

FOUR WHEELS AND ONE BOARD: STUDYING THE
SKATEBOARD TRIBE AND THEIR LOYALTY TOWARDS
SKATEBOARDING BRANDS

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“(...) So why has it continued to thrive? Well, by our very nature we're a creative group, a persistent group and a somewhat lawless one. If we've been told not to skate, we leave and come back only in the middle of the night with lights and generators. If a rail's been knobbed, we de-knob. If a ledge has been skate-proofed, we unskate-proof it. (...) It's what we have to do.”

By Steve Berra



“Skateboarding is as if you have an own space, with figurative barriers where you have all possible tricks in the world to do in this space. The different people will enter this space and do the same thing, so they will interact with each other”

Male, 24 years, comments on “What is skateboarding for you?”

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ABSTRACT

Skateboarding is considered an extreme sport, but for its practitioners it represents much more. Skateboarders share a deep link because of the high level of passion and emotion revolving around skateboarding itself. In line with the previous, it is believed that we live in a postmodern-era suggesting that consumer's value more symbolic and emotional aspects of products and services, rather than economic and functional ones. Furthermore, authors like Cova and Cova (2002) argue that consumers are willing to re-compose their social universe by connecting on an emotional basis with other consumers, forming consumer tribes.

The First objective of this thesis is to understand if a consumer tribe can be identified within the Portuguese skateboarding panorama. The second one is to analyze how through a tribal marketing strategy skateboarding brands can achieve a true and emotional brand loyalty among the tribe.

In order to accomplish these objectives an exploratory study was developed based on qualitative and ethnographic research including as main tools participant observation and in-depth interviews.

Through the gathered data it was possible to verify that typical characteristics of consumer tribes were observed among skateboarders and sharing of common values such as non-competitive spirit and sense of freedom. Concerning the behavior and loyalty towards skateboard brands, the present findings support that these brands must establish an authentic and emotional relation with skateboarders by actively supporting and understanding the tribe and additionally take in account the main social influences in brand choice and loyalty.

Keywords: Skateboarding; Tribes; Tribal Marketing; Brand Loyalty.

RESUMO

O skate é definido como um desporto radical, mas para os praticantes este representa muito mais. Os skaters partilham uma forte ligação devido à forte paixão e emoção relacionada com o skate. Na actualidade, é defendido que vivemos numa época pós-moderna significando que os consumidores dão maior valor aos aspectos simbólicos e emocionais dos produtos e serviços do que aos racionais. Adicionalmente, autores como Cova e Cova (2002) defendem que os consumidores querem recompor o seu universo social estabelecendo uma ligação emocional com outros consumidores, formando tribos.

O primeiro objectivo desta dissertação é compreender se uma tribo de consumidores pode ser identificada no skate nacional. Em segundo lugar pretende-se analisar como é que as marcas de skate, adoptando uma estratégia de marketing tribal, conseguem atingir uma lealdade autêntica e emocional face aos membros da tribo.

Para atingir os objectivos foi realizado um estudo exploratório baseado numa metodologia qualitativa e etnográfica utilizando como principais ferramentas a observação participante e as entrevistas semiestruturadas.

Através dos dados obtidos foi possível verificar que características típicas em tribos de consumidores também são observadas no skate, e que estas partilham valores idênticos tais como a atitude não-competitiva e o sentimento de liberdade. Relativamente ao comportamento e lealdade face a marcas de skate, os resultados obtidos reflectem que as marcas devem procurar desenvolver uma relação autêntica e emocional demonstrando compreensão e suporte face à tribo, e adicionalmente ter sempre em conta as principais influências de escolha e lealdade de marcas.

Palavras-chave: Skate; Tribos; Marketing Tribal; Lealdade de Marca

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many people see skateboarders as outlaws and vandals who make an inappropriate use of public areas such as city parks, squares, etc. However, due to the love felt for skateboarding, skateboarders are connected on an emotional basis in the same *world*. In this universe nothing more matters and everything resumes to one single aspect – love for riding the board.

The social dynamics that apparently revolve around skateboarding seem to have some similarities to consumer tribes, which are consumers that are linked together through non-rational aspects such as loyalty, passions and emotions. Having this relation in mind the **first research question** of the present work was defined: Understand if a consumer tribe can be identified among the Portuguese skateboarding panorama and if so, which are the common characteristics and values their members share?

On a consumer behavior perspective these types of consumer gatherings are interesting and relatively unexplored, because it revolutionizes how marketing strategy should be conducted. For instance, it is not possible to apply traditional segmentation in consumer tribes, because they are a heterogeneous group of consumers that have in common a specific drive, passion or emotion and that actually know each other, which is precisely the opposite from a consumer segment. Due to the importance for companies and brands to understand how tribes function, the **second research question** was developed: How can skateboard brands interact with the members of the skateboard tribe in order to obtain a true and emotional brand loyalty?

In order to study the previous phenomenons there was a need to conduct a **review of the existing literature** on all the main constructs associated to the present thesis. Besides defining the consumer tribe's concept, there was a need to understand how it was originated. For that matter, the postmodern era was the first point to be discussed, whose authors argue that consumers are consuming products and services for what they represent in a symbolic and hedonic way and not for what they truly are. Afterwards, it was discovered that consumer groupings such as brands communities and subcultures of consumption have similarities to consumer tribes, but also have great differences that should be clarified. Once the full review on consumer tribes was

concluded, it was necessary to understand how these relate to the marketing and consumer behavior area, by reviewing the literature on tribal marketing. Given the fact that this research proposes to study brand loyalty, the next chapter makes a full review on this construct and on the existing literature that relates loyalty to consumer tribes. Since skateboarding is defined as being an extreme sport, it was logical to include a chapter relating tribal behavior to the sporting environment, including previous tribal research on common sports and extreme sports. At last, the literature about skateboarding was investigated including the identity, values and negative associations to this *culture*.

After all constructs were properly reviewed, it was necessary to define the **methodology** that would be adopted to conduct the present study. In order to understand the complex behavior and interaction among tribe members, there is a need for the researcher to emerge in the tribe, seeing things in their perspective. For that matter, a qualitative methodology was adopted based on ethnography, which enables the study and interpretation of behaviors, practices and artifacts of a specific social group in its natural environment. As ethnographic research tools participant observation and in-depth interviews were used. In order to fully respond to the first research question, field-notes from participant observation were complemented through in-depth interviews and for the second research question only the data provided through the in-depth interviews was used.

After conducting over 9 hours of participant observations and 16 in-depth interviews with skateboarders there was a need to gather all the data, categorize it into logical and analyzable sections. After doing so, it was time to **analyze and discuss the results**. Regarding the **first research question** it was possible to verify skateboarders gather in heterogeneous groupings, with a shared passion and state of mind towards skateboarding, not requiring need of admission to enter the tribe nor a hierarchical structure. They also share an opposition towards skateboarding becoming a mainstream sport and towards certain brands that are just in the business for the money. Other characteristics include having their own rituals, clothing and words, through which they enhance the connection between skateboarders. After these findings it was possible to confirm the existence of a consumer tribe within the national skateboarding scenario.

In terms of **shared values** among the skateboard tribe, they include: (1) non-competitive attitude; (2) freedom; (3) self-expression; (4) persistence. Additionally, and although they do not represent values, two important aspects were discovered, being the first one the escape from the daily routine that skateboarding is able to provide and the second one the *dark side* associated to skateboarding (e.g. drug-abuse, vandalism).

Concerning the **second research question**, it was possible to understand that skateboard brands must form an authentic and emotional link with tribe members by actively understanding and supporting the tribe. It is essential to organize and support events such as competitions that have a great importance for skateboarders. Also the fact that brands are owned or managed by skaters is an important fact to increase the connection between brand and tribe. Additionally, some social influences were identified that play an important role in the choices skaters make and consequently to which brands they become loyal.

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“Skaters by their very nature are urban guerillas: they make everyday use of the useless artifacts of the technological burden, and employ the handiwork of the government/ corporate structure in a thousand ways that the original architects could never dream of”

Craig Stecyk, 1976

I. INTRODUCTION

In the 1950's some surfers from the west coast of the United States of America, came up with an alternative to when the sea was flat. Instead of surfing the ocean, they surfed the street by inventing an object composed of four wheels attached to a piece of wood, what is now called skateboarding, and since then the evolution has been extraordinary on many levels. One important aspect that has changed in a tremendous way is the increasing number of skateboarding brands that are available. With such a competitive market, there is a need for skateboarding brands to take action and differentiate themselves in all possible ways from other companies.

Also in the consumer behavior field, researchers and marketers believe that great changes are happening due to the transition from the modern to the postmodern era. The postmodern consumer is not exclusively interested in the economic value of the products and services he consumes, but instead he is more and more interested in the symbolic value they provide. Related to the postmodern era, authors like Cova and Cova (2002) and Maffesoli (1996) argue that due to the isolation felt by consumers, they are making an effort to re-build their social universe by re-establishing bonds with other consumers. By doing so, consumers give preference to products and services with linking value, which is defined as being the capacity of bringing consumers together. These bonds formed among consumers are defined as consumer tribes that are connected through shared emotions and passions.

Being that said, it is believed by the researcher of the present thesis that in skateboarding there is a very important and simple aspect that brands must be aware: the sharing of a genuine feeling and passion about skateboarding. This is responsible for connecting all skateboarders into the same world and reality, meaning for instance that it seems to be inefficient to apply traditional segmentation. It is believed that it is

not possible to segment skateboarders into homogeneous groups because the emotional link shared among them is stronger than any physical or social aspects, resulting in a heterogeneous group bonded by skateboarding. Also the offered products and services must be adapted, because the consumption does not occur for what these products and services are, but for what they represent, making the link more important than the thing (Cova, 1997).

Being that said, the main objective of this thesis is to understand if a consumer tribe can be identified within the Portuguese skateboarding panorama, and how it behaves in terms of loyalty towards skateboarding brands. For that matter, there is a need to investigate if it is possible to identify common characteristics of consumer tribes in skateboarding, where all members are connected through a shared passion, emotions and common values. Afterwards there is a need to understand how the skateboarding tribe develops relationships with skateboarding brands and what are the main issues that these brands should be aware in order to gain higher rates of brand loyalty.

The structure of the present thesis is divided into seven chapters. The **first chapter** is the present introduction that clarifies the main field of the present study, what are the main objectives of the study and motivations behind the chosen theme. The **second chapter** is a literature review that has as main topics: 1) Post-modern era; 2) Consumer tribes; 3) Tribal marketing; 4) Loyalty; 5) Tribal approach in sports; 6) Skateboarding. The **third chapter** includes the justification of the adopted methodology, the data collection and analysis processes. The **fourth chapter** refers to the analysis and discussion of the data, which are divided through two research questions. The **fifth chapter** explores the main conclusions that were taken from the previous chapter. The **sixth chapter** is translated in a practical point of view of the conclusions and recommendations for the management and marketing area. Finally, the **seventh chapter** contains some limitation of the present thesis and recommendations for further research.

The main motivations of conducting this study can be divided into different levels. On an academic level, there is a desire to complement the existing literature about tribal marketing with a new approach through skateboarding. On a personal and professional basis, this study could open opportunities to work as a marketing professional in the skateboarding industry.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The Postmodern Era – The impact on consumer behavior

1.1. From Modern to Postmodern Era

When analyzing literature related to consumer behavior it is possible to identify a “paradigm shift” (Brown, 1993) from modern to postmodern society. Given the fact that these two currents of thought are entirely different, there is a need to understand both of them and what are the implications on consumer behavior.

During the modern period there was a high focus on economic health, and so everything had to be built around the consumer, because his interactions with objects was responsible for the growth of the economy (Firat and J. Schultz II, 1997). In this sense, for the modern consumer, satisfaction of the consumed products and services were measured through cost/benefit analysis, making production the most important key for organizations (Firat, 1992; Firat and J. Schultz II, 1997; Cova, 1997). Consequently, modern thought argues that the consumer is very centered and self-conscious, knowing exactly what his needs are in order to reach satisfaction, which makes him stable in terms of orientations and behaviors (Firat and J. Schultz II, 1997). For that matter, it was possible to create homogeneous groups of consumers with the same behavior and needs and apply traditional segmentation techniques such as the VALS typology (Mitchell, 1984).

On the other hand, postmodern consumers have mainly opposite characteristics to the ones seen before, like for instance fragmentation. Literature on postmodern marketing (Firat and J. Schultz II, 1997) argues that all the media, including television programs, advertisement and music videos, are produced without any central idea, theme or focus. Besides that, given the different roles and situations during daily life that consumers must face (Solomon, 1983), there is a need to have different images making the consumer fragmented in terms of identity (Firat, 1992). Because of the growing “*fragmentation of everyday life experiences*” (Firat, 1992: 187) the consumption moments are becoming fragmented as well, leading to a growing loss of commitment (Firat and Venkatesh, 1993). There are several other postmodern conditions that have been studied, such as the preference for simulated reality (Firat

and Venkatesh, 1993) in a sense that the consumer wants to live a perpetual present (Gitlin, 1989).

At last, one can say that the *paradigm shift* from modern to postmodern era represents in fact a shift from economic to symbolic value (Firat and J. Schultz II, 1997; Ryan *et al.*, 2006). For instance, consumers are relying more and more on the symbolic connotations of consumption in order to structure their social reality (Solomon, 1983).

In this sense, the present thesis will analyze the potential skateboarding tribe based on the postmodern approach that has been exposed previously. In a more specific manner, it will follow the postmodern tribalism, which will be presented bellow.

1.2. Postmodern Individualism Vs. Postmodern Tribalism

Taking into account what was said before, postmodern society is described by the first current of sociological research (Firat and Venkatesh, 1993; Firat and J. Schultz II, 1997) for its individualism. Elliott (1997) argues that the individual was never so autonomous as now and that everyone must demonstrate one's own existence and consequently one's own difference.

On the other hand, there is the Latin Approach (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2002) that considers what was said above as being the myth on the *liberalization of the individual* in the sense that consumers are much freer and have a higher power of choice, but are also more isolated from the community spirit (Cova, 1997).

In this sense, the postmodern consumer is willing to re-create his social universe by preferring products and services for its linking value over its functional value (Maffesoli, 1996; Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2002). In other words, this linking value is perceived as the capacity of products and services to establish or reinforce relations between individuals (Cova and Cova, 2002). However, the company rarely generates this special characteristic, because it is not the producer who gives meaning to objects but the consumer himself (McCracken, 1988).

Having those two perspectives in mind, it is possible to state that although the postmodern social dynamics can be explained partially by individualism, there is also the emergence of tribalism (Maffesoli, 1996).

