

# **BRAND COMMUNITY PHENOMENON: A STUDY BLAZER AND JAZZ COMMUNITIES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Brand communities nowadays have become a new form of experiencing the brand value inside a social group created by customers. As the knowledge about the product, brand, and company grows, customers now actively seek for a meaningful bond that can be derived from those relationships. Even though community is always seen as a whole, but treating the members generally is a serious mistake. Each of the members has their own reasons and goals that they expected to be derived from the particular community.

Questionnaires were distributed to investigate the join-motives of each member in Blazer Indonesia Club and Jazz Fit Club by measuring the relationships based on customer-centric model by McAlexander et al. From the study conducted, multiple segments based on different consumption motivations do exist.

**Keywords:** Brand Community, Motivation, Consumer Motive, Market Segmentation, Cluster Analysis.

## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Research Background**

Driving alongside of Jalan Solo or Malioboro during crowded Saturday night is one of pleasure that most of Jogjaneese enjoyed. It's almost a culture for Indonesian that during Saturday night people gathers for meeting, looking for entertainment, where all this occur not only in shopping center but also alongside of Jogja's street. Some groups of people even have a specific place to meet, which they called it "base camp". This group of people shared information, belief, habits, culture and traditions regarding on their preferred possessions. This group of

shared value of a specific brand, shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility is so called brand community (Wikipedia, 2013).

The idea of "community" probably came about where people gathered around a common area for their mutual benefit (Anderson, 2010). While different definitions mean different things, the idea is the same; that a group comes together or lives together to share something that is of value to the members of that community.

In the advertising and marketing world, "brand community" has become a term used to encompass a brand's customers, fans and advocates. Having a strong and loyal brand community can turn a small brand into a success if it is nurtured and appreciated properly. Ad agency, Blade Creative Branding writes, "The people out in the marketplace who embrace the values of the brand, as customers and/or purchase influencers, are the brand's true "owners." This philosophy has become especially popular with marketers creating and working on social media campaigns with easier interaction and more opportunities to tap into the brand community to leverage the brand.

In assistance of the brand community development in Indonesia, researcher interested in specific community which is vehicle brand community. Indonesia is third world largest consumers in motor vehicle after China and India (IIBT, 2009). The auto market in Indonesia is still major market in ASEAN with the number of vehicle to reach 20 million units of cars and 50 million units of motorcycles. With the raging automotive industry and enthusiastic market happens in Indonesia, understanding the consumers' behavior has become an important part of marketers' strategy.

Regarding on the fact, researcher thought that brand community may have influence to the future value of a brand. Some people say that the continuity of brand image and development lays on the hand of customers, where this cause so many marketer tries to find out ways to nurture customer; while researcher creating huge question of how customers behave and how best capture their needs.

Regardless of community influences' fact, the communal feeling inside it cannot be the reason of seeing it as a homogenous social group. We should see a community as variety of people with the fact that they have different motives of joining a community. By understanding the heterogeneity in a community, it will be easier to treat the customers. Because marketers now able to see which kind of strategy can be used in order to build better relationship of customers to brand, customers to product, even to company that owns the brand.

## B. Problem Statement

There are problems proposed by the researcher in this study, such as:

1. What relationship do people seek from the community?
2. What kind of people joins those specific communities?
3. Is there any significant difference of motivations between both car communities' member?

### C. Research Objectives

There are two main objectives of this research, which are to analyze consumer motives in relation to Customer Centric model proposed by McAlexander et al. (2002) and to describe the demographic of current communities studied.

## II. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

### A. Theoretical Background

#### 1. Market Segmentation

Technically, market segmentation is the process of dividing the population of possible customers into distinct groups. Those customers within the same segment share common characteristics that can help a firm in targeting those customers and marketing to them effectively (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011).

Segmentation is one of the most important concepts in marketing. Firms vary widely in their abilities to serve different types of customers. Hence, rather than trying to compete in an entire market, firms should segment the market. Through the process of market segmentation, firms will identify those parts, or sections of the market, that they can serve best.

There are many ways to segment the market, including the following common ways and these approaches can be used in combination such as, demographic segmentation, psychographic segmentation, behavioral segmentation and needs segmentation.

