upon the revival of these two brands with strong heritage. The past of these two brands are linked to the present through modernization and new story building while maintaining their heritage.

Brand heritage is important since consumers are looking for brands with history, reliability, and authenticity in the competitive environment where many choices are available on the marketplace (Wiedmann et al., 2011b), and Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry (2003) note that, with their personal and communal links, brands with history can congregate people around feelings of utopia and nostalgia by forming "a safe heaven in an unsafe world" (p. 20). According to Aaker (1996), brands with heritage can construct leverage in competition because of the value driving relationships they have built with their customers along the path; and brand heritage brings along values for the companies such as increase in brand image, brand trust, satisfaction, loyalty, and buying intention (Wiedmann et al., 2011a). These outcomes are facilitated through the increase in cognitive, affective, and

intentional brand strength, all three of which are influenced positively by brand heritage. Brand heritage is a strong asset while the history of the brand adds value to the present and future brand equity, yet it may also become a liability if the heritage loses its attraction (Wiedmann et al., 2011b); therefore, whether to utilize its heritage or not becomes a critical business issue for brands with histories.

In terms of brand heritage, Apple has a quite long history since its establishment in 1976 and has many achievements in terms of bringing novelties to technology along with a gripping story about its iconic leader Steve Jobs. Apple brand heritage was mainly based on niche personal technology products, innovative thinking, and courageously overcoming struggles against industry giants. Mac computers were especially renowned for their quality and their ability to serve artists, designers, and creative professionals for creative production. They were positioned as more prestigious computers compared to the mainstream Windows PCs:

Apple has a positive brand image due to its high quality personal computers. The company uses very specialized graphic cards, and you can do many things which are not achievable on regular Windows PCs. This righteous reputation coming from the computing business was successfully carried on to the mobile devices (Osman, in-depth interview).

While the heritage of Apple based on design, beauty, and creativity is still admissible today, its journey from underdog niche marketing to market leadership in personal technologies has instigated a transformative process for its brand meaning, brand image, and brand heritage. Along with the MacBooks and the "i" series devices becoming the mainstream products for the affluent segment and Apple turning into an aspired brand for the general consumer, its heritage is currently being reshaped as well. Android, on the other hand, has a mixed heritage coming from the histories of Google and Samsung along with the open-source philosophy mostly represented by Linux. The most important aspect of its brand heritage is its representation of open-

source co-creation in the mobile market against the closed system of Apple. The current state of the brand is similar to the historic position of Apple with creativity and personality at the roots of its mutiny against the mainstream. It seems the efficiency of Google and aggressiveness of Samsung have also been blended in its original open-source mentality initiating a brand heritage that currently has shorter ancestry compared to Apple. This is actually one of the benefits of the Apple brand over Android: the more mature and established brand heritage provides Apple a robust brand image in the eyes of the generations that grew up with the story of the brand. Android is currently constructing such a heritage with younger generations witnessing its rise from the smaller, defiant player in the market into a major competitor challenging the mainstream perception.

Inherited Icons

A critical aspect in heritage is the icons produced along the history of the brand, becoming an essential part of its heritage. Holt (2004) defines icons as society's "anchors of meaning" (p. 1) and iconic brands carry critical ideological roles for the society (Holt, 2006). Iconic branding is based on symbols and myths constituted based on the brand's core meaning and help its spread by its stakeholders (Holt, 2006; Urde, Greyser, and Balmer, 2007; Wiedmann et al., 2011b). In this meaning making and myth spreading process which involves the mass media along with marketing, brands become iconic as they represent the ideals consumers respect; and they act as agents for consumers to express the identities they aspire to become (Holt, 2004; 2006). Apple is discussed as a culturally iconic brand (Holt, 2004) in the popular culture, which increases the potency of its heritage immensely and which

gets reflected in the superiority trait of the Apple community. More specifically, in terms of the communal rhetoric related to the iconic aspects of Apple, the main topic turns out to be Apple's charismatic founder Steve Jobs and his intriguing life story. His business leadership that constituted a global brand from an underdog that started in a garage (Paharia et al., 2011) and his eccentric persona full of passion, rage, and sometimes unfaithfulness became an insight for discussions, articles, biographies, business manuscripts, and movies. Many Apple users mention Steve Jobs as an influential character and his story as an inspiration in communal discussions:

The fact that Steve Jobs is an industry leader, whose words many people quote, adds value to the Apple company. Nobody even knows Samsung's CEO, do they? (Andaç, in-depth interview)

I have a special connection to Apple due to Steve Jobs, who is one of the main factors why I love the Apple brand. He reminds me of my dad. My dad died because of cancer, too, and the last stages of Steve Jobs resembled how my dad looked. Actually Jobs was not the kindest man in the world maybe and he was over-ambitious. Yet, I still have a deep affection for him because he resembles my dad. And my dad was a workaholic like Steve Jobs, too... (Ece U., in-depth interview)

Quotes from him, his speech at Stanford Commencement, and his interviews travel around social networking sites with a lot of his fans trying to revive his vision, especially after his death. Belk and Tumbat (2005) expose the fact that Apple consumers, especially the devoted ones, do not detect the destructive parts of Jobs' personality, which may be overwhelming or inconsiderate in his business or personal affairs. Yet, while Steve Jobs is admired by many, some people believe he is overestimated as a person or as a genius:

Steve Jobs is overrated. You know, they always compare him with Bill Gates. I don't think he is 10% of what Bill Gates is. Jobs is just a stage performer, an actor in my opinion. He was proposing to change the world. What did he bring to the world then? Nothing. We know that tablets were first invented by Microsoft; first touch screen was not invented by Apple; the finger print reader was not first used by Apple either, it is first commercialized by

Motorola in 2005 if I am not mistaken. He is just a genius in marketing. Others invent and build things, and he just markets them well (Semih, in-depth interview).