Consumer Tribes

2.1. Conceptualization

When relating tribal behavior with skateboarding, it is possible to understand some resemblances. For instance, in the skateboarding documentary Freeling (2012) it is demonstrated that skateboarders share a very special and strong link between them that overcomes everything. Additionally, an interviewed skateboarder in the documentary, Mikey Santillan, states, *“It does not matter how old you are, or what you are doing. When I was like thirteen years old I would hang out with twenty year old, because skateboarding brings everybody together”*.

The emergence of tribalism can be observed through the appearance of ephemeral groups who share a social experience that are defined in the literature as consumer tribes (Canniford, 2011), neo-tribes (Moutinho *et al.*, 2007), postmodern tribes (Cova and Cova, 2002) and even postmodern neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1996).

Although there are all these different names and conceptualizations, they have a common denominator: tribes. The main reason why those groups are referred in this way is related with some similarities to archaic tribes (Cova and Cova, 2002):

- Inexistence of central power to maintain the tribe and the social structure;
- Collective actor that represents a counter power to institutional power;
- Revolve around non-rational and archaic elements - loyalty, emotion and passion.

In the literature concerning postmodern tribes, there are different approaches on defining them. For instance, Maffesoli (1996: 98) suggests that tribes can be seen *“Without the rigidity of the forms of organization with which we are familiar, it refers to a certain ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favor appearance and form”*.

Furthermore, Cova (1996: 495) suggest that tribes are defined as *“(...) inherently unstable and small scale, held together by shared emotions, life styles, new moral*

beliefs and new consumption practices.”. Although this definition is quite simple, it gathers two relevant characteristics of postmodern tribes.

The fact that postmodern tribes are unstable is related with these tribes being ephemeral (Maffesoli, 1996). They are “*fuzzy*” (Cova and Cova, 2002: 11) and are constantly evolving in terms of what they do, where they come together and what they consume during this process (Canniford, 2011).

The second characteristic, present in the previous definition, was already pointed out and has to do with tribes gathering around non-rational aspects by sharing emotions and passions (Cova and Cova, 2002). Consequently, members give preference to products and services that, through their linking value, permit and support social interaction of the tribal type (Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2002).

In this sense, tribes differ greatly from psychographic segments because the first ones share an emotional link and the second ones share demographic characteristics. In other words, a tribe is a network of heterogeneous people where members actually know each other, and segments are a homogeneous group of people who do not know each other (Cova and Cova, 2002). Because tribal membership overcomes the norms of social class (Cooper *et al.*, 2005) their members are capable of collective action (Cova and Cova, 2002).

Another important aspect is that tribes work as “*open systems*” (Cova and Cova, 2002: 11) because membership does not require an admission (Cummings, 2007). This is related with one person being able to belong to more than one tribe at a time and perform different roles in each one (Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2001; Cova and Cova, 2002; Moutinho *et al.*, 2007). Also important to this last aspect is that besides making part of a tribe, people can lead a normal life behind it. In fact, tribes can work as an escape from the working week routine (Goulding *et al.*, 2002).

A recent study about managing consumer tribes (Canniford, 2011) defines tribes into four characteristics:

- ***Multiple***
- ***Playful***
- ***Transient***
- ***Entrepreneurial***

Tribes being multiple and playful was already discussed above, where the first aspect relates with tribes working as open systems and the second with the ephemerality and constant flux of tribes. More important and yet unexplored are the last two characteristics.

Tribes being transient, relates directly to tribes representing a counter-power to institutional power (Cova and Cova, 2002) and sometimes even sharing anti-market values (Kozinets, 2002a). Although consumption is an important aspect within the tribe, being often interpreted as a symbol of personal and familial integration (Cooper *et al.*, 2005), there is a reverse movement that can be associated to tribes: deconsumption (Cova, 1997). This phenomenon is related with people having the impulse to join others because of their need to belong (McGee-Cooper, 2005). In other words, consumers are trying to satisfy the will to belong within a tribe or community by rejecting products without linking value and by joining others because it feels good to do so (Cova, 1997; Goulding *et al.*, 2009).

The second important characteristic in the previous study is the entrepreneurial spirit of tribes. They have a sense of leadership by not wanting to be lead by companies or brands (Canniford, 2011). Tribes are always adapting to the environment in which they are inserted, creating sometimes even job opportunities or businesses for mainstream culture. This can be seen in the research of Goulding *et al.* (2009) where the authors conducted a behavioral study on the clubbing experience. They noticed that due to raves being illegal, their members started to insert the rave environment in regular nightclubs. As a result, this tribal reaction generated jobs and was responsible for the appearance of some of the biggest club brands.

Another fundamental tribal aspect to explore is the symbolic and ritualistic components associated to tribes. These are responsible for the maintenance of tribal

identity in the postmodern society (Cova and Cova, 2002). Because of the high importance of this component, it will be developed in a separate section.

2.2. Rituals and symbolic consumption

Given the fact that postmodern tribes are ephemeral and not constrained by time or space (Ryan *et al.*, 2006), rituals have a great importance to the maintenance of tribal identity in the postmodern society (Cova and Cova, 2002). As an example, Gainer (1995) studied what was the symbolic meaning behind shared consumption rituals in the market of the live performing arts, concluding that those rituals were extremely important for these consumers, because through them they could be all bind together into a *small world*.

With the purpose of creating a unique definition of rituals, Rook (1985: 252) used the following conceptualization: “(...) *a type of expressive, symbolic activity constructed of multiple behaviors that occur in a fixed, episodic sequence, and that tend to be repeated over time*”.

A marketing area that takes in account rituals is ethnomarketing, whose main objective is to identify and isolate daily aspects of consumers lives and interpret them with deep meanings, for instance as rituals (Cova, 1997). This research area and methodology is applied regularly in the tribal context by establishing the link between consumption practices and tribal imagination (Cova, 1997).

Rook (1985) demonstrates that in order to perform a ritual, there are four distinct aspects that must exist:

- ***Ritual Artifacts***
- ***Ritual Script***
- ***Ritual performance roles***
- ***Ritual audience***

Rituals are often limited to religious meanings, but in fact the concept of ritual expands much further. Rook (1985) claims that mystical elements can be present in nonreligious environments, what leads to the relation between rituals and the sacred. In this sense, a ritual can be seen as a way of approaching or preparing for the sacred

(Belk *et al.*, 1989). Additionally, Belk *et al.* (1989) also claim that the sacred is not always connected to religion, and that elements such as flags, sports starts, national parks, among others can be seen as sacred while having no religious meaning. Instead they might relate more to a consumption environment.

When looking towards the sacred consumption there are various domains that need to be defined and related with the subject of this thesis (Belk *et al.*, 1989):

- **Places:** Places might become sacred through mythology, contamination by events or rituals that took place there. In a consumption perspective sacred places are related with department stores, which are seen as cathedrals of consumption. In skateboarding, skaters gather at public spaces, which are called “skate spots”, in order to skate and to be with their friends (Karsten and Pel, 2000; Woolley and Johns, 2001);
- **Times:** Sacred times might occur in sacred places and are cyclical in the sense that they can occur from a daily basis (coffee-break) to an annual basis (wedding anniversary). In skateboarding, a sacred time occurs when somebody lands a new trick (Karsten and Pel, 2000). In the documentary Freeling (2012), it is described as being one of the best feelings that skateboarders have;
- **Tangible things:** Sacred objects can go from very simple objects such as clothing to fine pieces of art. What differentiates them is the symbolic link with the sacred. In Freeling (2012), skateboarders demonstrate a great passion around the simple feeling of being on top of a skateboard, making this object sacred for them;
- **Intangible Things:** Examples of sacred non-material aspects can be fraternity rituals, shared secrets between persons (lovers, family, friends). In skateboarding, skaters share a bond through what they do and who they are (Lovgren, 2012);
- **Persons and other beings:** Mythological beings are seen as sacred as well as charismatic leaders;
- **Experiences:** Such as traveling to sacred places, specific mealtime occasions (thanksgiving) or going to a sport event. In skateboarding, a sacred experience can be the act of traveling to other cities and other places to meet new people and new skate spots (Karsten and Pel, 2000; Woolley and Johns, 2001; Lovgren, 2012).

The existence of rituals and the practice of sacred consumption represent a great variable among tribes. Given the fact that tribal behaviour gathers around emotional bonds through the linking values of products and services, the consumption of cult objects in cult places is notorious (Cova, 1996). For instance, regular places become linking places (Cova, 1997) or anchoring places (Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999) by representing gathering points for tribes to perform their rituals of integration and recognition.

The rituals and their sacralisation described above carry a great symbolic meaning. In a postmodern society, marketing should be concerned with images rather than products and services itself (Cova, 1996). As Firat and Schultz (1997) point out, it is the product that represents the image and not the other way around, ultimately meaning that symbolic aspects have largely taken over functional and utilitarian domains of goods and services. This relates with tribes in the sense that their members consume products and services not for what they are but for what they represent within the tribe.

To enter the symbolic field of products is to enter the hedonic consumption area. This field of research “*designates those facets of consumer behaviour that relate to the multisensory, fantasy and emotive aspects of one’s experience with products*” (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982: 92). In another study, Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) develop the experiential perspective of consumption, which explores the symbolic and subjective meaning of products and services and their link towards fantasies, feelings and fun.

When relating symbolic consumption with tribal movement, it is possible to infer that these symbolical aspects are responsible for the maintenance of tribal identity (Cova, 1996; Cova and Cova, 2002). This comes in line with the fact that intangible aspects of goods and services are pathways not only for the construction of the consumers self-concept but also for the development of their social life and development of relationships (Solomon, 1983; Elliott, 1997). For instance, Belk *et al.* (1989) stated that specific clothing is a way of symbolizing group membership, which can be contextualized in the tribal environment.

Ultimately, this demonstrates again how consumer tribes gather around archaic values and share emotions and passions, where consumption might not even enter at all. However, there are other types of communities whose existence is solely justified through the consumption of a certain brand.

2.3. Delineating the concept of consumer tribes

When analyzing tribes in a consumption perspective, they are inserted in the micro-social level, that is the area where marketing research studies the way consumers interact face-to-face or in large-gatherings and where consumption is seen as a way to create social links and build a societal frame (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Cova and Cova, 2002). Being that said, there are other groupings of consumers such as brand communities (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schau *et al.*, 2009) and subcultures of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) that co-exist in the micro-social level.

Although tribes share some characteristics with the previous communal structures, there are important differences that set them apart. In this sense, there is a need to clarify the concepts of brand community and subculture of consumption to distinguish them from the object of study: consumer tribes.

Muñiz and O'Guinn (2001: 412) define brand communities as being: “(...) *a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand.*” The fact that this type of community revolves around a specific brand is the main aspect that sets them apart from consumer tribes. This makes brand communities explicitly commercial and much more specialized, structured, stable and with a higher commitment than consumer tribes (Muñiz and O'Guinn, 2001).

Another distinguishable characteristic is the higher predictability level of brand communities when looking towards the relation: brands - products - consumers (Canniford, 2011). When looking at a brand community, their members share a moral sense to endure and maintain the community, making it easier for the brand to know which role it will have. Their predictability can actually be grouped in four different categories: i) Social networkings; ii) Impression management; iii) Community engagement; iv) Brand use (Schau *et al.*, 2009).

On the other hand, there are subcultures of consumption that can be defined as: “(...) *a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity.*” (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995: 43).

When comparing consumer tribes to subcultures of consumption in terms of hierarchy, the first ones do not rely on a central power to maintain the tribe (Cova and Cova, 2002) while the second ones have a hierarchical social structure (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Also important to mention is that consumer tribes have a much less centralized and conservative power around the values of the product or brand (McAlexander *et al.*, 2002).

However, there are certain characteristics that are visible in those three types of communities. Related to the consumer tribe literature, Maffesoli (1996) argues that these tribes exist exclusively in a symbolically and ritually form, manifesting the commitment of their members. Similarly, in the brand community literature, Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) argue that there is a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions among the community members. Finally, also Schouten and McAlexander (1995: 43) state that subcultures of consumption have their own “*jargons, rituals and models of symbolic expression*”. Another shared similarity is observed through the boundaries that are conceptual (Cova and Cova, 2002) and non-geographical (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Muñiz and O’Guinn, 2001).

Tribal Marketing

3.1. Conceptualization

Consumer tribes are ephemeral, unstable and require a “*disruption in marketing know how to understand them*” (Cova and Cova, 2002: 11). In order to do so, the Latin approach views marketing as a vector of the community link (Cova, 1997). Tribal marketing puts the company in the position of a network facilitator (Canniford, 2011) in the sense that it supports consumer - consumer relations (Cova and Cova, 2002)

In a tribal perspective, the main objective for marketers is to understand which tribes should be supported (Cova and Cova, 2002). In order to achieve this objective, Canniford (2011: 597) suggests the creation of seed networks, that can be defined as

“(…) a supportive, hybrid collective of people, things, markets, discourses, and emotions through which consumers can be supported in their quests for linking value”. In her study, she analyses the case of the brand *Volcom* (producer and designer of action-sports clothing and accessories). It is clear that *Volcom* does not want to dominate the tribe by predicting what the tribe members want, but instead it empowers the consumers and consequently supports the tribal movement among the brand.

The fact that tribes are in constant change and flux means that tribal marketers must remain close to the tribe and in constant vigilance (Canniford, 2011). However, it is not easy to understand and support the tribe without unwillingly demonstrate invasiveness and intrusiveness (Moutinho *et al.*, 2007). Based on the principle of uncertainty (Canniford, 2011) it may even seem that members will do anything in their power to protect their tribe when marketers begin to know more about the tribe.

Another challenge that tribal managers and marketers must face is that in such environment awareness and preference are not always related to purchase intentions. In a tribal marketing study directed towards the surfing community, Moutinho *et al.* (2007: 684) found out that surfers “are willing to drink coffee or beer brands that actively support surfing (...) not necessarily prefer a car brand associated with the sport or lifestyle.”. Ultimately, this means that tribes give preference to brands that demonstrate an active support through the products and services they provide for the tribe.

Based on the Latin approach, Cova (1997) argues that the main problem associated to postmodernism is that companies are producing goods and services that exclusively contain value in an individualistic perspective, and not a linking value for the communal movement.

Despite the previous difficulties and challenges behind a tribal marketing strategy, there are numerous opportunities that support this perspective. A great opportunity is the co-creation and co-production between tribes and companies (Cova and Cova, 2002; Moutinho *et al.*, 2007; Canniford, 2011; Mitchell and Imrie, 2011). The fact that tribes are entrepreneurial (Canniford, 2011) reflects a way for marketers to create social interaction with their product, service or brand (Mitchell and Imrie,

2011). In other words, tribes embrace consumers that want to invest their time and creativity and therefore the will to co-create with all kinds of market resources is constant (Canniford, 2011). For example, when Cova and Cova (2001; 2002) conducted research on the in-line skater tribe, they concluded that the partnership between firm and tribe is an essential aspect in tribal marketing. Brands like *Salomon* recognized the competences of the in-line tribe and co-designed their products with some of the tribe members.