#### 2. Brand Community

A brand community is a community formed on the basis of attachment to a product or marque. Recent developments in marketing and in research in customer behavior result in stressing the connection between brand, individual identity and culture. Among the concepts developed to explain the behavior of customers, the concept of a brand community focuses on the connections between customers.

A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its center is a branded good or service. Like other communities, it is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. Each of these qualities is, however, situated within a commercial and mass-mediated ethos, and has its own particular expression. Brand communities are participants in the brand's larger social construction and play a vital role in the brand's ultimate legacy.

The research on brand community and brand loyalty has been developed and some might have been well-implemented. In a study of Jeep and Harley

Davidson community, McAlexander et al. (2002) said that community-integrated customers serve as brand missionaries, carrying the marketing message into other communities. By proactively providing the context for relationship to develop, marketers can cultivate community in ways and increase the customer loyalty. Customers who are highly integrated in the brand community are emotionally invested in the welfare of the company and desire to contribute to its success.

In area of brand community and virtual community, Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) argues that heterogeneity within communities does exist and treating them as a single, homogenous group may be a serious mistake. Both suggest that communication with members should be differentiated and the communication strategy used to promote the community also should be adapted to the prime purpose in which the community is built.

Brand communities in general provide brand ability-related information and integrity-level experiences. This in turn motivates customers themselves to improve the brand with which they associate, since they strongly believe that their opinions will be reflected in the brand management (Hur, W-M et al., 2011).

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) who have carried out a lot of studies about the brand communities focus on the three important elements of brand communities; (1) Consciousness of Kind: Collective consciousness is about strong connection feeling between community members. Members feel like they know each other, although they have never met. Legitimacy and oppositional brand loyalty concepts are important in collective consciousness. Legitimacy is about usage of the brand with the "right reasons". For instance, the community members do not find the reason of "using the brand just because it is popular" legitimate. Oppositional brand loyalty is about the thought that possession of that certain brand makes members special and different. Brand loyalty is so critical for continuity of collective consciousness (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001:418). (2) Shared Rituals and Traditions: The rituals and traditions are also among the elements, important for the collective consciousness to develop and continue. These are generally formed by "celebrating the history of the brand" and "shared brand stories". Stories about brand and celebration of noteworthy days of the brand contribute to create and hear shared values amongst community members. One of the stories about the brand history is logo or label of the brand. While current logo or label has a commercial value, older one has a nostalgic value. Stories in exchange are the elements that is shared and talked about by community members. (3) Moral Responsibility: To insure the long-term survival of brand communities, it is necessary to retain old members and integrate new ones. To provide this, responsibility consciousness should be developed. A brotherhood sense is created and the idea of "if you use another brand, you betray the community" is developed. In this process, if some errors occur, community members try to overcome them by helping each other. In this respect, brand communities perform limited and specialized moral responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001: 415).

### 3. Consumer Motives In Joining Communities

Customer centric relationship model proposed by McAlexander et al (2002) is an extension of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) brand community triad model as well as a shift of perspective. In this model, there are four relationships produced such as: customer to company, customer to product, customer to customer, and customer to brand relationship. According to McAlexander:

"Construing brand community as a social aggregation of brand users and their relationship to the brand itself as a repository of meaning overlooks other relationships that supply brand community members with their commonality and cultural capital (McAlexander et al. 2002, p. 39)"

Communities, in Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008), might be classified according to whether and to what extent they help customers to reach their objectives. There are four objectives proposed by Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder in their study and segmented the community population on the basis of the importance the members attach to the four relationships of the customer-centric brand community model (McAlexander et al., 2002). They contend that such differences originate in the different motives consumers have to join communities.

### 4. Customer Centric Model of Brand Community

The framework proposed in this study implies the customer-centric approach model McAlexander et al. (2002) has proposed, which in that, the existence and meaningfulness of the community inhere in customer experience rather than in the brand around which that experience revolves. The framework in this study overlooks the relationship between brand users to the brand itself and other relationship that supply brand community members with their commonality and cultural capital (Holt, 1998). The relationship continues to customers that value the brand they possessed, the marketing agents, and the institutions that own and manage the brand (McAlexander et al., 2002).

In Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder's study, they investigate whether the strength of customer-centric relationship bonds are equally strong for every community member; whether difference exist among community members with respect to the importance they attach to the four links of those relationships. So in the beginning they have proposed four motivations customers might have when they join a community such as reassurance of quality for products, high involvement with the branded product category, opportunity for joint consumption and to live up the brand's symbolic function.

## B. Hypotheses Development

Based on the problems proposed and the theory of consumer motives researcher developed hypotheses to be tested in this study as follows:

First, consumers may participate in a brand community because of their need for quality reassurance. Quality assessments of search goods can be made on the basis of visible cues that can be inferred a priori, whereas experience goods allow for assessment immediately after consumption. For credence goods, however, quality may be assessed only after continued consumption. In line with this distinction, brand communities may function as groups of consumers that provide reassurance about a credence product's quality. Furthermore, the link a community provides to the company may reduce consumer uncertainty. On a more practical level, the community may serve as a platform for exchanging experiences regarding the maintenance, repair, adaptation, or even basic usage of the product. Within a community, members feel a responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) to share this knowledge.

H1 Customers aims for customer to marketer/company relationship

Second, consumers may participate in a community to express their involvement with the branded product. High-involvement product categories typically are those with which the consumer wants to feel connected even beyond the moment of consumption. Brand communities in general can help consumers share their experiences with high-involvement products. In this sense, the community serves to intensify or elongate the consumption experience.

H2 Customers aims for customer to product relationship

Third, consumers may require joint consumption and therefore join a brand community. In line with Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) contention that communities are more likely for publicly consumed goods, Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder note that some products must be consumed jointly rather than individually.

H3 Customers aims for customer to customer relationship

Fourth, consumers may decide to participate in a brand community because they want to live up to the brand's symbolic function. The concept of brand identity, as proposed by Aaker (Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder, 2008), suggests that one dimension pertains to symbolic meaning. This identity goes beyond a basic set of associations, in that some brands, such as Nike, reach iconic status. For brands with important symbolic meanings, such as Harley-Davidson, a community may strengthen that meaning and offer a meeting place where members can express their devotion to the symbol.

H4 Customers aims for customer to brand relationship

In the other condition, customers joins communities because the need of being a part of the communal feeling by understanding the value of the brand, get involved in the product, and reassuring the quality of product used. It shows that customers embrace all the four relationships elements as important, valuable, or appreciated. Customers in this state are the ideal community members, for they like everything related to the brand – the product, the brand, the company behind the brand, and other community members (Ouwersloot and Gaby Odekerken-Schröder, 2008).

H5 Customers aims for all aspects (customer to brand, customer to customer, customer to product, customer to marketer/company) relationship

As well as the high enthusiasm, there is also possibility of low even zero enthusiasm. At first, customers join due to the curiosity of community. Eventually, they end up feeling that becoming the member of this community is just part of socializing and they seek of no further relation.

H6 Customers aims for no specific relationship

The last hypothesis created based on comparison made in matters of consumer motives between communities. As both communities are randomly picked by researcher, there are questions such as “what kind of person joins car communities; Is this type of community dominated by men only?” and “does people in Blazer community differs from people in Jazz community, in matters of socio-demographic variables or their consumer motives?” that emerges.

These different motives to join a brand community may lead to different levels of appreciation of the aspects of community life. The customer-centric community model, which proposes four relationships consumers may have with a brand community – product, brand, organization, and other consumers – provides an effective means to understand and measure key aspects of communities (McAlexander et al., 2002).

H7 There is a significant join motivation differences between Jazz community and Blazer community

As hypotheses are built upon the customer relationships theory, researcher is eager to find significant results and segmentation possibilities which available in both communities.

### III. Research Methodology

The sample of this study is two car communities, which are Blazer Indonesia Club and Jazz Fit Club. Sampling method used in the study is convenience sampling. Despite of the large number of members, there are approximately less than 150 active members in both communities. Researcher contacted the administrators of both communities and the questionnaires were put on their forums, some of them are distributed personally to active members. From

the effort, researcher had received 50 useable questionnaires from JFC and 64 useable questionnaires from BIC.