I think he is a sociopath. He might be extremely intelligent, but totally ripped off of his emotions, like a robot. But maybe this is what makes him successful (Melinda, in-depth interview).

In addition, some people believe that after Steve Jobs' decease, Apple has started to lose its innovative and creative soul as Jobs was the main driver of the company's vision:

Apple post Steve is Apple pre-Steve-come-back. It's all downhill from here on out baby - at least in terms of phones, macs are still awesome (Doc750, March 2013, MacRumors).

I miss Steve Jobs. Apple is syncing slowly with Tim Cook. Maybe I will switch back to Apple when they catch up with some really good features Android has to offer (Lawanda, December 2013, PcPro).

No matter how people feel about Steve Jobs, many have the urge to talk about him and his deeds. This is again an indication of his impactful persona and his iconic essence within the brand heritage of Apple.

Other iconic symbols for the Apple brand may be the Apple logo and the flagship Apple store in Manhattan on 5th Avenue. The logo is used very frequently by Apple lovers as stickers on their cars or on their Apple devices, and it is also recreated in different versions by the community. The flagship store is also the central point of the lining up ritual Apple fans repeat during every new iPhone or iPad release. One of the interviewees, Pelin, describes her first visit to the store as an Android fan, and mentions about the online chat she had with one of her best friends, who is an Apple devotee. When Pelin recorded her check-in at the store on social media:

Friend: Are you aware that you are in the center of the world right now?
Pelin: I entered and told them that HTC is the best mobile brand while you guys suck! Now they are beating me to death!
Friend: Why are they beating you, for making the worst joke ever?
(Pelin, in-depth interview)

On the Android front, the only aspect that befits an iconic symbol is the green robot logo, which is a co-created emblem through the coalition of Google and the Android community. Under Google supervision, the green robot was first designed by Irina Blok in 2007 as the brand's logo (Kennedy, 2013). The logo was later co-created into an anthropomorphized symbol by the community to represent the rugged and individualistic character of Android users, and the rage as well as frustration of the Android community against competition. Android forums contain threads where entrepreneurs have utilized the logo to create artifacts of Android such as knicknacks, stickers, and other curiosities, and other community members supported their business with superfluous orders. The mostly community driven iconization of the green robot is now further endorsed by Google under the "Androidify" project where people can create their own Android characters and share it on social media.

Even though Google itself can be considered an iconic brand in contemporary technology, it is perplexing to note that it does not appear as an iconic factor within the anecdotes of Android community. In terms of brand heritage, Apple seems to have an upper hand in the competition, in terms of having a history of a success journey led by its founder glorified as a genius and a great leader. This strong heritage also leads many people to have personal histories with the brand, which has been the main dynamic in creating brand relationships and attachment to Apple and enthroning it as a global love brand.

Legacy - Personal Histories

A second legacy attribute that gets reflected to IBCC is the consumer-brand relationships built through the personal histories of consumers with the brands. Many brand community members contribute to the communal dialogues by sharing their personal stories. The history of continuous usage brings along strong consumer-brand relationships and brand love that further enhances oppositional brand loyalty and consequently increases possibility of conflict.

Eminent work of Belk (1988) reveals that consumers use their critical possessions to extend, expand, and strengthen their self; and Fournier (1998) analyzes the self-brand relationship to show that brands can act as "viable relationship partners," and "consumer-brand relationships are valid at the level of lived experiences" (p. 344). Accordingly, the relationships built between brands and consumers are reciprocal since marketing communications as well as consumer or company generated animation and anthropomorphization practices that humanize brands make them active partners that respond to consumers. Consumers have different types of relationships with the brands they use based on what they associate these brands with or what they attribute to the brands based on actual life experiences or personal roles in life. Fournier (1998) also delineates consumer-brand relationships create meanings that lead to brand relationship quality expressed as love and passion, self-connection, commitment, interdependency, and partnership quality (Fournier, 1998). Brakus, Schmitt, and Zarantello (2009) further defines these lived brand experiences as subjective internal (sensations, feelings, and cognitions) and behavioral response evoked by brand stimuli. The authors also create a scale to

measure brand experience based on its sensory, affective, behavioral and intellectual dimensions. Especially personal emotional experience with products increases stickiness of usage and oppositional loyalty, which in return decrease the value of rival products (Yeh, 2012). As a result of these personal lived experiences with brands, consumers develop brand attachment (Thomson, MacInnis, and Park, 2005), brand trust (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001), brand equity (Keller, 1993), and brand loyalty (Jacoby and Chesnut, 1978). In addition to such attitudes developed, brand experiences also facilitate integration of consumers to brand communities through owner-brand, owner-product, owner-company, owner-owner links (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002).