Another opportunity lies behind the creation of symbiotic relations with tribe members through their affective links (Cova and Cova, 2002; Mitchell and Imrie, 2011). Ethnography makes it possible for marketers to play a bigger role in the tribe rather than just a mere non-participant observer (Cova and Cova, 2002). It makes it possible to share emotional and ritualistic experiences with the tribe, what ultimately culminates in the fact that *“the tribe is not outside the company, it’s part of the company network just as the company is part of the tribe”* (Cova and Cova, 2002: 20).

Mitchell and Imrie (2011) developed a perspective towards tribes in a more market-oriented view, being the main objective of tribal marketing to *“scrutinizes how tribes consume and ‘co-create’ products for their own uses”* (Mitchell and Imrie, 2011: 42). They argue that tribes can be seen as market segments, where the *members* of these segments know each other and have similar consumption values and preferences, providing opportunities for managers and marketers.

3.2. How to Identify and Support the Tribe: Operational and Strategic Implications

As it was said previously, tribes are in constant change and flux. Consequently, the main problem that comes along with supporting the tribe is the identification process. In order to do so, Cova and Cova (2002) state that marketers and researchers must look not only for physical evidence of tribal existence but also look towards more intangible aspects. In this sense, the authors propose a framework entitled as the tribal clover (Figure I).

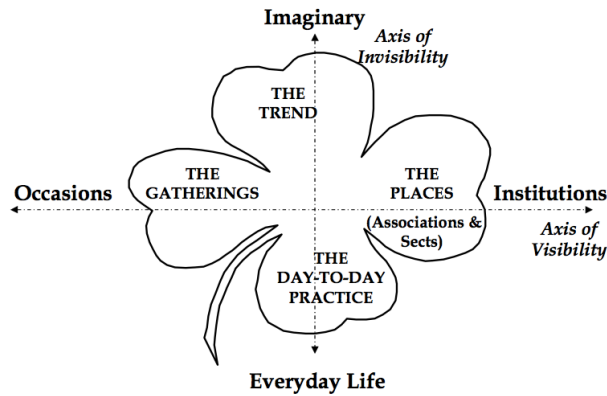


Figure I: The Tribal Clover (Cova and Cova, 2002)

This framework is divided in two axis: Visibility; Invisibility. The first one concerns the physical evidence of the tribe including temporal aspects such as gatherings (*occasions*) and spatial aspects like physical meeting places and virtual ones (*institutions*). The second axis gives credit to attributes with an intangible nature, including signs reflected in quotidian practices of the tribe (*Everyday Life*), as well as aspects including trends and vogues that influence society (*imaginary*).

Based on the previous figure, these authors proposed four different roles that members can adopt inside the tribe (Figure II):

- **Member** of institutions;
- **Participant** in informal gatherings
- **Practitioner** with a high involvement with the tribe
- **Sympathiser** with the tribe. He belongs marginally with the tribe because he moves along with vogues and trends in the society.

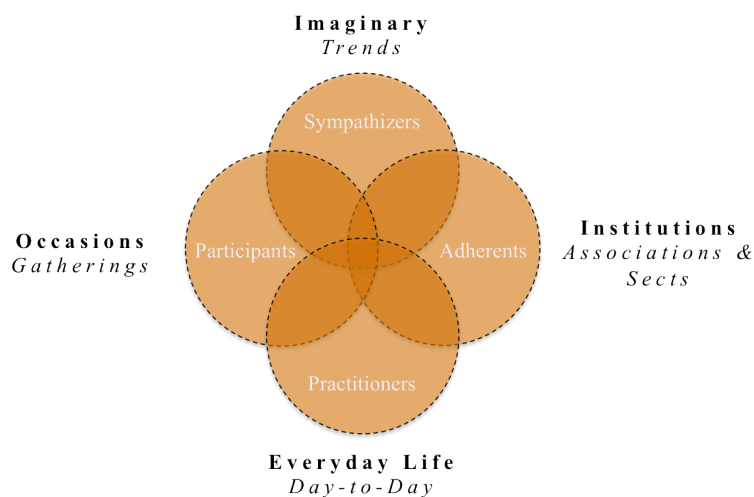


Figure II: Different Roles of Tribe Members (Adapted from Cova and Cova, 2002)

However, in 2011 Mitchell and Imrie studied the tribal behavior of vinyl collectors and through the collected data, they were able to identify a fifth role: The *Chief*. Among the tribe, the *Chief* has a certain status and respect, and is seen as an opinion leader and also a facilitator of where and how the tribe socializes. Identifying the *Chief* is essential for managers and marketers because it reflects an important point of access to the tribe, in order to communicate, better understand and ultimately support it.

In the product innovation area, Cova (1997: 312) points out the importance of societal innovations, which he defines as “*the process through which new significations and new possibilities of emotion are introduced in the postmodern social systems*”. This enables the possibility of changing how tribe members perceive goods and services through new experiences shared among them.

It is also important to have in mind the work developed by Robin Canniford in 2011, where he suggests five interdependent strategic orientations that tribal managers and marketers should follow in order to better understand and support the tribe:

- i) ***Providing a platform***: where tribe members can “*improvise performances and assemble culture in a continual process of plundering, creativity, and innovation*” (Canniford, 2011: 598);
- ii) ***Hybrid Cultures***: keep in mind that tribes are hybrid cultures in the sense that they are “*symbolically and emotionally constructed through shared product/service on these platforms*” (Canniford, 2011: 598);
- iii) ***Communities of affect***: Support the tribe by providing products and services which stimulate the emotional link between consumers and consequently creating an emotional bond between firm and customers;
- iv) ***Network Opportunities***: Companies and almost any type of businesses can support the tribe by working as a passage point;
- v) ***Identity in Flux***: Support the tribe by remaining close but not invasively. In this way, there is a better understanding of tribal behaviour.

Besides supporting the tribe there are other aspects that the company can focus on. In their ethnographic study related to the subculture of consumption of the new bikers, Schouten and McAlexander (1995) suggest that marketers can provide assistance to

the socialization of new members, work as a facilitator of communications inside the tribe and support events that have the interest of the tribe.

As it has been stated before, a tribal oriented strategy has its difficulties, problems and challenges. However the aftermath is extremely rewarding. When considering tribal marketing in a financial perspective, it takes a long period to return the investment, because this type of strategy begins with a non-market approach where the main aim is to provide support to the tribe, forming a bond. In order to do so, the relation with the tribe must be authentic, making it necessary for the company to adopt a very flexible and open-minded approach, where some of the tribe rules must be adopted. For instance, Canniford (2011) points out that Volcom adopts this strategy in the sense of providing the right platforms for consumers to interact and (re) create the values and meanings of the brand, turning the brand as fluent as the tribe itself.

After the company has formed a symbiotic relation with the tribe, it is possible to return to a market-oriented focus, but now with the support of the tribe (Cova and Cova, 2002). In this sense, tribes must be understood as real partners of the company, transforming the firm in *“not only a simple economic actor adapting to the market, but a social actor relating to the social context”* (Badot *et al.*, 1993: 51).

Loyalty

4.1. Defining and Measuring Loyalty

Turning the consumers of a company into loyal ones is argued in the literature as being one of the main objectives for firms, in the sense that those consumers represent a sustainable competitive advantage over other players in the market (Dick and Basu, 1994; Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004). In fact, a high brand loyalty can be translated into a higher market share, return on investment and finally in a higher brand equity (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004).

In the time where academics and practitioners had not yet gained a great interest for loyalty, Copeland (1923) studied consumer buying habits of convenience goods, shopping goods and specialty goods. When analysing branded goods, he suggested that the manufacturer must take into account the attitudes of the consumer towards the purchase of the brand in question. He divides those demand attitudes into three stages:

- 1° **Recognition:** When the consumer is able to identify the brand. It represents the only attitude that the manufacturer can influence in the mind of the consumer.
- 2° **Preference:** Reflects the strength of the brand and can be induced by the effects of advertising, previous experiences with the brand or retailer recommendation.
- 3° **Insistence:** When the consumer has in mind the specific brand he wants to purchase. If the current product is not available he will not buy an alternative brand unless it is an emergency.

Although Copeland is not referring directly to loyalty, this study represents one of the first ones that can be related to loyalty. The stages that he describes are related with one of the perspectives on loyalty - the attitude-based perspective. The next paragraphs will introduce and explore the different perspectives on loyalty, starting of by the behavioural perspective.

In 1956, Cunningham conducted a pioneer study, being one of the main objectives to understand if brand loyalty was something that really existed. In order to do so, he used as measure the ratio between the amount of purchases of a brand from a specific product class and the total amount spent on this specific product class. By doing so, he considers that loyalty is seen as a behaviour (Cunningham, 1956; Kahn and Louie, 1990), which measures loyalty through shares of purchase and purchase frequency (Kabiraj and Shanmugan, 2011).

The main advantage of behavioural measures is that they provide an objective way to measure loyalty (Cunningham, 1956). However, by focusing its attention exclusively on the behavior of purchase, this perspective is unable to reflect the real reasons behind it (Day, 1969; Dick and Basu, 1994; Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004). Like Day (1969: 29) pointed out “*There is more to brand loyalty than just consistent buying of the same brand*”.

In his study, Day (1969) criticizes the exclusive focus on the behavioral perspective, by saying that this perspective is not able to distinguish real loyalty from spurious loyalty. Consumers that demonstrate a spurious loyalty are the ones that do not have any attachment to the brand and can easily switch brands if they view a better opportunity. Consequently, he suggests the introduction of a new variable in the brand loyalty equation: Attitudes. By doing so, he was able to identify 108 loyal buyers (out

of 148) with behavioral measures and only 76 buyers when he added attitudinal measures. In this sense, the attitude-based perspective started to gain significance, which defines loyalty as a function of a psychological process (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978).

Afterwards, Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) designed an elaborate definition of loyalty which covers a great amount of aspects related to brand loyalty including the behavioural and attitudinal perspective: “*The biased, behavioral response, expressed over time, by some decision-making unit, with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and is a function of psychological (decision-making, evaluative) processes*” (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978: 80).

Nevertheless, there is a third perspective on brand loyalty that has been derived over the theory of reasoned action. This perspective inserts the variable of social influence and pressure into loyalty. For instance, a consumer may buy a certain brand because of peer’s influence, but still have a negative attitude towards the brand (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004).

4.2. Antecedents of Brand Loyalty

In the literature concerning brand loyalty, there are certain authors that focus their attention not only in loyalty itself, but also in what are the main antecedents or drivers for consumers to become brand loyal (Dick and Basu, 1994; Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004). Once these antecedents are identified, it is possible to gain a better understanding and managing perspective over loyalty itself (Dick and Basu, 1994)

The framework developed by Dick and Basu (1994) include the antecedents that are presented in table I. Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) also created a framework with three different categories of brand loyalty antecedents which they named as drivers: *consumer drivers; brand drivers; social drivers*.

Category	Description	Sub-categories
<i>Cognitive</i>	Related to informational determinants such as brand beliefs.	- Accessibility - Confidence - Centrality - Clarity
<i>Affective</i>	Related with feelings towards the brand.	- Emotions - Moods - Primary Affect - Satisfaction
<i>Conative</i>	Related with behavioral disposition towards the brand.	- Switching Costs - Sunk Costs - Expectations

Table I: Antecedents of Brand Loyalty (Dick and Basu, 1994)

Those antecedents will influence the “relative attitude” towards a certain brand. It is taken into account as “relative” because a consumer may develop a positive attitude towards a certain brand in the market but have a higher attitude towards another brand. In other words, it means that the attitude towards a brand should not be analyzed in isolation - absolute terms - but in comparison to other brands on the market - relative terms. In this sense, a relative attitude reaches the highest point when the attitude towards a specific brand is favorable and this specific brand is differentiated in the consumers mind from other ones on the market.

The levels of relative attitude will influence the behavioral level of loyalty, that is to say, whether there is a repeat purchasing behavior or not. Besides relative attitude there are two other factors that influence repeat patronage:

- ***Social Norms***: Related with the influence of interpersonal relationships on consumer behavior;
- ***Situational Factors***: Include certain situation or occasions that may have an impact in brand loyalty (e.g. stockouts).

However, if the relative attitude towards a brand is high, there is a higher possibility for the consumer to overcome social norms and situational factors that could influence in a negative way the repeat patronage (Dick and Basu, 1994).

Having in mind the relation between the attitudes and the behavior of the consumer towards a brand, Dick and Basu (1994) developed a matrix that relate these two aspects resulting in four distinct types of loyalty (figure III)

		Repeat Patronage	
		High	Low
Relative Attitude	High	Loyalty	Latent Loyalty
	Low	Spurious Loyalty	No Loyalty

Figure III: Types of Loyalty (Dick and Basu. 1994)

- **No Loyalty:** Occurs when there is a low relative attitude and a low repeat patronage. The low relative attitude may occur when there has been a recent introduction in the market or when the brands of a certain market are perceived as being very similar to one another. In this sense, given the difficulty of gaining a high level of relative attitude, managers should conduct efforts towards generating a higher repeat patronage with the main objective of obtaining a spurious loyalty;
- **Spurious Loyalty:** This type of loyalty has already been described above in the work of Day (1969). In a managerial perspective, there is a need to differentiate the brands from other market players in order to be able to move to *Loyalty*. Although with a different name, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) defined this loyalty as *Inertia Loyalty*. They add the fact that the consumer does not buy the brand for social motives;
- **Latent Loyalty:** This type of loyalty is developed by a high relative attitude and a low repeat patronage, which might happen when the consumer has a high attitude towards a specific brand, but for some reason is not able to have a consistent re-purchasing behavior. In a similar logic, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) name this type of loyalty as *Covetous loyalty*, but they add the variable of social influence by arguing that in this case, the strong predisposition towards the brand results from the social environment;
- **Loyalty:** It represents the type of brand loyalty that most of the brands wish to achieve. It represents the “*true brand-loyal buyers*” (Day, 1969: 34) that have a favorable relative attitude towards the brand and also have a high repeat patronage. This type of loyalty relates with the insistence attitude phase described by Copeland (1923), in the sense that the consumer is willing to purchase the

brand and overcome potential barriers (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004). Once again, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) refer to a similar type of loyalty as *premium loyalty* where besides all the previous facts, they add that the consumer is highly influenced by social pressure.

In a different perspective, Oliver (1999) relates loyalty to satisfaction, where both constructs share an asymmetric relation. He argues that satisfaction is one of the seeds responsible for loyalty, but if there is only satisfaction, it is unlikely that it would transform into loyalty. In order for that transformation to happen, it must be taken into account personal determinations of the consumers and the social support.