To make analysis for this research, researcher used cluster analysis and T-test. The segmentation of brand community will be analyzed using cluster analysis and to measure the level of significant difference between both communities one sample T-test will be performed. Researcher used the four relationship variables to cluster analyze the data set. Ward's method (Aaker et al., 2001) will be applied with the constructed relationship scores as the basis for segmentation and will refine the solution by applying K-means clustering procedure (Punji and Stewart, 1983).

#### IV. Data Analysis and Discussion

##### 1. Hypotheses Testing

For hypotheses H1 until H6:

To segment within the communities, cluster analysis was performed. The analysis is using Ward's Method and K-means clustering that resulted in four clusters solution in both communities. The first cluster of Blazer Indonesia Club is referred as "enthusiasts". The members of this community assess the four relationships as valuable, important and/or appreciated, which lead to the high scores for all four of them. Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) argues that enthusiasts are the ideal community members, in that they like everything related to the brand – the product, the brand, the company behind brand, and other community members. Due to all high scores, which mean high enthusiasm, it's quite difficult to decide which principle motives that motivates them most. Therefore, it is suitable to apply all motives to them.

The second identified cluster of Blazer Indonesia Club has low scores to all relationship constructs. Apparently the characteristic of this segment is almost the same with "not me" segment. Only that in this segment, the members still values the other three relationships mostly to the product, therefore labelled "almost into". The motive of joining the community due to their interest in product and slightly to the brand as the ultimate product, but their interest is still so-so.

The third segment is called "friendly users". This third identified cluster has average ratings on three of four relationships constructs but scores slightly high in product dimensions. This cluster also appears to have a positive customer relationship to other customers that may occur due to the high involvement of the members; the needs to share their product experiences with other customers.

The final segment of this community is called "not me". This group is characterized by low scores on all constructs and therefore is not really interested in the community. This community was originally built in the form of mailing list with the purpose to connect the owner of Blazer and Montera. There is possibility that the members in this segment are just registered with no further consideration of building relationship.

Concerning the socio-demographic characteristics of the cluster, men are distributed to each of the segments while women are each in “enthusiasts” and “friendly users” segment. The age variable reveals no interpretable patterns, which means that all segments follow more or less the distributions of the sample.

Shifting the attention to Jazz Fit Club, there are two clusters on Blazer Indonesia Club clusters that can be applied in Jazz Fit Club’s. Those are “not me” and “average” clusters/segments. The first segment is called “behind-the-scenes”. The three relationships construct scores below the average, but the company relationship is slightly higher. It means that in this segments the motive of joining the community due to the trust to the company (high scored in “The Honda company understand my needs” question). In this sample, “not me” segment has the lowest scores of all relationship constructs but much more closer to the average than Blazer Indonesia club’s “not me” segment.

The third cluster is the segment that appreciates all four relationship constructs of the community but appear to prioritize relationship with other customers. Named after “socializers”, people who love to interact with others. The final segment, “appraiser” segment has average scores on company and customer relationship but the product and brand relationship are quite high.

For hypothesis 7:

The motivation difference between both communities is tested using one sample *t* test analysis. The analysis is using two tailed significance ( $\alpha = 0,05/2 = 0,025$ ); if *t* statistic < *t* table then null hypothesis is accepted, if probability *P* value/2 > 0,025 then null hypothesis is accepted. *T* table is calculated using degree of freedom (*df*) where *df* = *n*-1 and if *t* statistic is positive it means that the sample value is higher than the test value. After the analysis performed, researcher chose Jazz Fit Club as representation of sample and Blazer Fit Club’s average per relationships as the test value.

For customer to company relationship, *t* table of Jazz Fit Club is 2,009 ( $\alpha; df = 0,05; 49$ ) which means that  $4,519 > 2,009$  and the *P* value is  $0,000 < 0,025$ , therefore null hypothesis is rejected. In V2,  $1,650 < 2,009$  and *P* value is  $0,0525 > 0,025$  therefore null hypothesis is accepted.