Stories that Bring Brand Love

A deeper state of consumer-brand relationship that emerges as a result of profound consumer-brand interactions and experiences is brand love (Ahuvia, 2005; Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi, 2012; Fournier, 1998). Roy, Eshghi, and Sarkar (2013) posit that affective part of brand experience is an antecedent to the formation of brand love as it induces brand-related emotional arousal. Fournier (1998) defines love for brands as an end result of brand relationship quality between the consumer and the brands and Albert, Merunka, and Valette-Florence (2008) further analyzes the brand love construct to find eleven dimensions that inspire its occurrence: passion, a long-duration relationship, self-congruity, dreams, memories, pleasure, attraction, uniqueness, beauty, trust (satisfaction), and willingness to state love. Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012), on the other hand, discuss brand love as an abstract higher-order construct that is built upon other constructs such as passion driven behavior (desire to

use and invest, involvement), self-brand integration (desired and current self-identity, life meaning), positive emotional connection (intuitive fit, emotional attachment, positive affect), long-term relationship, anticipated separation distress, and overall attitude strength and valence. The authors define it as a mental prototype that consumers experience through cognitive, affective, and behavioral processes that result in repeat purchase intention, positive WOM, and resistance to negative information about the brand, and intrinsic rewards such as happiness. While previous authors consider the formation process of brand love, Hemetsberger, Kittinger-Rosanelli, Friedmann (2009) study how brand love ends between people and their brands. They find out that consumer-brand love relationships cease to exist due to consumer transformations based on major life events and personal development, or changing brand personalities that cause brands to be no longer congruent with their consumers.

In the Apple and Android IBCC context, we see intense consumer-brand relationships and the emergence of brand love as a result of personal experience with technology usage. While both camps depict strong attachments, the demonstration of brand love on the Apple front appears to be more intense since Apple has strong brand heritage with a longer history than Android, which has provided Apple fans to experience more instances to build relationships with their brand. By exposure to many products throughout Apple's history, users have gained more personal experience that led to stories creating further brand love and brand loyalty:

Let me tell you a little bit about my story with Apple. I first met Apple through my first iPod that was bought for me at the age of fourteen. It was its pink color that really attracted me; therefore, I wanted to have one. Later I realized that it was not that easy to upload music to the device, but despite all that inconvenience, I kept on using it; and after all these years it still works! When I think about it, it is actually displayed in the most central and beautiful part of my room now. None of my other stuff was ever that valuable for me. I think I have an emotional attachment to it. I love it. I used to listen to music

with it during my adolescence. Music had a magnificent effect on me during that period, the period when I first fell in love or had a boyfriend. My dad died during those years, too, which was really hard (Ece U., in-depth interview).

Ece U.'s story is a great example of how consumers bond with some of their personal belongings due to the symbolic meanings they attribute to these products related to the critical events in their personal histories. Her iPod represents growing up, falling in love, the sorrow for losing her father for her and she has been a very loyal Apple user, with deep affection for the brand, since then. She now owns an iPhone and a MacBook. Another iPhone and Mac user, Kaan, also got to become an Apple fan through his first MacBook:

The first Apple product I met was my roommate's MacBook. I used to write tablatures on Windows GuitarPro for songs and put them online so that people could play them on their own. Then I discovered that Mac had an application called GarageBand to write tablatures. I used to wait for him to sleep at nights so that I could use his MacBook. The design and the general user experience made me fall in love with the laptop. During that time I was also chosen as the chief of the university's acapella orchestra, so GarageBand would be very useful for me to be able to compose for the orchestra. So somehow I convinced my mother to fund my MacBook by promising to pay her back in monthly installments. And my music life totally changed after I bought it. I bought a midi keyboard to use with GarageBand. The tones in GarageBand's soundbank, the ability to play with the little details, the variety of instruments it provided, and the mixing and mastering features were all great. For a while MacBook mainly meant GarageBand for me. Then came along the issue of editing choir videos. I discovered iMovie and I could not believe how easy it was to do what I wanted to do. I was very scared of editing, but I realized that it was actually very easy. Apart from editing, I also started to record my vocal performances with a microphone. That 13 inch laptop with a single headset microphone recorded beautifully. I was amazed (Kaan, in-depth interview).

Kaan provides another major example of how his love for Apple started to develop as a facilitator for his most critical passion in life: music. As music is the most significant part of his youth and history, his association of music with Apple brought along a similar passion for the brand as well. This passion led him to buy an iPhone

and he never considered other choices for his mobile device due to his love for Apple. A third example of a personal history with Apple is that of Andaç:

My first introduction to IOS was through an iPad. My brother had brought me an iPad as a present when he visited the United States. That was the first version of iPad, it should be around 2008. I did have an iPod before, not the iPod touch, the one with the revolving wheel as a controller. I was really amazed with the iPad as an instrument. I started to use it like a regular computer and then ended up buying a MacBook. Then I bought an iPhone 4. I bought the iPhone because my whole family was using iPhones. To be honest, my parents are not trend-setters for me, but my brother is. So it was important for me that he was using an iPhone (Andaç, in-depth interview).