While Dick and Basu (1994) and Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) propose different types of loyalty, Oliver (1999) argues that the consumer goes through four distinct phases of loyalty:

- 1° **Cognitive Loyalty**: The preference for a certain brand is justified by the performance and information that are provided by the brand. The choice is made in a routine manner, where satisfaction is not directly perceived. However, if the consumer starts to feel and process the satisfaction, then he is entering the second phase of loyalty;
- 2° **Affective Loyalty**: The commitment towards a certain brand is now not only cognitive but also affective. However, at this level of commitment there is still a high chance of switching brands;
- 3° **Conative Loyalty**: There is a behavioral intention and a commitment to repeat the purchase of a certain brand. However, this may only reflect a desire and not the actual repurchase itself;
- 4° **Action Loyalty**: The final stage of loyalty is the transformation of intentions and desires to the action of purchasing the brand. The consumer is willing to rebuy the brand in a consistent manner, transforming this action into “action inertia”.

Once again, such as the previous frameworks of Dick and Basu (1994) and Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) these phases include the attitudinal perspective (phases one, two and three) and the behavioral perspective (phase four). By that, it is possible to see how Oliver (1999) defends that loyalty starts with the consumer’s attitudes and escalates to consumer’s behavior.

4.3. Consequences of loyalty

After establishing the various types of loyalty that emerge from the relation attitude/repeat patronage, Dick and Basu (1994) discussed what could be the motivational, perceptual and behavioral consequences of loyalty.

The first consequence that Dick and Basu (1994) determined was the **search for information**. They state the possibility of a direct relation between loyalty and the motivation that the consumer has to search for information about different brands. In other words, if a consumer develops a high relative attitude and/or repeat patronage towards a brand, the search for information for other brands will appear less beneficial.

Secondly, they point out the **resistance to counterpersuasion**. Individuals who are in fact loyal to a certain brand develop consequently a resistance to counteroffers made by other brands. This is related with the insistence phase pointed out by Copeland (1923) where consumers will insist on the purchase of a certain brand. Similarly, in the framework developed by Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004), the authors hypothesized that, depending on the type of loyalty that the consumer develops it will be more or less likely for him to purchase an alternative brand. In fact, these authors argue that when the consumer has developed the highest type of loyalty (Premium loyalty), the consequence of an absence of the desired brand is to buy nothing.

The third consequence of customer loyalty that Dick and Basu (1994) point out is **Word of Mouth**. The same consequence is taken into account in the study of Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004). According to Oliver (1999), sharing the experience provided by the brand with other consumers is the main source of satisfaction and not the brand itself.

Additionally, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos (2004) included one more consequence of loyalty that is related with whether the consumer will or will not go to a different store if he does not find the brand he was looking for in the first place. For that matter, the previous authors hypothesize that this fact is related with the type of loyalty that is shown by the consumer.

4.4. Affective loyalty and Consumer Tribes

Now that the loyalty construct was analyzed through different perspectives, it is possible to establish the relation that exists between loyalty and tribal behavior. Previously it has been discussed how companies can support and understand tribes in order to form a symbiotic relation with them. Now the main issue is to understand how those relationships influence the loyalty demonstrated by the tribe.

Tribes are based on the sharing of highly affective aspects such as passions and emotions (Cova and Cova, 2002), and the relation between tribe and company must “(...) extend beyond a focus upon the level of repeat purchasing behaviour, to those based on affective bonds of loyalty” (Mitchell and Imrie, 2011: 40). Oliver (1999) named this type of loyalty as bonded loyalty and it occurs when there is an influence from a certain social group and where these people show a collective loyalty towards a brand or product.

Having said that, it is possible to conceive the fact that tribal strategy focuses on building an “*affective loyalty*” (Cova and Cova, 2002: 11). In order to achieve affective loyalty there are several aspects that marketers must take into consideration.

The first one is to understand what are the **main factors that lead to tribal membership** (Kozinets, 1999). Although Kozinets (1999) studied online tribes, his findings are relevant in a general way. He divides these antecedents in two distinct dimensions:

- ***Self-centrality of consumption activity***: How the beliefs, activities or passions of the tribe relate with the self-concept of the individual;
- ***Social ties to the community***: Level on intensity of social interaction with other tribe members.

Through the antecedents of tribal membership, it is possible to develop a better understanding of what the level of commitment and involvement within the tribe is (Mitchell and Imrie, 2011). Furthermore, these antecedents can be complemented by the roles proposed by Cova and Cova (2002), i.e. different roles reflect different levels of involvement and emotional attachment towards a tribe.

Secondly, it is necessary to acknowledge that in order to generate emotional loyalty there are two other constructs that must be taken in account: *Brand Experience*; *Affective Commitment*. *Brand experience* includes the internal and behavioral consumer responses that are generated by a direct and indirect contact with a specific brand (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, *affective commitment* is defined by Allen and Meyer (1990) as the emotional attachment that the consumer has towards a brand or store. In this sense, affective commitment can be seen as an emotional bond with a brand, while brand experience cannot be seen as being exclusively emotional because these experiences include sensations and feelings but also behavioral responses towards brand-related stimuli's (Brakus *et al.*, 2009). In the findings of Iglesias *et al.* (2011) it was shown that affective commitment has the function of a mediator between brand experience and brand loyalty. However, they reject the hypothesis of brand experience leading directly to brand loyalty, meaning that managers and marketers must always take into account the affective dimension of the brand, in order to be able to form a bond with the consumer (Iglesias *et al.*, 2011) or tribe, in this particular thesis. Examples in the tribal environment on how brands can support tribal movements include the creation and support of events that unify the tribe members and the offer of a space where tribe members can gather, such as brands like *Tatoo*, *Salomon* and *Kellogg's* did with the Parisian in-line skater tribe (Cova and Cova, 2002).

In 2011, Mitchell and Imrie conducted a case study on the consumer tribe of vinyl record collectors. One of the objectives of this study was to understand how it was possible for companies to support tribal movement and consequently build loyalty. Based on their findings, the authors developed four different tools, where each one of them will have an effect on the tribe and all together will lead to a bonded loyalty between the company and the tribe (Figure IV):

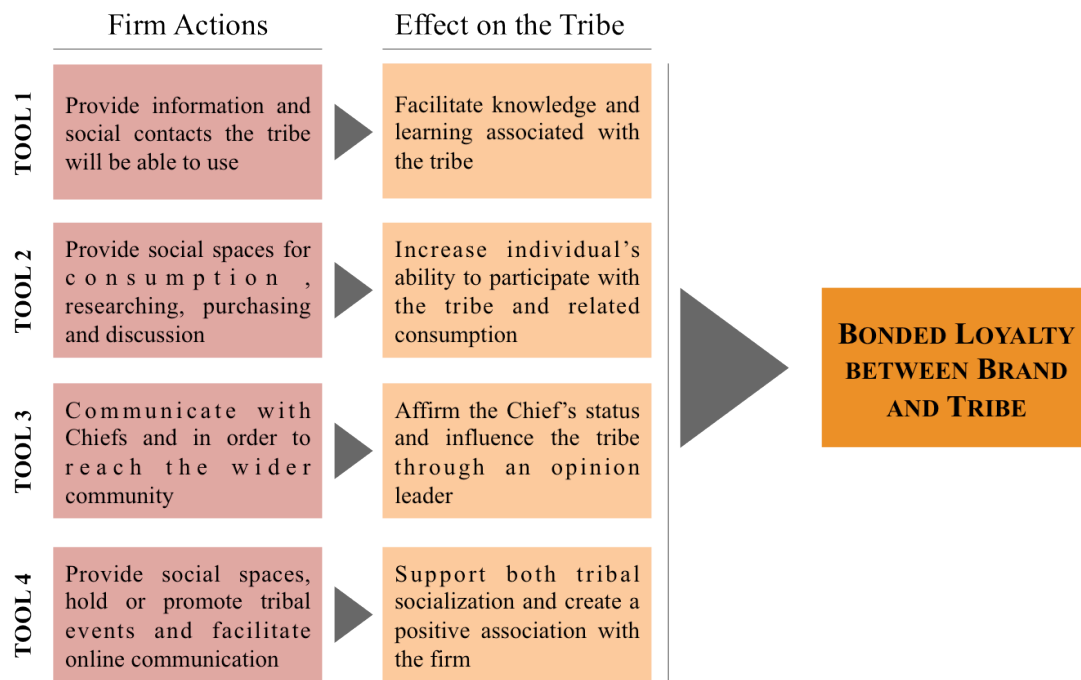


Figure IV: Tools for Increasing Bonded Loyalty (adapted from Mitchell and Imrie, 2011)

- **Tool 1:** By using this tool, it is possible to provide information about the tribe for people that are interested in knowing more about the tribe. The authors suggest that one channel that can be efficiently used for that matter is the Internet;
- **Tool 2:** By providing a space for the tribe, the firm is showing interest in keeping the tribe alive and that it understands the rituals and cult places of the tribe (Cova and Cova, 2002);
- **Tool 3:** This tool is directed to the fifth tribal role that the authors found in their study: The *Chief*. Being an opinion leader, the *Chief* is a fundamental channel of communication between the tribe and the company;
- **Tool 4:** By maintaining a good relation with the *Chief*, there is the possibility to understand what are the values of the tribe and consequently reflect them in the company offer (brands, products, services, communication, etc.).

After the development of the loyalty construct and the application of loyalty with consumer tribes, it is possible to establish a relation between the phases of loyalty defined by Oliver (1999) and the tribal strategy that has been idealized by Cova and Cova (2002) (table II).

	Oliver (1999)	Cova and Cova (2002)
Attitudinal Perspective	- Cognitive Loyalty - Affective Loyalty - Conative Loyalty	The first phase of a tribal strategy is non-market oriented and has the main objective of creating a symbiotic relation with the tribe
Behavioral Perspective	- Action Loyalty	The second phase allows the firm to return to the market with the support and loyalty of the tribe

Table II: Comparison between the loyalty phases (Oliver, 1999) and the tribal strategy (Cova and Cova, 2002)

On one side Oliver (1999) points out that the first phases of loyalty are driven by attitudinal factors rather than behavioral ones. On the other side, Cova and Cova (2002) suggest that the tribal strategy begins with a non-market oriented approach having as objective to induce a positive attitude towards the company or brand. The last phase of loyalty described by Oliver (1999) is related to the second phase of the tribal strategy idealized by Cova and Cova (2002), because both are market-oriented i.e., in a behavioral perspective.

Tribal Approach in Sports

5.1. Common Sports

In a broad sense, sports can be defined as *“all forms of physical activity which, through casual or organized participation, aim at expressing or improving physical fitness and mental well-being, forming social relationships or obtaining results in competition at all levels”* (The European Sports Charter, 1992). Brody (1979) argues that sports can be seen within a line where on one end there are institutionalized sports and on the other end there are recreational sports. The institutionalized end has a close relation with religion, whereas consequently Brody defines it as a quasi-religion. He points out three common characteristics:

- (1) Participations in sports is motivated by competition of a consequential sort;
- (2) The presence of an audience of spectators;
- (3) Ongoing organized character to the activity.

Analyzing the second point mentioned by Brody, the audience of sporting events can be categorized in two distinguishable groups according to their level of passion

(Anderson, 1979) - spectators and fans. In a more detailed manner, some authors have categorized fans into different typologies (Hunt *et al.*, 1999; Tapp and Clowes, 2002).

For instance, in the study of Dionísio *et al.* (2008) concerning football fans the authors were able to identify certain rituals, symbols, places and beliefs that clearly demonstrate the fandom phenomenon. More specifically, fans used certain products like t-shirts and scarves as symbols, which enabled them to identify other fans. Another study conducted by Chun *et al.* (2005) towards Japanese baseball fans showed that the fans who took the sporting event more serious would participate in collective rituals in order to motivate the *togetherness* spirit.

Given the previous facts by which fans demonstrate their devotion to a certain sporting club or event, there is a strict relation between fandom and tribal behavior. Moutinho *et al.* (2007) state that fandom provides diverse feelings such as camaraderie, community and solidarity. In other words, sporting fans are connected by an emotional bond, just like consumer tribes are.

5.2. Extreme Sports

Still in the sports world, but far away from common sports are the extreme sports, which can also be named as action sports and can be defined as “*sports that are not mainstream or traditional and often include risk, danger, or unconventional rules and/or techniques*” (Bennett *et al.*, 2002: 175). They include well known extreme sports such as skateboarding, mountain biking, snowboarding, inline skating (Punchan, 2004), but also include a sub-category named high-risk leisure activities such as skydiving, climbing and base jumping (Celsi *et al.*, 1993). Another differentiating characteristic from common sports is that the competitive context is commonly developed in an individualistic way and not within a team (Bennett *et al.*, 2002).

Having said that, one might believe at first that there is not a spirit of community or a tribal behavior among extreme sports. However, Celsi *et al.* (1993) in their study about skydiving, concluded that among the transcendent motivations of practicing high-risk sports there was a sense of *communita*, that is defined as “*a sense of camaraderie that occurs when individuals from various walks of life share a common bond of experience, such as skydiving*” (Celsi *et al.*, 1993: 12). Also in a study

conducted by Arnould and Price (1993) related to river rafting, it was found out that one-third of the respondents identified the interaction of the communal type as one of the best things of the trip. In other words, these communities are constituted by a heterogeneous group of people with a linking value through high-risk sports, having great similarities with consumer tribes.

Taking into account what was said above, it is possible to add that, contrary to common sports, tribal behavior can be observed within the practitioners. This is also visible in other extreme sports such as surfing and in-line skating. For instance, Moutinho *et al.* (2007) concluded in their investigation that surfers demonstrated characteristics that were similar to religious cults, such as rituals, symbols, locations and beliefs, which are also highly related to tribes. Still in the surfing environment, there is the work developed by Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan (2007), where the authors refer to the surfing community as a subculture pointing out that *“it is clear that consumption does not fuse the surfing community, rather it is united by a common love of the sport”* (Burgh-Woodman and Brace-Govan, 2007: 204), which can be interpreted as the linking value that bind surfers.

Another valid example of the high correlation between extreme sports and tribal matters is the ethnographic study conducted by Cova and Cova (2002) concerning in-line skaters. In fact, they positively identified the different roles that members adopt within the in-line tribe and also the visible traces (e.g. public meetings) and invisible traces (e.g. daily in-line skating) of tribal existence.

Skateboarding

6.1. Origins of Skateboarding

In the 1950's, surfers from the west coast of the U.S.A. developed an alternative activity for when the sea was flat, which ended up being called skateboarding (Borden, 2001). This era marked the beginning of street skateboarding (Borden, 2001) i.e., where skateboarders use public places and streets to skate, which are not constructed or designed for that specific matter (Woolley and Johns, 2001).