For customer to product relationship, V1 is  $-1,232 < 2,009$  and *P* value  $0,112 > 0,025$  therefore null hypothesis is accepted. In V2, *t* statistic  $-1,660 < t$  table 2,009 and *P* value is  $0,0515 > 0,025$  therefore null hypothesis is accepted. Null hypothesis also accepted in V3 and V4 because; in V3, *t* statistic  $-1,379 < t$  table 2,009 and *P* value  $0,087 > 0,025$  while in V4, *t* statistic  $-1,142 < t$  table 2,009 and *P* value  $0,1295 > 0,025$ .

For customer to customer relationship, V1 with *t* statistic  $-3,202 > 2,009$  and *P* value  $0,01 < 0,025$  resulted in rejected null hypothesis. While in V2 the *t* statistic  $-2,157 > 2,009$  null hypothesis is rejected but the *P* value  $0,18 > 0,025$  which means the null hypothesis is accepted. The last V3’s null hypothesis is accepted because  $-1,601 < 2,009$  and *P* value  $0,058 > 0,025$ .

Finally for the last customer to brand relationship, the accepted null hypothesis belong to V1 with t statistic  $0,474 < t \text{ table } 2,009$  and P value  $0,3185 > 0,025$ ; V3 t statistic  $-0,539 < t \text{ table } 2,009$  and P value  $0,2695 > 0,025$ ; V4 with t statistic  $0,093 < t \text{ table } 2,009$  and P value  $0,4635 > 0,025$ ; and the last one is V7 where  $0,845 < 2,009$  and P value  $0,201 > 0,025$ .

V2 with t statistic  $-2,164 > t \text{ table } 2,009$  means null hypothesis is rejected but with P value  $0,175 > 0,025$  null hypothesis is accepted. The other two rejected null hypotheses belongs to V5 and V6, where V5 t statistic  $-3,016 > t \text{ table } 2,009$  - P value  $0,02 < 0,025$  and V6 t statistic  $-3,781 > 2,009$  and P value  $0,000 > 0,025$ .

## V. Conclusion, Limitation and Suggestion

The conclusion of this study is summarized on the table as following:

Hypotheses	Blazer Indonesia Club	Jazz Fit Club
Customers aims for customer to company relationship	Accepted	Accepted
Customers aims for customer to product relationship	Accepted	Accepted
Customers aims for customer to customer relationship	Accepted	Accepted
Customers aims for customer to brand relationship	Accepted	Accepted
Customers aims for all aspects relationship	Accepted	Rejected
Customers aims for no specific relationship	Accepted	Accepted
There is a significant motivation difference between Jazz Fit Club and Blazer Indonesia Club	Accepted	Accepted

Besides of segments found inside both communities, researcher also tried to measure which of relationship variables are valuable in each community. By comparing the relationships, the results are very interesting. Each of variables that contributed in the relationships appears to have different influences in both communities. In customer to company relationship Jazz Fit Club has bigger interest in it, which in the case of how company cares about their opinions. Meanwhile, customer to product relationship is dominated by Blazer Indonesia Club that they love the product, proud of it, and enjoys riding it. But Jazz Fit Club admits that their product is one of their favorite possessions.

The third relationship, which is customer to other customer, there are no big differences. Both communities embraces their relationship with other customers as they felt wonderful and feeling a sense of kinship with other brand owners. But most of all, Blazer Indonesia Club is a little bit enthusiast about

having more interpersonal contact. And finally for the last customer to brand relationship; for the way both communities value brand heritage, how they saw the product as the ultimate brand, and word of mouth doing, Jazz Fit Club has higher interest on those actions. While Blazer Indonesia Club actively will say positive things to other people about their brand.

The study conducted by researcher in this state has limitations. Due to the time limits, researcher unable to study the behavior of members in longitudinal time dimension. How members will behave before and after several months joining community. Regarding to the number of respondents, this study has received a limited number of sample since it is quite challenging to retrieve a huge number of respondents even in big communities since they are widespread and reaching them through online questionnaires is not quite effective. For future research, readers might consider the limitations that experienced by researcher and may broaden the area of brand community study in essence of not only knowing what segments could be found in the communities but also their future relationship with another field of study. Hopefully this study contributes perspectives to readers and future researchers.

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