The personal history of Andaç with Apple started out due to the choices of his role model, his brother. Apart from his joy in using Apple products, the influence of his brother in his life and the fact that his first Apple was a gift from his brother are again critical factors that led him to become a devoted Apple user. Two common elements in all the stories were that the experience of Apple was associated with an important era, a passion, or a person in these people's histories; and their first devices were not necessarily an iPhone but rather a different Apple device that led to the choice of an iPhone due to their relationship with the brand and their love for Apple.

Personal histories embellished with brand experience contribute a lot to the strength of brand community membership as well as to the articulation of these feelings during inter-communal conversations that lead to IBCC. Apart from personal histories of individuals, the specific histories related to the brand communities also bring a third dimension to the legacy the brands and brand communities inherit.

Legacy - Communal History

From the legacy perspective, the rhetoric in IBCC gets influenced by the history of the brand, namely brand heritage; the history of consumers' own usage and experience; and lastly, the history of their brand community. Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) affirms that "communities are probably most likely to form around brands with a strong image, a rich and lengthy history, and threatening competition" (p. 415). There is a close relationship with communal history and brand heritage as the community bases its consciousness of kind, traditions, and rituals on the brand heritage aspects. There is also a close relationship between communal history and personal histories since communal history is continuously fed by personal stories of users, and reciprocally, cultural context and collective interpretation of the brand meaning is crucial for individual consumer-brand relationships (Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry, 2003). Membership in a community influences how people evaluate and adopt products of the cherished brand (Thompson and Sinha, 2008). Membership also causes consumers to favor the in-group members over the out-group population (Hogg and Abrams, 2003) since more frequent participation in communal activities lead to further integration to the brand community (McAlexander, Schouten, and Koenig, 2002). The integration even reaches such levels that the community frequently feels more competent than the manufacturer in terms of their understanding of the brand, which leads to a sense of rightful ownership sometimes even greater than that of the manufacturer. Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001) refer to this strenuous ownership concept by describing how Mac fans complained about how Apple fell into an erroneous belief about their consumers' loyalty and forgot the need to further advance their technology and products. We see very similar pleas from the Apple community today after Steve Job's death and the competition aggressively catching up with the market leadership role of Apple.

What maintains brand heritage and turns it into cultural heritage and communal history is the consumer communities that incorporate the past into present through maintaining artifacts, rituals, ideas, and knowledge that is created in the past. Otnes and Maclaran (2007) discuss the British Royal Family as an example of a brand with heritage and how the community around this brand has helped its continued existence through creating rituals, establishing traditions, consociating the royal family's grievances, and sharing consumption fantasies among each other. The authors also note the services of the community as educating the peripheral members, interacting with the media as a stakeholder in the brand, and participating in the evolution of rituals and traditions. One of the main aspects that facilitate the development of communal history is story-telling. Brand communities rejoice their brand history and they tell stories regarding their personal experiences with the brand. This story-telling activity creates myths related to the brand and facilitates the formation of the community's own culture and history (Belk and Tumbat, 2005; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muñiz and Schau, 2005). It is the brand stories that play the role of creating links between community members (Cova and Cova, 1997; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001). Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry (2003) call these brand stories allegories. The main stories in the Apple and Android communities are mainly based on personal experiences with usage, relationships with the brands and companies, trial of new device releases, initial impressions related to new updates to the software, and results of jailbreaking and rooting activities.

The communal history of the Android camp is rather new, forming from a brand community that commenced with the introduction of Android devices in 2008. The communal history can be traced in forum threads and technology review websites. The earlier stages of Android community show formation of close in-group

bonds with a core group of Android fans forming friendship bonds during their conversations. The then rather small group of core fans was frustrated for being the underdog community. Currently, the Android community has grown to become the majority users in the market and their current fight is rather converting more fans to their side and changing the market leader position of Apple in terms of initiating the fashion of mobile industry.

Apple's communal history has gone through very parallel routes with Android. Consumer culture literature is a great resource to study the history of the Apple brand community. According to Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001), the self-perception of Apple users is stated as more curious compared to Windows users, and Apple suits the more individualist and creatively inclined users. Likewise, Muñiz and Schau (2005) show how Apple Newton PDA users define themselves as the outcasts that prefer not to follow the mainstream technological trends, and they, again, define themselves as more individualistic technical experts compared to mainstream PDA users. Ironically, in the current study, we discuss these qualities of inquisitiveness and individuality more for Android than Apple. Today, most Apple users represent the mainstream hip culture and are nowhere near being the minority as in the old days. The one brand community characteristic that has been carried along since Apple's history seems to be loyalty. As Belk and Tumbat (2005) portrays, the loyalty was more cult-like with apparent religious aspects when Apple was still a niche market brand with its specialized laptops and personal computers. With the entry of the wearable and mobile devices, the brand has shifted its market share from a minority to a pacesetter maintaining the loyalty of its followers.