Afterwards, in the 1970's skaters started to realize that empty swimming pools gave the possibility to try new ways of skating (Hayes, 2005). Consequently, this generated

another type of skateboarding – Vert Skating. In this category, skateboarders use ramps that are generally shaped and called as half pipes and made out of wood or concrete (Borden, 2001).

Most recently, there has been a development of a new typology of skateboarders that are known as big air skateboarders (Moore, 2009). It basically consists of a *mega-ramp* of the size of a 7-storey building that will help the skateboarder to gain speed in order to attempt a gap between this ramp and another one. Although it is a recent category, it has gained a major notoriety specially through the professional skateboarder Danny Way and the launch of the documentary “Waiting for Lightning” that describes his life and all the extraordinary stunts he was able to pull during his skateboarding career, such as jumping from one side to the other side of the Wall of China on a skateboard (<http://www.waitingforlightningthemovie.com/#the-filmmakers>).

6.2. Skateboarding Culture Identity

In 2008 it was estimated that there were 12,5 million skateboarders worldwide and that 71% have an age between 12 and 17 years (Montgomery, 2009). Although there are attempts such as the previous to categorize and profile the skateboarding culture, it seems that skaters are a very heterogeneous amount of people that connect through skateboarding (Beal and Weidman, 2003). In the year 2012 a documentary directed by Andrew Lovgren named *Freeling* was released starring different skateboarders, including Mikey Santillan who explains that skaters “(...) *have that in common. No matter where you go, you can make friends with pretty much everyone you want if you skateboard*”.

Skateboarders in particular are seen as outsiders to society, rebels, social deviants or just different (Moore, 2009). Although their strong and unique identity sets them apart from their peers (Woolley and Johns, 2001), skaters are unified by the values and beliefs they share among the one object that connects them – the skateboard. Skaters have their own type of language, clothes and own rules, which makes them identifiable for other skateboarders and other groups that live among society (Karsten and Pel, 2000; Woolley and Johns, 2001; Beal and Weidman, 2003; Moore, 2009;).

6.3. Values of the Skateboarding culture

In the study of Beal and Weidman (2003), the authors were able to identify two core values that support the skateboarding culture. The first one was labeled as **Participant Control**, and relates to the small level of formality that the skateboarding culture reflects. This enables a feeling of freedom, making it possible to express themselves and to embrace skateboarding as being part of their identity (Karsten and Pel, 2000). The second value relates to skateboarding being embraced as a **non-competitive** activity. It is this last value that sets skateboarding apart from mainstream sports (Beal and Weidman, 2003), because even in the professional skateboarding sphere, riders demonstrate signs of passion and happiness (Moore, 2009), and although it is an individualistic sport, skateboarders support each other when for instance someone lands a trick (Karsten and Pel, 2000).

Joining these two values, skateboarding reflects a way of self-expression, where every skateboarder is encouraged to find his personalized style and way of skateboarding (Beal and Weidman, 2003; Moore, 2009). *Freeling*, a documentary released in 2002, includes some thoughts on that matter of professional skateboarder Austin Cosler, who states, *“It is just you. You are expressing yourself the way you want to express yourself and it is what makes it that more special”*. Moore (2009) sees this possibility of self-expression, without anyone dictating rules or the abstinence of formal environments, as another value of this culture. The fact that skaters can demonstrate their creativity and by that be able to project their identity, gives them a feeling of self-fulfillment, turning in one of the main reasons why skateboarders enjoy it so much (Beal and Weidman, 2003).

This creativity and desire for self-expression is more visible in street skaters because generally they do not skate in areas that were designed for that matter. As Woolley and Johns (2001) suggest, skateboarders see the city in a completely different perspective, as if it was a playground. In this sense, there are certain public places that are denominated as *street skate spots*, which have a great symbolic meaning because they represent a gathering point for skateboarding and interaction (Karsten and Pel, 2000; Woolley and Johns, 2001). However, this use of public areas to skateboard is not always seen in a positive way.

6.4. Negative associations to skateboarders and skateboarding

In the study of Woolley and Johns (2001) the authors found several themes that were related with the attractiveness of skate spots, being one of them compatibility, which reflects “(...) *the level of conflict or harmony in a space between skateboarders and other groups*” (Woolley and Johns, 2001: 225).

Commonly, skateboarders are seen as vandals or out-laws by non-skateboarders because there is a concern for potential collisions with skateboarders and with the physical degradation of those areas that are skated on (Borden, 2001; Woolley *et al.*, 2011). In the documentary named *Freeling* directed by Lovgren (2012), skateboarder Dj Stewart reveals, “*You have some kind of crazy bond with people you meet skateboarding because you are doing something that has a negative connotation to it, that everyone is kind of against you*”.

However, there are some authors who argument that skateboarders bring youth, life and dynamism to the cities (Karsten and Pel, 2000; Woolley and Johns, 2001). Woolley and Johns (2001: 228) go even further by asking, “*Is there any reason why landscape elements such as rails, steps, kerbs and benches should not be designed to withstand such use?*”.

It is clear that there is a great passion involved in the skateboarding panorama, but is it possible to identify a consumer tribe within this activity? And if so, what are the shared characteristics and values of the skateboard tribe? And how is the relation of their members with skateboarding brands? Do they form emotional bonds with them? What should these brands take into account in order to gain higher loyalty rates?

III. METHODOLOGY

Introductory Note

As explained previously, tribes revolve around shared passions and emotions, where members have their own ways of communicating with one another, a special language, expressions and signs. Adding to the previous, Cova and Cova (2002) suggest that researchers studying tribal behavior should follow a more unusual methodology than the “(...) *traditional mono-disciplinary, systemic approaches*” (Cova and Cova, 2002: 12). Furthermore, Malhotra and Birks (2006) suggest that when the researcher is trying to study a complex phenomenon, the reality may not be possible to capture through a structured survey. For that matter, in order to conduct the present thesis, the adopted methodology was based on a qualitative approach.

Ethnography as a research approach

Ethnography is a type of research method that aims to capture and interpret behaviors, practices and artifacts of a certain social group in its natural environment (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994; Kozinets, 2002b; Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Malhotra and Birks, 2006). Because ethnography is willing to study and interpret cultural and social aspects (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003), the researcher must emerge in the particular group of people that he plans to study and observe their behavior as if he was one of them, by sharing their lifestyle (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995; Malhotra and Birks, 2006).

The complexity of postmodern social dynamics is only possible to fully understand and interpret if the researcher makes a progressive contextualization from outsider to insider of the social group. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) conducted a three year based ethnographic study to better comprehend the subculture of consumption of Harley-Davidson motorcycle owners. In order to do so, the researchers chose as main tools formal and informal interviews, nonparticipant and participant observation and photography. Also Cova and Cova (2002) suggest that only through ethnography it is possible for the researcher to take an active role in the tribe, sharing emotions and ritual experiences with its members. The main tools they recommended include desk research, semi-structured and non-structured interviews, and participant and non-participant observation.

When looking towards research conducted in the skateboarding environment it is also possible to identify the use of ethnographic tools. For instance Karsten and Pel (2000) used observations, semi-structured interviews and desk research in order to better understand the identity of skateboarders, their interactions with one another and how they use urban spaces and routes. Another good example is the study conducted by Petrone (2010) where the main aim was to understand the process of becoming a skateboarder, to which he used ethnographic tools such as participant observation, in-depth interviews and document and artifact collection.

Data Collecting Procedures

Having in mind the literature concerning ethnographic research, several tools were selected in order to collect the data for the present thesis.

3.1. Participant Observation

In order for the researcher to fully understand the phenomenon or behavior in question, there is a need to comprehend the symbolic aspects entailed to it, such as language, jargons and dialect (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003). This understanding is developed mainly through the observation, because being an ethnographer means that *“(...) instead of observing people doing what they might do or say if real-world complexities did not impose on them, as in laboratory experiments, ethnographers observe actual people's behavior in real time”* (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994: 486).

Observations can have a higher or lower involvement of the researcher, ranging generically from full participation to non-participation (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). Participant observation occurs when *“you are directly involved in community life, observing and talking with people as you learn from them their point of reality”* (Agar, 1996: 163). However, this type of observation demands from the researcher acting like a member of the studied behavior, because an outsider can compromise the natural behavior of the studied group or phenomenon (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003). When this is not possible to achieve, the researcher should use non-participant observation, where the researcher does not become a part of the unfolding events (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994).

For the present research, participant observation was used in order to capture the behavior and social dynamics observed in skateboarding. In order to capture what was observed, field notes were taken as well as photographic records. In order for the field notes to be organized and contextualized, the researcher used a list of what should be ideally recorded (Spradley, 1980: 78).

- **Space:** the physical place or places;
- **Actor:** the people involved.
- **Activity:** a set of related acts people do.
- **Object:** the physical things that are present.
- **Act:** single actions that people do.
- **Event:** a set of related activities that people carry out.
- **Time:** the sequencing that takes place over time.
- **Goal:** the things people are trying to accomplish.
- **Feeling:** the emotions felt and expressed.

It is necessary to reinforce that in some observations not all topics of the previous list were observed individually nor all field notes have been recorded in this order. For instance, the topics *Activity*, *Act* and *Event* were often hard to distinguish.

When conducting an observation, having as main objective non disturbance or influence on the natural behavior of the skateboarders, the researcher always acted as a member of the group, dressing, acting and speaking like a skateboarder. This task was not hard due to the fact that the researcher has been inside the skateboarding atmosphere for over ten years, making it easy to blend in and also being one of the main reasons why it was possible to chose participant observation.

The observations occurred during the month of February of the year 2013 including skateparks and other places where skateboarders come together in order to skate or perform rituals. Details such as the amount of time spent per observation are visible in table III.

Date	Location	Observations	Hours
14/Feb	Skatepark of Lagos, Algarve	16:30 - 18:00	1 h, 30 min
19/Feb	Skatepark of Lagos, Algarve	17:00 - 19:00	2 h, 00 min
24/Feb	Skatepark of Albufeira, Algarve	15:30 - 17:00	1 h, 30 min
24/Feb	Skate spot "The Incline", Albufeira, Algarve	17:10 - 18:30	1 h, 20 min
27/Feb	Praça da Liberdade, Almada	16:00 - 19:00	3 h, 00 min
SUM			9 h, 20 min

Table III: Details Concerning Participant Observation

However, observation alone is not capable of providing detailed information such as perceptions, values and beliefs of the studied phenomenon (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). In order to overcome these limitations, observational data is generally combined with other data collecting procedures such as structured/unstructured interviews and formal/informal conversations (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994; Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003).

3.2. In-depth Interviews

Interviews also represent one of the most important tools in the ethnographic area, because *“Asking people why they are doing what they are doing is a necessary component in developing an understanding of their situated behavior (...)”* (Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003: 217). In the literature concerning ethnographic methodology, there are several typologies and conceptualizations of interviews, always ranging from a more unstructured and informal approach to a more formal and structured one.

The informal and unstructured ones are generally conducted on an individual and personal basis where the interviewer tries to uncover non-rational aspects such as motivations, beliefs and feelings on a specific issue or topic (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994; Elliott and Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Malhotra and Birks, 2006). On the other hand, the formal interviews, also named as structured surveys, include a structured set of questions and may even include quantitative response scales to be analyzed in a statistical manner (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994). However, these structured interviews may provide indicators of actions but not always of behaviors (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994).

For the present thesis, the chosen approach for interviews is situated in-between the two types of interviews previously explained – semi-structured interviews. The main reason for this choice is the fact that through semi-structured interviews it is possible

to compare the answers of the different respondents. During the interviews, the interviewer always had a set of questions that should be covered and discussed during the interview (see attachment 1 and 2). Nevertheless, the interview was semi-structured because in most of the interviews, the order of the questions or even the questions asked *per se* depended highly on what the respondent said (Malhotra and Birks, 2006). In order to gain a rich content through these interviews, several aspects were taken into account (Malhotra and Birks, 2006):

- **Initial questions:** a set of initial questions were prepared in order to act like an “ice breaker” to make the respondent feel comfortable and relaxed;
- **Place:** The place where the interview took place was always chosen by the respondent, including places like skate spots, car or the home of respondents;
- **Recording:** Audio-recording took place in all interviews. However, video-recording only took place at interviews where respondents were completely comfortable with;
- **Adaptation:** The respondent’s age and background was in some cases quite distinct. For that matter, the way questions were asked and the tone of voice used by the interviewer changed according to each interview, in order to get closer to the respondent;
- **Support:** Sometimes respondents showed signs of embarrassment or being uncomfortable by certain questions. Every time this happened the interviewer gave some support by saying sentences like “*Take the time you need*”, or “*say whatever is on your mind*” and “*there are no right and wrong answers, just opinions*”;
- **Persistence:** Whenever the answer of the respondent was very short or not completely clear, the interviewer tried to stay on the same subject with a different angle. Also when the respondent showed genuine interest and enthusiasm on a specific issue, the interviewer tried to stay longer on this issue in order for the respondent to open up with the interviewer about their emotions, beliefs and motivations.

Overall, sixteen interviews were conducted, including one pre-test interview with the main objective to identify potential errors and feedback from the respondent. All the respondents were males with ages between fourteen and twenty-seven, and their place

of residence included the city of Lagos, Albufeira, Almada and Lisbon. The data provided by the interviews originated approximately 6 hours of audiotape and 2 hours of videotape (Table IV). In order to understand the social dynamics and the emotional involvement within the skateboarding environment the respondents were chosen on purpose for that specific matter.

Nº	Date	Gender	Age	Occupation	Interview Duration	Years Skateboarding
1*	15/Feb	Male	17	Student	09 min, 51 sec	5
2	16/Feb	Male	17	Student	16 min, 31 sec	2
3	18/Feb	Male	18	Student	19 min, 20 sec	6
4	18/Feb	Male	21	Unemployed	18 min, 27 sec	5
5	18/Feb	Male	22	Student	26 min, 17 sec	12
6	19/Feb	Male	21	Full-time worker	20 min, 20 sec	7
7	20/Feb	Male	20	Bar man	20 min, 49 sec	6
8	20/Feb	Male	27	Skateshop owner	53 min, 27 sec	13
9	23/Feb	Male	14	Student	18 min, 50 sec	4
10	24/Feb	Male	25	Full-time worker	16 min, 24 sec	5
11	26/Feb	Male	24	Student	18 min, 27 sec	5
12	27/Feb	Male	17	Student	20 min, 07 sec	5
13	27/Feb	Male	18	Student	22 min, 34 sec	6
14	27/Feb	Male	17	Student	22 min, 48 sec	2
15	27/Feb	Male	14	Student	22 min, 48 sec	2
16	28/Feb	Male	24	Student	40 min, 07 sec	12
SUM					≈ 06 h, 07 min	-

Table IV: Details Concerning In-Depth Interviews

Data Analysis Process

After the data collection process, there was a need to make transcripts of the conducted in-depth interviews, which are “*hard-copies of the questions and probes and the corresponding answers and responses in focus group or depth interviews*” (Malhotra and Birks, 2006: 208). The total process of making the transcripts lasted about 36 hours, and was done simultaneously as other interviews were conducted.

The next step involved organizing and structuring the collected data from participant observation and in-depth interviews, to which Malhotra and Birks (2006: 208) name as “*Data Reduction*”. Organizing data involves coding the data, which is defined as condensing relevant qualitative data into different categories in a way that they can be analyzed in a next stage (Malhotra and Birks, 2006). The creation of these categories

was mainly based on the literature review conducted previously and afterwards compared with the collected data in the sense of making some adjustments.

For the first research question related to the **characteristics of the skateboard tribe**, the used data was originated by in-depth interviews as well as participant observation. In order to categorize the data, all the tribe characteristics present in the literature review were inserted in a document. Afterwards, citations from the in-depth interviews and from the field notes, taken during observations, were categorized according to these characteristics. When this process was complete, there was a need to review the categories, and see if all the characteristics were found. For instance the characteristic reflecting the ephemerality of tribes was not observed, which does not imply that it does not exist. Instead, it means that through the present respondents and conducted observations there is no evidence that suggests the existence of this characteristic amongst the skateboard tribe.

In order to identify which were the **shared values of the skateboard tribe**, the process began in a similar way, in the sense that different skateboard values were retrieved from the literature review. However, a gap was observed between the values in the literature and the ones reflected in the collected data, which implied the creation of additional categories in order to organize the remaining data.

For the second research question, related to the **emotional brand loyalty felt by tribe members**, the data was almost exclusively obtained through the in-depth interviews. During the data analysis, a parallel between the literature concerning loyalty in general and loyalty applied to consumer tribes was conducted. In this sense, it was possible to create categories that revealed the main antecedents of brand loyalty and whether the brand loyalty was formed on an emotional and affectual basis or not.

IV. RESULTS

1. Tribal Characteristics in Skateboarding

During the fieldwork, including semi-structured interviews and participant observation, it was possible to understand that skateboarders have a **genuine passion for skateboarding** on an individual and collective basis.

To begin with, on an individual level, respondents demonstrated a big connection to skateboarding in general. This demonstrates a great drive and passion for what they are doing, which works as a common denominator among them.

“It is a passion. It is a big emotion and I feel really connected to the skate, like I said before, I think I will never stop skateboarding. If I have time, and I hope that this will never be a problem. Sometimes when I come from skateboarding I...get really happy and that is noticeable.”

Male, 22 years, Comments on “What is skateboarding for you?”

In some cases, this passion is so strong that respondents refer to it as an addiction, because they are always with their mind or body on a skateboard:

“Oh...Yeah! When I am sleeping I am thinking about tricks I could do or that I would like to do. I start to think about it because when you have something on your mind you are going to dream about it and really think about it. Always think about it...that’s it...”

Male, 25 years, Comments on “Importance of skateboarding in your life?”

“I am at home on the computer and I only see skate videos. Basically when I am in school I start to think about what tricks I am going to do and start to get anxious to get out of class and go skate. That’s it; always thinking about skateboarding.”

Male, 18 years, Comments on “Do you frequently think about skateboarding?”

The previous citations demonstrate some evidence of how the passion and emotions for skateboarding are a common characteristic among skaters, which for Cova and Cova (2002) is extremely important in order to keep consumer tribes held together. These **shared passions and emotions** can be reflected in a general passion for skateboarding or in certain actions someone takes, for instance landing a trick.

“Men, when you are trying a trick and always failing...and then your friends say ‘come on, you can do it’, and then you go for it and land it. They get all hyped and start to scream ‘Yeahhhh! Great trick, you did it!’ It is a great feeling.”

Male, 14 years, Comments on “Best feelings on a skateboard?”

“During the present observation it was notorious the feelings skateboarders transmitted when someone landed a trick. In the first place, the skater who landed the trick was very happy and even seemed sometimes surprised. Then, other skaters showed some typical signs of being happy and of recognition for the trick and for the skater in question. The other skaters whistled and made noise by hitting their boards on the ground, or just yelling ‘ohhhhhh!’.”

Date: 19th February 2013 // Place: Skatepark in the city of Lagos, Algarve

These shared emotions and passions revolve around an object that has the power of linking skateboarders together. It was observed that the main product with this characteristic is the skateboard itself, because through it skateboarders are able to identify themselves among the group and differentiate them from other people who do not skate.

“It is the object itself that makes the link. Imagine that you are walking somewhere and see another person walking by. You are not going to say ‘hi’ when you do not know this person from anywhere, right? In skateboarding and other ‘sports’, you have a connection to the object, and it is that object that will be responsible for the link between people and make people talk about it.”

Male, 24 years, comments on “What connects people in skateboarding?”

In other words it is the skateboard that enables and supports the social interaction of the communal type, providing this object with **linking value** (Cova, 1997; Cova and Cova, 2002). This linking value is so strong that it even exists among skateboarders who do not know each other, exceeding physical barriers.

“For instance, if you go to another country with your skateboard in your hand, and another skater passes by, you start talking with him in a totally relaxed way.”

Male, 21 years, comments on “Unification among skateboarders”

Apparently it seems that the link and shared passion among skateboarders results in a complex and interesting relationship among skateboarders that is defined by some as a *family feeling*.

“I think that there is no competitive spirit. It is like a family that in some way is linked together. It really seems like we are a family. There is no competition, it is more a thing of helping each other.”

Male, 20 years, Comments on “Competitive aspects of skateboarding”

However this close connection between skateboarders appears to be only shared among *real skateboarders*, which are the ones that through their actions and attitudes demonstrate that skateboarding is already a part of their way of living.

“With some I feel it, and with others not so much. I don’t know, it seems that I can distinguish those who enjoy this way of living from the ones who look to skateboarding as if it is a trend or something like that.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “Connection with skateboarders you do not know?”

When relating the previous citations with the conducted literature review, it is interesting to observe that Cova and Cova (2002) set tribal behavior apart from trends and vogues, because the last ones tend to ignore the shared emotions and interactions between individuals. It seems that the same behavior is happening in the skateboarding environment, where people who skateboard just because it is a trend are set apart from real skateboarders, who belong to the potential skateboard tribe. Also important to mention is that besides shared emotions and passions, Cova and Cova (2002) add that tribes also share moral beliefs and a common **lifestyle**, while Maffesoli (1996) claims that a tribe can also be defined by a **state of mind**. Once again, this is possible to observe in the skateboarding scenario.

“For me it is more a way of living. To me, it seems that it is already part of my daily routine, that it is a part of me. It seems that...I don’t know, if I do not skate for a longer time it seems that I become sillier.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “Is skateboarding only a sport?”

“Why? I guess it is because it has been in my life for so long that I don’t know another way of living...I guess that’s it. It’s the whole movement around it. Everything is so good...that it is not possible to give it up.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “Why is skateboarding so important for you?”

Also interesting to observe is that this true passion and shared lifestyle are the main aspects that matter in order to be a true skater. This means that there is **no need of admission** in skateboarding, because consumer tribes work as open systems (Cova and Cova, 2002).

“(...) if somebody is skateboarding with you, it is not because he is rich, poor, black, white...first of all, in my perspective nobody is above anybody. And if he is there skating, you have to respect that. And besides respecting, you also take pleasure of him being there, because skateboarding is a worldwide thing, and not only for a specific group of people. It is accessible to everybody. You only need to like it.”

Male, 21 years, comments on “How so different people are able to skate together?”

In addition, the skateboarding tribe does not have a clear hierarchy because all of their members have the same importance, which relates directly to what Cova and Cova (2002) wrote about tribes and the **inexistence of central power** to maintain social order and behavior in the consumer tribe. In consequence of the previous characteristics, the group of skateboarders becomes a very **heterogeneous** one, where characteristics such as physic and social ones do not matter.

“No! Not at all. For instance, speaking of me, I go to the skatepark and skate with people that sometimes are five years younger, or even six or seven, but when we are there it seems as if we were all equal. This happens because the people on the outside are different, and from the inside maybe as well, with different personalities and values, but when it comes to skateboarding, which is something we all enjoy so much, we become united with each other because it is something we have in common. Everything else might be different, but when we arrive at the skatepark or at some other skate spot these things stop to matter, because the only important thing is skateboarding and having a good time.”

Male, 22 years, comments on “Personal characteristics matter in skateboarding?”

“There were at least ten skaters at the square, where the youngest one was 14 years old and the older one was 30, and all of them, from the younger to the older, interacted with each other like equals.”

Date: 27th February 2013 // Place: Praça da Liberdade, Almada

Once more, a great resemblance between the previous characteristic and tribes is evident. In the perspective of Cova and Cova (2002), tribes being a heterogeneous group, kept together by shared emotions and passions, is what sets them apart from a consumer segment, which is composed by a homogeneous group of people who do not know each other.

“(...) for instance I would not stop talking to someone related to skateboarding just because the person is from a different ethnicity, race, poorer or richer, do you understand? Because you are connected to the object, the skateboard, and that is the main reason why people connect and speak with each other, so in that case these characteristics will not matter (...)”

Male, 24 years, comments on “How so different people can all do the same thing with no problem?”

It is evident that the **linking value** originated through the shared passion for skateboarding is so strong that aspects such as age, gender and social class are irrelevant.

“It is the union. When I have my body on top of a skateboard and when all of those people are skateboarding we do not think about these aspects. We just think about what we are doing and when somebody makes a cool trick we get all hyped. We do not care if he is badly dressed or if he has a weird haircut, if he is rich or poor, white or black. We are all on top of a skateboard and are all having fun due to the same reason.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “How can people so different get along doing the same thing?”

In one of the conceptualizations of consumer tribes by Cova and Cova (2002) they describe them as being small scaled and Gainer (1995) suggests a similar thought by implying that tribes are bind together in a “small world”. In the present thesis, evidence of this tribal characteristic was also found and interpreted as being another important aspect in order to maintain skateboarders united.

“I think it is because we are so few. When we are few, we try to stay together. And it is always good to have friends that help when you are learning because it is cool to learn with friends that will help you. There is always somebody teaching you and that is really cool.”

Male, 17 years, comments on “What unifies skaters?”

“I feel happy because there are more and more skaters, which is good. In the Portuguese society there are not many skateboarders, and it is always good when the number of skaters increases. The more, the better.”

Male, 17 years, comments on “What do you feel when you see another skateboarder?”

It was also observed that skateboarders share a negative attitude towards some brands and skateboarding becoming a mainstream sport, which can be justified due to the fact of skateboarding being a small-scaled movement.

“Personally I try that who skates with me, fights against the fact of skateboarding becoming more and more a sport.”

Male, 27 years, comments on “The importance of skateboarding in your life?”

“In skateboarding you already have lots of competition because of the brands. Lots of brands are entering the market and are transforming skateboarding more and more into a sport in order to make more money.”

Male, 27 years, Comments on “Competitive environment of skateboarding”

The previous citations are connected with consumer tribes being **transient** (Canniford, 2011). This comes coherent with tribes representing a **counter-power to institutional power** (Cova and Cova, 2002), making members share in some situations anti-market values (Kozinets, 2002a). The visible opposition of skateboarders towards skateboarding being seen as a mainstream sport reinforces once again the possibility of skateboarding being seen as a consumer tribe. Also the negative attitude that is visible towards certain brands can cause phenomena such as deconsumption that are often observed among tribes (Cova, 1997).

There are three fields that represent a great importance for the maintenance of the tribal identity, which are the **ritual** and **sacred** aspects related to tribal behavior and the **symbolic** meaning attached to it (Cova and Cova, 2002; Belk *et al.*, 1989; Gainer, 1995). In the skateboarding scene it was observed that skaters meet in such regular

basis that there is no need to warn others about it, becoming more than a habit in fact a ritual.

“I come to this spot, we skate and at the end of the day somebody picks us up or we go with the underground or bus, and then on the next day we repeat it. It is always like that.”

Male, 14 years, comments on “What unifies skateboarders?”

“Hum, the majority of the people I did not know at first, but as we started skateboarding together, even without saying nothing to each other we knew we were there at a specific time, because that is what we do – we are there at that time.”

Male, 22 years, comments on “Skateboarding alone or in group?”

It is evident that the ritual of getting together in order to skate also strengthens the connection among skateboarders and brings new members to the potential tribe. Rook (1985) pointed out that rituals can be seen as a preparation to enter the sacred domain, and this is also possible to observe in the skateboarding environment. For instance certain places carry a great **symbolic** and **sacred** meaning for skateboarders.

“I see my second home. I spend here all my time. Here we don’t even soil de floor. When somebody throws garbage to the floor we just say, ‘Do you do that at home? No? So why are you doing it here? You have garbage cans, you must respect it’. If we have the possibility of having this place to skate, which not all skaters have, we have to thank god for that.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “What does this square represent for you?”

The possibility of having a skate spot to skate and practice their rituals, transforms these places into anchoring places (Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999) or linking places (Cova, 1997). These regular places (e.g. squares) achieve this status through all the events and emotions that skateboarders were able to share in a specific moment, which makes them symbolically relevant.

“It represents fun. I look over here and think about all the fun I had, what I am still able to do here in a moment, or even from the last years, two years or in two days, I don’t know. Men, I look at this square and see fun...I mean I look at this square and see skate...I see skate.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “what does this square represent for you?”

Sometimes the actual act of traveling to a sacred place transforms this experience into a sacred one, just like Belk *et al.* (1989) claimed. It seems that in the world of skateboarding, the city of Barcelona is one of those places where skaters travel purposely in order to skate the city, making it a sacred experience.

“To me? I guess so, we all have a purpose is not that so? For example, I already went to Barcelona just because of skateboarding. Obviously I also wanted to see the city, but it was mainly because of that. And I think it is the dream of lots of people, lots of skateboarders (...) It has a great value not only for me but also for lots of people. It is like the capital of skateboarding. I really think that it is the capital of skateboarding.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “Skateboarding helped you see the world in a different matter?”

However, the symbolical aspects are not only related to the ritual and the sacred dimension, but also to other tribal characteristics such as the usage of an **own clothing style** (see attachment 3). These clothes provide skateboarders with a sense of identity, belonging and recognition among the tribe, acting as a developer of social life and involvement with others (Solomon, 1983; Elliott R. , 1997). This is also coherent with the work of Belk *et al.* (1989), who claim that specific clothing is a way of symbolizing group membership.

“And sometimes even without a skateboard it seems you can identify a skateboarder, for instant because of the shoes that are damaged in a certain way, you see immediately that it is someone who skates.”

Male, 27 years, comments on “What you feel when you see another skater?”