While Steve Jobs and Apple were the protagonists against the evil forces of IBM, Microsoft, and Bill Gates (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muñiz and Schau, 2005)

in the past. Muñiz and Schau (2005) mention how Apple community used to consider those using Microsoft products as followers of a defective system, participants of a herd. Yet, the tables have turned today with the Android community in the shoes of precedent frustrated Apple community fighting for technical superiority and creativity in the position of an underdog. The romantic Apple myth against conformism has been transformed into a giant commercial and almost a monopolistic company along with its niche community diluted with ordinary consumers who look for practical solutions for their personal needs and ostentatious fashionistas following mainstream trends. These new members of the Apple fan club do not necessarily share the same beliefs or consciousness with the former idealistic Apple brand community members. A current Apple fan, Arda, particularly notes that he was apathetic for what the Apple community represented in earlier years:

In the past, I found the devoted Apple fans rather irritating and I never thought of using Apple products as I did not associate myself with the Apple community's image. Today I do not want to use any other mobile device than iPhone as it suits my needs perfectly, and I am especially glad that the stigmatized image of the Apple community is no longer a part of its current impression (Arda, in-depth interview).

Cultural heritage changes with the alterations in the communal history and the stories the brand community members cherish within the altered communal identity. Therefore, it is critical to understand what kind of a history the community acquires during the course of the brand's journey. This communal history becomes a legacy for the future members to direct their own cause and journey either in a parallel fashion or in a deviating approach.

The three main dimensions of personality, strategy, and legacy and how they are influential in the formation of IBCC have been discussed in detail. Accordingly, differences between communal personalities, competitive strategies executed by the

companies that manage these brands, as well as diversities in brand legacy based on individual and communal histories with the brands are all influential in the course and elevation of IBCC. The final section in the findings and discussion delineate what IBCC and its drivers mean in terms of business implications.

Business Implications of IBCC

This research provides a new angle to how companies need to perceive their brand communities. Brand soldiers in brand communities are introduced as a voluntary army in IBCC with a motivation to articulate their ideas and passion related to the brands they cherish through inter-communal rhetoric. By realizing and understanding the drivers of IBCC, companies could enhance their business performance through an alignment with their brand soldiers; therefore, the concept of IBCC along with its drivers has critical implications for business strategies of firms. These implications can be analyzed under two main headings related to recognizing communal personalities to build aligned business and communication strategies and establish a long-term legacy, as well as targeting and maintaining a mainstream position in the market.

Recognizing Communal Personalities to Build Strategy and Legacy

Understanding the communal personalities of their brand communities is crucial for companies to align their business and communication strategies. It is the personality traits of brand community members that shape their interactions with the brand and other consumers, and it is their consumption norms and communal identities that

determine their buying behavior. Designing and rolling out innovation and communication strategies aligned with communal personalities is a must for companies. For instance, the sociability trait of Apple brand community shows the importance of their social circles for Apple users as well as their tendency to consume Apple products together with their friends and family. Based on this finding, it is critical to provide social consumption opportunities for Apple users through Apple stores, through the interconnectivity in the Apple ecosystem, and through the innovative projects that may increase socialization via the actual iPhone device. Again, based on their superiority trait, proposing business strategies to maintain the market leader position and constructing marketing messages to boost the feelings of superiority become priorities for a company with an ego-centric community. This is especially true for sustaining the trend-lover group within Apple as their loyalty is solely based on the perceptions of the brand, and it also means that tactics that signal following of trends rather than setting them may hurt the brand perception in the long run. The propensity of Apple users to show their brand loyalty can also be triggered by providing platforms where they can show off their history of usage as well as building loyalty programs to further inspire and retain this trait.

As for the Android operating system developers and manufacturers that utilize it, appealing to the individuality and curiosity of their users is imperative to make them feel in control and let them entertain themselves through exploring and customizing their devices. As they are also keen on showing their hostility, including the Android brand soldiers within the Android propaganda against Apple by providing rhetorical tools through firm-sourced marketing communications as well as co-creation possibilities to inspire consumer generated marketing activities would be strategic moves to align with Android brand soldiers. The study reveals that brand

community members have the tendency to mirror company communication strategies; therefore, firms need to premeditate on what kind of messages they want their communities to reflect and regard their communities as allies within the brand competition. However, keeping in mind that the roles of brand soldiers are based on voluntary actions rather than company-initiated agency roles is vital to avoid possible firm-community clashes.

The digitalization of interactions in brand competition causes every firm based action to become engraved in the virtual histories of brands and companies. As discussed in the Legacy section, brand heritage, personal and communal histories of brand community members are essential in determining the attitude of community members in the brand competition. Therefore, firms need to remind themselves consistently that their actions, whether successful or not, become a part of their present and future, and end up determining the posture of their brand communities. The legacy a company establishes is actually built through the enactment of its business strategies, deployment of its communication tactics, and the interactions of its brand community members. Therefore, it is possible to argue that all drivers of IBCC have an effect on future legacies of companies. Thus, it is possible to posit that within the creation of legacy, IBCC acts both as an outcome but also as an antecedent for the formation of brand and communal history. As IBCC elevates, the plethora of changes in the course of conflict could alter the track of experience people have regarding their brands, which would build a different legacy for the future brand community members. Therefore, there is a reciprocal relationship between legacy and IBCC, which needs to be taken into account while steering corporate strategies that directly or indirectly influence the conflict.

Targeting and Maintaining a Mainstream Position

The IBCC discussion exposes insights related to the characteristics of communities around mainstream brands. Accordingly, the superiority of the mainstream brand is challenged with hostility of the anti-mainstream brands, whether they have the goal to take over the mainstream position of the market leader brand or not. The brand war between mainstream and non-mainstream create interactions that fit into a life cycle where the intensity of IBCC appears to vary based on different phases. The context of Apple and Android also supports the fact that IBCC has a life cycle of its own based on corporate strategies. The interactions between the Android and Apple communities have shown different levels of antagonism during the life cycle of the brand competition: the threads between 2009 and 2012 show more hostility and eagerness to defend Android as a righteous choice, when the operating system was rather new and was perceived as the secondary choice in the market. This is the period where the market leadership of Apple was unquestioned based on its profitability. Starting with 2013, the Samsung branded Android devices have started to catch up with the profitability of iPhones, which led Apple to shift its marketing strategy noticeably. Rather than confining its consumers to a single product, Apple has since released two devices each period, the iPhone 5S and iPhone 5C being the first examples. The 5C was a less expensive device with more colorful plastic options, giving consumers a second choice to choose from. This year, the 2014 releases of iPhone 6 and iPhone 6 Plus clearly indicate that the need for bigger sized phones of consumers that preferred products other than Apple were heard and targeted. With such changes, the Apple users have also become active participants in starting conflict rather than staying ignorant of the hostility of Androiders. They

became aware that the competition is fierce and the definition of "cool" might be changing. More astonishingly, the hostility levels of Android users seem to show a slight decline with the response they finally get from Apple fans. The recent changes are natural since Apple is not the only premium or trend setter player in the market anymore, Android users have become quite influential in the market themselves:

Remember when we hated apple fans because they were assumptions tossers with inflated self esteem stemmed from their phone choice? Yeah, All those things are done by Android fans now, and they do not seem to grasp the irony (lyubimovim, 9Gag, September 2014).

The size enlargement is clearly a sign of this change, as Apple had to follow the competition than lead it for the first time. It looks like a more balanced fight among the brands and their communities with the lessening frustration of Androiders. These changes throughout the course of Apple and Android IBCC as well as the fact that Apple was once in the shoes of Android against other mainstream brands of IBM and Microsoft, hint at the fact that IBCC goes through a life cycle parallel to corporate life cycles and the changing positions of the brands in the market (see Figure 10). The IBCC Intensity Cycle shows that as a new product or brand is introduced into the competition at Phase I, the adopters of the new brand start their soldiering activities and increase the already present conflict among the existing rivals. With adequate innovation and effective corporate communication strategies, the new brand enters the growth period, Phase II, where the communal rhetoric of the new brand founded on successful strategy accelerates the most. At Phase III, IBCC reaches its peak since the brand community that supports the opposing and marginal player or brand in the market shows the highest frustration and therefore hostility against the vanity and superiority of the community that follows the market leader.