“Clearly through the way of dressing. The shoes. For example, if the shoes are damaged in a certain way I see it is a skater. Or if they have some little holes it is also because he skates. I think it is easy to recognize.”

Male, 24 years, comments on “Ways of identifying a skateboarder”

“In a general way, the shoes were worn out in certain spots, all of them were wearing jeans and most of them were using a sweatshirt with a hood (hoodie). It was also possible to see that many of the skateboarders were wearing a shoelace as a belt. When asked about it, one skater claimed that it serves the same purpose as a belt but is more comfortable and gives more flexibility.”

Date: 27th February 2013 // Place: Praça da Liberdade, Almada

Besides having their own clothing style, skateboarders share a **common language**, which can be verbal and non-verbal. There are certain expressions or slang words, that people outside the skateboarding environment would not know or understand, that bring skateboarders even closer. For example “*goofy*” are skateboarders that use their left foot at the back of the board and “*regulars*” are the ones using their right foot behind. They also use a special substance, which they name as “*wax*” that is used in order to glide better on top of an object such as a rail or bench. Additionally, some skaters define a “*line*” as being a set of consecutive tricks where, for instance, the first trick can be on the flat ground, the second on a rail and the third one jumping down a set of stairs (for additional vocabulary please see attachment 4).

In the case of **non-verbal language** there are certain gestures or movements that are shared between skateboarders, when they greet each other or when they want to demonstrate a sign of approval. It was possible to identify a specific handshake that is used by skateboarders in order to greet others and also to give some compliments when for instance someone lands a trick.

In the literature concerning consumer tribes, Cova and Cova (2002) refer to a certain characteristic named as **group narcissism**. Due to the passion skateboarders have for what they are doing, they tend to see skateboarding as an unmatched sport providing them a unique experience, feeling and vision of the world.

“It is a lifestyle. I think that I am privileged to skateboard because it is a feeling...it is a feeling where you challenge gravity, among other things, and it has also its benefits.”

Male, 17 years, comments on “What is skateboarding for you?”

“We are here on top of our skateboard and we are all having fun for the same reason. That’s what turns skateboarding into a different sport from all others.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “How people that are so different can do the same thing”

“Because it is something that never...It is not like a football game where you win, do you understand? It is something that you keep on doing, getting better and evolving where you can get from level to level. There is no limit (...)”

Male, 24 years, comments on “Why is skateboarding a different hobby?”

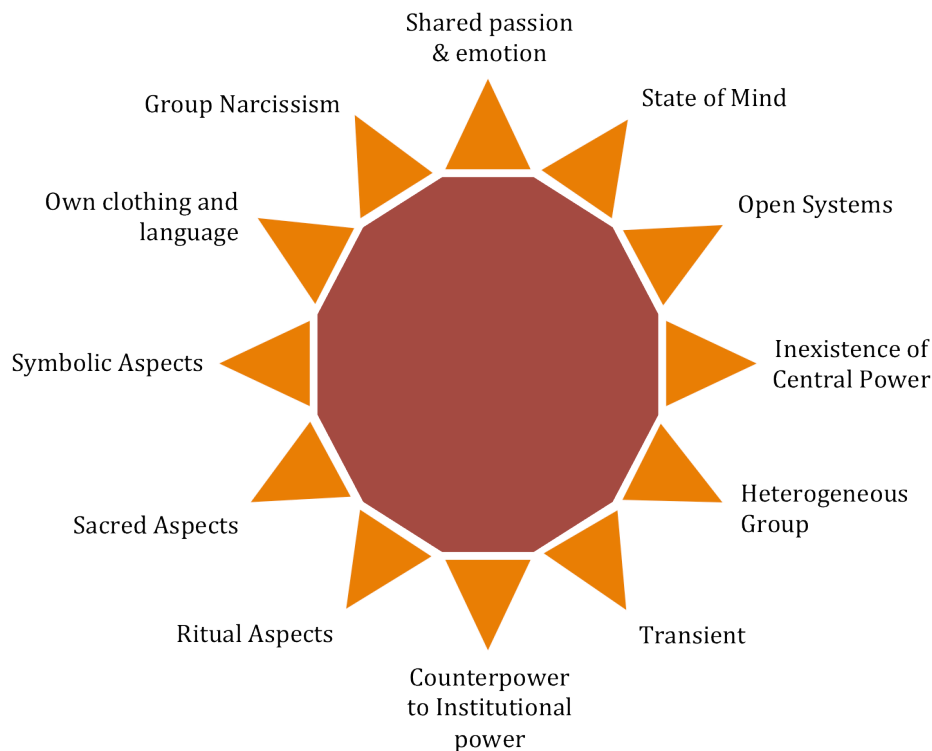


Figure V: Characteristics of the Skateboard Tribe

After exploring the previous characteristics present in the skateboarding environment, it is possible to condense them in the figure V. **Having said that, it is possible to claim that the dynamics revolving around skateboarding have a tribal influence, making it possible to identify visible and invisible traces of a tribal identity.**

2. Values Within the Skateboard Tribe

As explained previously, members of the skateboard tribe share a great passion and emotion revolving around skateboarding. This becomes even more evident when respondents were questioned about skateboarding competitions and the environment of those events.

“It is an opportunity to be with your friends that skateboard. Get together, meet new people, have new experiences. It is not about going there to win, to destroy it and giving your best. No! You are there chilling, if you fail a trick it is ok and if you win of course you get happy, but competing is not the main objective.”

Male, 20 years, comments on “Environment of skateboarding competitions”

Beal and Weidman (2003) refer to this as a **non-competitive spirit**, which was also visible when respondents were asked about what they wanted to achieve through skateboarding for their lives.

“No. I skateboard because I love it, and not to get anywhere. It is just for fun. Being there with my skateboard, chilling.”

Male, 21 years, comments on “Accomplish something through skateboarding?”

During participant observation it was also possible to see skateboarders conducting non-competitive activities, including a game named as “Game of S.K.A.T.E.”. Initially, this game may seem quite competitive, but the conducted observations proved exactly the opposite.

“This game is played by two or more players, where the first player does a certain maneuver /trick and in case he succeeds the other players must do the same trick. For each trick the players fail, they get one of the letters from the word “SKATE”. The player who completes the whole word loses.”

Date: 14th February 2013 // Place: Skatepark in the city of Lagos, Algarve

“Once again the skateboarders played several games of S.K.A.T.E.. The player who made the initial trick showed happiness and thrill when other players completed the trick in question. When somebody did not land a trick they would just say some comforting words and that next time they would have better luck.”

Date: 19th February 2013 // Place: Skatepark in the city of Lagos, Algarve

It was also possible to identify that skateboarders share a great sense of **freedom** in skateboarding, which provides them with liberty of **self-expression**. These values are reflected in the work of Beal and Weidman (2003) where the authors grouped them into one value – participant control.

“It is the feeling of freedom. It is leaving everything behind, you are on your skateboard, on your four wheels and just go.”

Male, 21 years, comments on “What is it that you love about skateboarding?”

“Skateboarding for me? It is my way of expressing everything I feel, and a way of calming down when I am angry (...) But I think that more than a sport it is an art. The art of being capable of expressing what you feel based on a simple object like the skateboard.”

Male, 22 years, comments on “What is skateboarding for you?”

Another value that was observed through the data collecting procedures was the **persistence** that tribe members must have in order to succeed in their tricks and maneuvers.

“I think it is one of the best qualities you can have. Persistence and working on something until you complete your objective, which is something that skateboarding teaches you, as well as all other individual extreme sports. If you cannot do something, you will work hard until you do it. That is if you have this personality, otherwise you will just quit skateboarding.”

Male, 24 years, comments on “So skateboarding taught you also persistence?”

“Nothing is impossible. If you fall, you get back up. And if you do not, you will not do the trick, and you will not succeed in life. If you do not try, you will not know if it is possible or not.”

Male, 27 years, Comments on “What has skateboarding taught you?”

“One skater tried a trick over 10 times, falling really hard on the ground. When this happened, other skateboarders stopped skating and went near him to check if he was all right. Generally, after that the skater just got up and tried the trick again until he landed it.”

Date: 24th February 2013 // Place: Skatepark in the city of Albufeira, Algarve

This value was not found in any skateboarding related literature, but does transmit an important aspect to the tribe because it reflects the drive skaters share in order to attain certain objectives, making this another common feature that results in a higher bond among members.

Although they cannot be categorized as values, two more aspects related to the skateboard tribe were identified. The first one relates how skateboarding serves as an **escape from the daily routine**.

“When I am bored I go skate. It is an amusement, it is like a second life.”

Male, 14 years, Comments on “What is skateboarding for you?”

“It is also a way of relaxing and getting things out of your head. When something bad happens you go on your board and take off that anger, pain or even happiness. You take everything away for skateboarding.”

Male, 17 Years, when asked, “what is skateboarding for you?”

Lastly, there is the **negative side** associated to skateboarding. Given the fact that skateboarders also use public places to skate, they are seen by some people as vandals and destroyers. This “dark side” of skateboarding is reflected in the work conducted by Wolley and Johns (2001) and also by Borden (2001).

“(…) People think that we are just some vagabonds destroying everything. But I don’t think like that, I am just having fun.”

Male, 14 years, comments on “What is skateboarding for you?”

“There is still a lot of discrimination. Skateboarding is always associated to bad lives and drug usage. It is stupid, but that is what people think, the older people...we are always a little bit discriminated.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “Do characteristics of the person matter?”

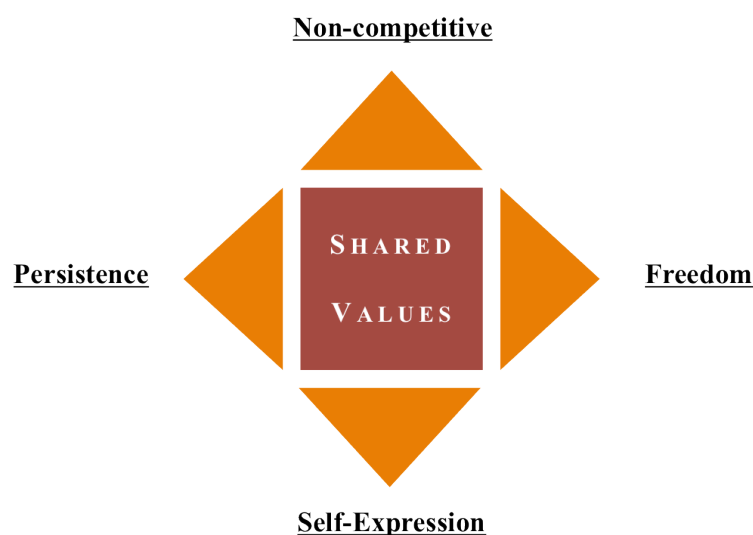


Figure VI: Shared Values Among the Skateboard Tribe

3. Brand Loyalty Within the Skateboard Tribe

In order to understand how members of the skateboard tribe develop loyalty for brands, there was a need to perceive which factors influence their **relative attitude** towards those brands. In a general way, respondents were in favour of brands that actively supported skateboarding.

“(...) I don’t think a brand that does not do anything for skateboarding deserves to have a lot of clients, because there are brands that do everything for skateboarding. They do competitions, they make “tours”, movies, help out, make charity events and other things that make them deserve to have more clients than those brands that do not care about skateboarding and only want money.”

Male, 17 years, comments on “To brands you are loyal do you look more to the products or the values they transmit?”

In some cases, respondents show even a narrower criterion by showing loyalty to brands that specifically support the skateboarding movement in Portugal.

“One should not buy brands for what they do abroad but for what they do in Portugal. If a brand sponsors “x” skateboarders abroad, having great riders, but then in Portugal does nothing: does not organize events, does not have a team...if you are spending money on this brand, you are simply giving away money for them to have skateboarders abroad.”

Male, 27 years, comments on “The skateboarder you have become has influenced brands you are loyal?”

The previous fact is coherent with the literature on consumer tribes, where Cova and Cova (2002) refer that the first step of a tribal strategy is based on a **non-financial approach** where the main objective is to understand and support the tribe. As Mitchell and Imrie (2011) indicate in their study, there is a need to provide social spaces and promote tribal events in order to support socialization among tribes. This will create a positive association with the tribe, leading ultimately to a bonded loyalty between tribe and brand. Also Cova and Cova (2002) and Canniford (2011) state that these events are a way for the tribe to reaffirm their shared values and additionally link individual members to the skateboard tribe. In terms of loyalty, this will generate

affective antecedents of loyalty (Dick and Basu, 1994) that will generate a higher relative attitude and ideally a higher purchase behaviour.

Another influencing factor towards brand loyalty are the owners behind the brand. It was discovered that **members of the skateboard tribe share a bigger connection with brands that were founded by skateboarders**, because they know how to support them.

“Generally I am loyal to brands that have a ‘skater touch’, that for instance were founded by a skateboarder or that are managed by skateboarders. These people know what skateboarders go through, but if somebody creates a skateboarding brand that never had contact with the skateboard world there will not be the same connection.”

Male, 22 years, comments on “Loyalty to skateboarding brands?”

The fact that a brand is created or managed by skateboarders makes it possible to create a **sympiotic relation** between the company and tribe members (Cova and Cova, 2002; Mitchell and Imrie, 2011), where the company is not perceived as an intrusive and non-participant observer, but instead is seen as being part of the tribe demonstrating support and understanding towards aspects like the sacred and ritualistic dimensions. Additionally, the brand will have a **higher reputation** among skateboarders, which is included as antecedents of loyalty in the brand driver’s category (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004).

In some cases, consumer tribes include different sub-tribes that have slightly different values and even rituals (Cova and Cova, 2002). It is fundamental for a brand to understand the tribe and all its surroundings and dynamics. In the particular case of the skateboard tribe, brands must have in account the **different types of skateboarders** that form those sub-tribes. In the literature review concerning skateboarding, different typologies are defined, including street skateboarding (Borden, 2001), vert skateboarding (Hayes, 2005) or even big air skateboarding (Moore, 2009), but apparently in the eyes of most respondents this division is neither actual nor fair.

“Vert or street? No! There are lots of styles. Specially now, that new styles are appearing, such as skaters who do not even leave the same place. There are others

that only want to skate pools and I do not consider this vert. Then there are others who want stairs and skateparks.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “Is the division street and vert enough in skateboarding?”

“You can say that there are skaters from street, vert, skatepark, or even longboard (because there are different types of skate). You can claim that these ones are from street punk and that those ones are “G’s”. You can make 1001 divisions.”

Male, 27 years, comments on “Different types of skateboarders?”

These different types of skateboarders have different needs and perspectives over skateboarding, meaning that brands must identify those differences and adapt their offer in order to create an emotional bond with these sub-tribes.