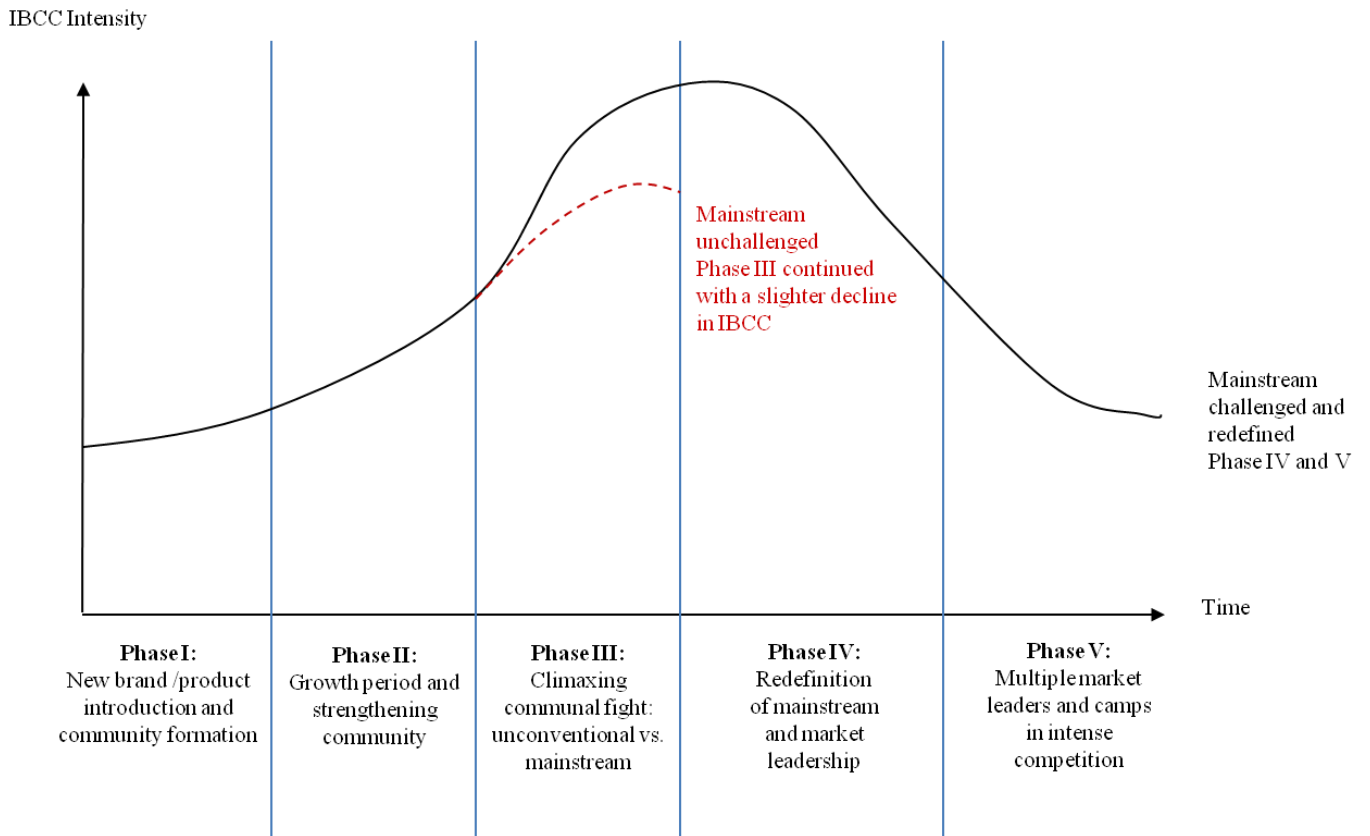


Figure 10. IBCC cycle

This conflict may lessen when there is a change in the definition of the mainstream leading to Phases IV and V, or may go on if the mainstream image is not properly challenged, staying at Phase III. If the underdog or less popular brand can challenge the place of the market leader, the mainstream image may become redefined with the blend of the conventional and eccentric brand definitions and trends:

With each passing generation of hardware/OS, however, each side becomes more like the other: Androids are improving in battery life, and iOS is gaining more and more customizable features. The end result is that consumers win, as ideally each platform will ultimately become equivalent, and choice is always great for consumers (adaaam, September 2012, Phandroid).

The amalgamation of two or more market leaders creates a cut-throat competition that still feeds IBCC due to the presence of strong brand communities, but as the

vanity of the main community diminishes, so does the hostility of the opposing community.

The Apple and Android brand war is currently at a crossroads to redefine what mainstream is. The mainstream position is almost shared between the two giants today, but Android companies and the Android community still act as if they are the underdog group, which maintains their aggressive growth in the market. The cycle of IBCC bears many business implications: Companies need to question their innovativeness even if they become mainstream market leaders. Mainstream companies may have the tendency to become lazy and boring as their performance makes them less vigorous and more dependent on the comfort zone of the products they have already built their market share with. Companies that want to maintain their mainstream positions need to keep innovating and revolutionizing the market without becoming accustomed to their market leader positions. Companies also need to note that after being exposed to so much change and rivalry, consumers become numb towards innovation and it needs a real revolution to start real excitement in the market. In a way, along the cut-throat competition, rivals may cannibalize their own markets by creating innovation-prone consumers that refuse to upgrade. And at such a stagnant period of unexciting launches, whoever is able to conquer a revolutionary idea may become the next challenger of the mainstream.

The war between companies in the mobile industry goes on in a contentious battle, but the players in the battlefield seem to change inevitably. Even less than a decade ago, the main brands in this discussion were Nokia and Blackberry. Nokia was the market leader in the past decade, but it was not able to keep up with the touch screen technology fast enough to maintain its position even as one of the main players of the game. The critical issue is understanding the changing needs of the

consumer, which is redefined almost every day with the development of lifestyles that are all on the go, in a hurry, and with the need to be connected and have at least a little fun in the hastening and demanding expectations of the ordinary day. As the "connection" and "fun" definitions change with seasons just like fashion, it is not easy to predict an outcome in brand wars. The ones who keep themselves and their products updated and who act as visionaries to shape the future are expected to stay in the game. In addition, as communities become powerful voluntary armies in brand competition, and the negotiation of all brand meanings, preferences, and consumption rituals become a parallel consumer battle field mimicking the corporate clashes. Therefore, those companies that are able to form alliances with their brand communities have the possibility to create an upper-hand in the competition.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This dissertation contributes to marketing literature and consumer culture theory in various ways. First of all, the study is based on a thorough literature review that scrutinizes previous works related to the brand community construct and presents them in a structure under the headings of engagement, culture, and value, which portray the state-of-the-art in this area. The thorough literature review also reveals the lack of studies based on multiple communities that interact around a common theme. This is one of the initial studies that undertake a context where inter-communal engagement is observed and analyzed.

Secondly, the context of mobile consumption where Apple and Android brand communities interact in a rather clashing manner divulges the construct of IBCC and the study investigates the meaning as well as the antecedents of this novel concept. It is also important to note that the digital revolution and the escalating inter-personal communication in the milieu of social media have prepared the necessary environment for a concept like IBCC to arise. While similar notions such as clashes between sports club fans and conflict between activist groups and opposed institutions were possible and visible in physical contexts, it might have been challenging to witness a battle between brand communities without the expansion of online interactions and social media. Within the context of IBCC, a second novel concept, brand soldier, is also introduced and defined. Accordingly, brand soldiers

enact their individual, communal, and social motives and take a voluntary stance in inter-communal fight by articulating their thoughts and beliefs in communal rhetoric, either with researched knowledge or unacquainted bias. Brand soldiers also play a critical role in elevating IBCC, and they provide a lot of positive benefits to the brands and the companies by co-sharing their branding activities. Moreover, the rhetorical strategies of brand soldiers are described with a typology along the axes of awareness and articulation, creating four types of rhetorical behavior that are present in both sides of the conflict.

The analysis of the IBCC construct and its antecedents shows that there are three main dimensions that feed the inter-communal clashes: communal personality differences, marketing communications strategy differences between companies that get reflected to how brand communities provoke and attack each other, and differences between community legacies that determine the power of members regarding their foundations for inter-communal rhetoric. The communal personality is again a novel concept introduced and defined in this study. While literature has mainly focused on brand personality, findings show that brand communities also build up their own communal personalities which become more evident in inter-communal fights. Accordingly, the Apple community character is defined as sociable, superior, and loyal, while the Android community character is portrayed as individualistic, hostile, and curious. The communal personalities parallel brand personalities of sophistication on the Apple front and ruggedness and excitement on the Android front. The personality section also discusses the consumption norms of these two communities which are completely different from each other. Finally, the two communities are examined with respect to a mainstream vs. non-mainstream dichotomy regarding their communal impressions. In a thorough discussion based on

literature, the communal personalities of Apple and Android are suggested as the main attitudes of mainstream followers and unconventional rebels, respectively. It turns out, the character traits of sociability, superiority, and loyalty can be considered as the general qualities of mainstream brand followers, whereas individuality, hostility, and curiosity represent the frustrated mind-set of consumers that use and shield unconventional, eccentric, avant-garde, and sometimes even stigmatized brands.

The results of the study also show that marketing communication strategies and battle tactics of opposing manufacturers also feed IBCC. Communities might sometimes mirror the strategies of companies and act in coherence with their messages during communal rhetoric. The teasing habits of Android, and especially Samsung, against Apple are replicated in how Android consumers attack Apple fans. In a way, companies provide the weapons they want their consumer communities to be equipped with. While consumers wittily replicate the communication patterns of the manufacturers at the user level, they do not fail to scrutinize the integrity of all the players in the market in terms of innovation and ethical standards. Being provided with valid innovation and progress is what consumers require from the manufacturers and marketers. The whole market system, including third parties need to be intact to please the aware consumers, who seem to examine every commercial detail and prefer to be the master rather than the follower. The consumer power driven from this awareness and the constant scrutiny of corporate actions put even more pressure on manufacturers to maintain loyalty.

Another factor that propels consumer power in inter-communal rhetoric turns out to be the legacies communities inherit based on brand history, individual histories, and communal histories. The present conflicts are derivatives of past

experiences; therefore, it is crucial for companies to guard what kind of a legacy they prepare for their future community members with their current actions and strategies. It is also critical to build a strong brand heritage that consumers relate with as a result of their individual and communal encounters with the brand. With the digital age, all kinds of actions get ruthlessly imprinted in online reviews and communal engagement; therefore companies need to act with even more caution to predetermine how their decisions and actions will be translated into the minds of the consumers and the accounts of their brands, which will all be utilized in IBCC in return.

A final discussion is based on the business implications of the IBCC and brand soldier concepts. Companies need to act on the three dimensions of the complex prototype of IBCC which influence each other reciprocally. This complex prototype also goes through a cycle based on the corporate and communal strategies of the opposing camps. While some of such conflicts may redefine the mainstream brands in the market after reaching a climax of brand battle, some get prolonged as the mainstream brand cannot be strongly challenged by another brand and its community.

The current research has certain limitations to be noted and it creates new possibilities for further investigation. First of all, IBCC construct and the discussion points that result from the investigation of IBCC are based on the specific case of Apple and Android brand war. Applying the same methodology in a different context would provide an opportunity to show the generalizability of the findings or further results for newer insights than what is revealed in this brand battle. Secondly, the communal personality concept can be further developed and the congruity between communal personality and brand personality can be studied through the means of

quantitative methods that measure both communal personality and brand personality to be compared. Another field that needs further explanation is the mainstream vs. non-mainstream issue, which is crucial for companies that need to understand how to develop strategies if they aspire to stay as a leading brand in their markets. The current literature lacks in-depth research on what it means to be mainstream or popular and how the life cycle of such brands is steered by both companies and consumers. Finally, the general IBCC model may also be tested through structural equation modeling and the results may show which dimension has more influence on conflict than others as well as the strength of relationships between constructs.

In conclusion, IBCC and brand soldiers are novel concepts that developed under the roof of digital interactions that made brand wars among consumer more apparent and therefore more easily realized and investigated. It has created a great opportunity for consumers and their demands to be heard, and for companies to decipher the needs and wants of their followers to stay ahead of the competition. In a way, the communal conflict and battle has created a common ground for all stakeholders to benefit from. It gives power to consumers and it prevents a single company from becoming a monopoly for a long time, which could hinder competition and preclude real innovation to take place. Hence it is appropriate to end the discussion in 2014 with the eminent phrase from *1984*: "War is Peace."

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