“It might be. It depends. There are brands that have a bigger relation with vert, doing bigger boards, different shapes, but only some brands do that. Others make things for, I don’t want to say normal, but what is usual to do: Normal sized boards and normal sized wheels. That is the difference.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “Does the type of skateboarder you are, influence the brands you use?”

However, the fact that the skateboard tribe can be divided into sub-tribes does not mean that there is no interaction and emotional linkage between these groups. Once again, the linking value provided by the skateboard seems to be so intense that even people with different ideologies and values related to skateboard are able to stay connected.

“No, everybody relates to all. That is what I have told. If you arrive at a skatepark it is not because there are vert skaters that you go to another side of the skatepark. If you want to join them on the ramps you can go even without knowing how to skate on ramps. It is not a problem.”

Male, 21 years, comments on “Do different types of skateboarders come together or form groups?”

As seen before, **social influences** also represent an important factor in the development of brand loyalty (Dick and Basu, 1994; Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004). As previously discussed in the literature review, Mitchell and Imrie (2011) identified a role that tribe members can adopt, named as *Chief*. Identifying the *Chief* is a very important step, because he is an opinion leader inside the tribe and also represents a facilitator of communication between brand and tribe. In the skateboard

tribe, it seems plausible to admit that skate shop owners who actually skate can be seen as *Chiefs*. They recommend certain brands to skateboarders they know, working almost as **peer's recommendation** (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004).

“If I had brands that sell much more, I would generate profit much easier. Sales would increase but I would not feel fulfilled (...) That was not the reason why I opened the shop and I think that more important are the choices I make and explain why I do them, giving awareness to those brands. A lot of brands are not well known, but are finally starting to have a bigger market, and people start to recognize and feel familiar with them, understanding that it is better to chose those brands (...).”

Male, 27 years, comments on “What do brands do in Portugal for skateboarding?”

“But it also depends on the place where I buy things. For example, I have a friend that has a skateshop and I try to always buy my shoes and clothes there, because it is a way of supporting what he is doing, which is creating a skateshop in a small city with few consumers and I guess it is important for the skateboarders to keep united.”

Male, 22 years, comments on “When being loyal to a brand, do you give more importance to products or values of the brand?”

The previous citations are coherent with the work conducted by Mitchell and Imrie (2011) who developed four tools that companies should use in order to create a higher bonded loyalty between the tribe and the brand. The third tool aims at identifying and communicating with *Chief's* of the tribe in order to reaffirm their status, and influence the tribe through a true opinion leader, which should generate a bonded loyalty between tribe and brand. However, these social influences are not exclusively entitled to *Chiefs*. Also regular members of the tribe have a big influence in the brands that are bought, and potentially to which they become loyal.

“Yes. Normally yes. While we skate we always talk like ‘how are those shoes doing?’, ‘Yeah they are good’ or ‘not really they are wearing out very quick’. Yes, we give advices to one another of the products we buy.”

Male, 21 years, comments on “Do you take into account friend's opinions?”

Still included in the social drivers are the **social group influences** (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004). Through these influences, consumers look up to certain **reference groups** adopting some of their behaviours and even attitudes. In

skateboarding, it is common that brands are represented worldwide by a group of professional skateboarders (“team riders”) who reflect the image and style the brand wants to communicate. Their worldwide notoriety is gained through movies that transmit their skateboarding or lifestyle, making them an important reference group to tribe members.

“You have types of riders, skateboarders, whether they are an icon or a group that brands have. There are brands that are much more directed to a type of music, with a certain image and their riders must have all that. I think that when it comes to brands and connection with brands, you feel it more through this aspect.”

Male, 27 years, comments on “Connection with skateboarding brands”

Consequently, members of the skateboard tribe will feel an emotional bond with the riders they worship, and consequently with the brand they are representing. This emotional attachment will lead to an increase in **affective commitment**, which could lead to a higher loyalty towards the brand (Iglesias *et al.*, 2011).

“I like to use brands that remind me of skateboarders I like. I think about the tricks that they do and try to inspire myself.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “What are the most important aspects on brands you truly like?”

“The people that are on that team. For instance, I really like Fallen, because Fallen already came once to Portugal and I spoke to Tom Asta, Sandoval, and I liked them very much, and I also like their shoes.”

Male, 14 years, comment on “What do you like about the brands that you generally buy?”

All of these loyalty drivers and antecedents are related with the feelings and emotions that tribe members have for the brand in question. It was possible to comprehend that, when a skateboarding brand is well accepted by the tribe there is a tendency to form an emotional bond between the skateboarding tribe and the brand.

“Yes, the values. Sometimes I even have crappy products and think ‘ok, I could buy another product, but it is best if I don’t’.”

Male, 18 years, comments on “What is more important? Values or the products of the brand?”

“I am also a consumer and I have concern for these aspects. I still have this feeling for some shoes that I have always wanted and I keep them for myself. They might be

more expensive, but I keep them because a product is not defined only by quality, but also through the connection.”

Male, 27 years, comments on “Does the quality matter more than the image and values of the brand?”

Through the above, it is possible to see that respondents demonstrate an affective loyalty (Cova and Cova, 2002) with the brand overcoming potential barriers such as high prices or even products with lower quality. These consumers are now emotionally attached to the brand, and consume their products and services not only because of what they are, but mainly because of what they represent, which proves once again that the link is more important than the thing (Cova, 1997).

If skateboarding brands are trying to enter or enhance their position within the skateboard tribe, and do not follow an initial approach of trying to connect and bond with the tribe, they will not succeed, and might end up having a negative and irreversible reputation among the tribe.

“For instance Nike did not support skateboarding, and even had campaigns against skateboarding. They do not organize competitions or anything like it. And I think a lot of skateboarders realize or should realize that.”

Male, 22 years, comments on “Does the skateboarder you are, influence the brands you are loyal to?”

“These people have never put a foot on a skateboard in order to know what we feel and what we want. I think that in those cases it is difficult for skateboarders to be able to have a relation with the brand.”

Male, 22 years, comments on “Why Nike?”

In the tribal environment, the marketing underlying the company and brand must be completely focused in the tribe and provide in all possible ways linking value towards its members (Cova and Cova, 2002). **Given all the previous analysis and facts, it seems to stand to reason that the skateboard tribe forms affective bonds with skateboarding brands that understand and support the tribal movement, which at the highest level results on an emotional loyalty towards the brand in question (Figure VII).**

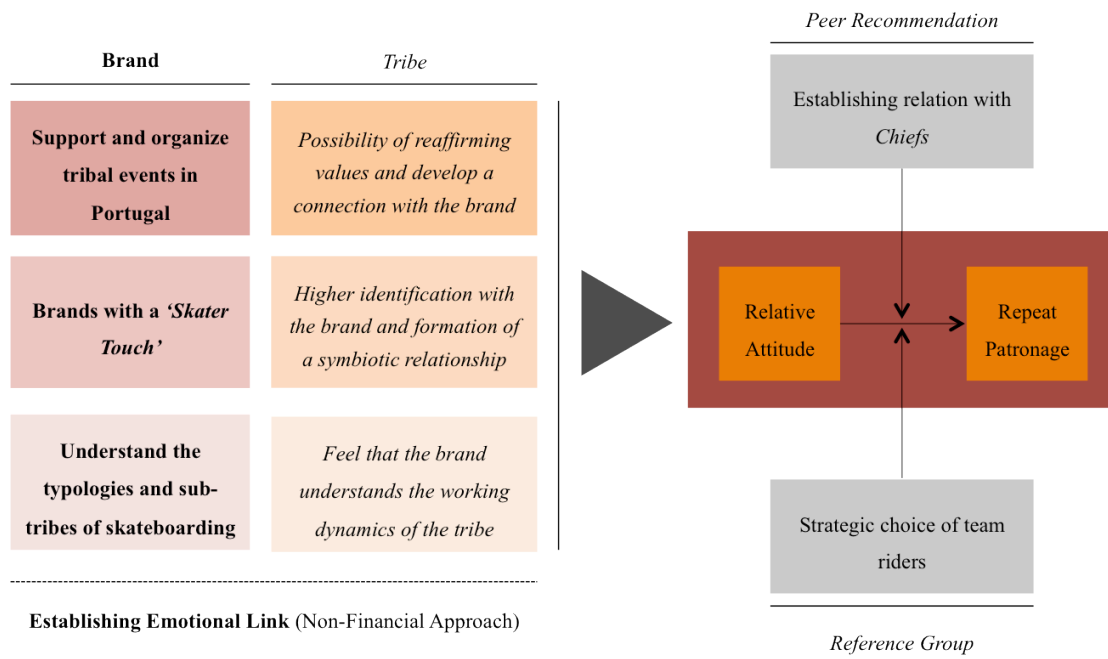


Figure VII: Important Antecedents and Influencers Towards Emotional Brand Loyalty

V. CONCLUSIONS

The present dissertation had two main objectives, being the first one to understand the social dynamics in the skateboarding environment and if there was a presence of tribal behavior, or in other words a consumer tribe. The second main objective was to analyze how tribe members form relations with skateboard brands, and which main aspects these brands should keep in mind to establish an affective linkage resulting in an emotional loyalty. For that matter, a qualitative methodology based on ethnographic tools was conducted, whose output data was analyzed originating results that lead to several conclusions.

It was possible to conclude that members of the skateboard tribe are able to identify other skateboarders through visual aspects such as worn shoes, hoodies, skateboards and even words that have a shared meaning to the tribe. However, “true skateboarders” seem to identify and connect on a deeper level through a **shared genuine passion and state of mind for skateboarding**. This strong emotion is what links the tribe members together, which results in tribes working as **open system**, where **no admission** and **no need to have a central power** is required in order to dictates rules, because all of the tribe members are connected through their passion and commitment for skateboarding. Consequently, it was possible to understand that the tribe in study is composed by a very **heterogeneous group of skateboarders**, where aspects like age, gender, social class, race do not matter, because the emotional link among members is stronger than any of those characteristics.

It was also possible to verify that the skateboard tribe has a clear opposition to brands that do not understand nor support their movement, which could lead to a phenomenon of **deconsumption** or **anti-market values** towards this specific brand. It was also identified that skateboarders are against skateboarding becoming more and more a **mainstream sport**, because this could have serious consequences for the tribe, namely the modification of the shared values. The fact that skateboarding is not a mainstream activity could also be one of the reasons why **skateboarders are still so discriminated and related to negative aspects** such as drug addiction and vandalism.

A fundamental aspect for the maintenance of the tribe is the **ritual** dimension and **the symbolic** meaning attached to it. For instance, an important ritual is developed when skateboarders come together in order to skate, because it is something done on a very regular basis, being responsible for strengthening bonds between tribe members. The places where these rituals occur can be normal ones such as squares, but they carry a **sacred meaning** for the tribe, as tribe members relate them with special events or activities, which were carried out at a specific place and time.

An important gathering point are skateboarding events such as championships and competitions, where the main objective is to provide a place where skateboarders can come together, meet new people and bond with them, rather than just compete with each other. This **non-competitive attitude** is coherent with the fact of skateboarding being related to a passion and not to a sport, where tribe members share such a big feeling to one another that some define it as *family*. Still related to their shared values is the fact that due to the inexistence of a hierarchy or central power, skateboarders share a great **sense of freedom** and **possibility of self-expression**. Additionally, the demonstrated **persistence** in landing a trick, even after getting hurt, is another value skateboarders share, which is mainly motivated by the unique feeling achieved by landing a specific trick.

In the perspective of the firm, there should always be an **effort to create an emotional and affective bond between brand and tribe** by offering products and services that provide linking value to their members. An important way to do so is by organizing events such as competitions and championships, which are a way of bringing tribe members together and additionally a way for the company to support and understand tribal behaviours related to aspects like rituals, values and other characteristics. Through those events, skateboarders know that the brand cares for the tribe and is there to support their movement, achieving a true relation that can have as output an emotional loyalty towards the brand.

With the main aim of creating a symbiotic relation between the brand and the skateboard tribe, another important factor was identified, which relates to the **brand owners or managers**. Skateboarders have a higher loyalty towards skateboard brands that have a true *skateboarder touch*, meaning that they were created or managed by true skateboarders, because more than anyone, they know what the tribe is going

through and what are the main values and passions they share. It is a way of getting close to the tribe and supporting it in a non-invasive way.

The main *Chiefs* of the skateboard tribe were identified as being the ones who own shops dedicated exclusively to skateboarding (skateshop). They belong to the tribe because they share the same tribal characteristics and have, in most cases, a higher degree of knowledge about the skateboarding market and make recommendations that influence the attitude that tribe members have towards certain brands. For that matter, it is essential for the brand to **establish a relation with the Chiefs**, which can enable a more efficient way of communicating with the tribe. Also other tribe members have a great influence towards the brand that one buys and is loyal to.

It is a common feature for skateboarding brands to have a team composed by professional skateboarders (*riders*) who represent the brand on a worldwide basis, transmitting the brand's strategic positioning, values and image. For instance, some brands are more related to the rock culture while others to hip-hop, which means that their riders should also transmit these aspects. Additionally, it seems that in the tribe's perspective **these riders are seen as idols and a source of inspiration**, resulting in a higher purchase of the brand in order to look like and skate like their favourite skateboarder.

Finally, through this research it was possible to conclude that skateboard brands should also consider the **different types of skateboarding, which almost form sub-tribes** by having different needs, values and sometimes even a distinct perspective over skateboarding. There is a need of adaptation and understanding towards all different skateboarding types. By doing so, the brand is demonstrating that it fully understands the complex social dynamics that revolve around the tribe, resulting in a higher connection and possibly deeper brand loyalty. However, it was observed through the research that although there are different sub-tribes in skateboarding, the skateboard itself provides such a strong link, that when skateboarders are on top of it the only true relevant aspect is their common love and drive towards skateboarding.

VI. MANAGEMENT AND MARKETING RECOMMENDATIONS

The strategic approach based on tribal marketing is quite different from traditional marketing approaches, so it is essential to give some guidelines and recommendations for managers and marketers who are willing to adopt this kind of strategy.

Events in skateboarding such as competitions and championships are occasions for skateboarders to gather and reinforce their link and tribe. For that matter, skateboarding brands and companies should **organize or even sponsor some of the most important contests in Portugal**, because by doing so, skateboarders start to value the company because it is showing actual support in the national skate panorama.

Other contests can include online contests where the winning prize could include a **trip to a place categorized as sacred for skateboarders**. As generally the brand's skateboarding team goes on trips to specific places or cities, contest winners could be offered to join them on one of these trips to a sacred place like Barcelona.

The values that are reflected through **the brand's communication** must follow the ones that are shared among the skateboard tribe. In this sense, advertising must reflect aspects such as non-competitive attitude, sense of freedom, liberty of self-expression and persistence.

Skateboarders like getting together in order to skateboard with friends and even meet new people, and for that matter brands should enhance the possibilities for skateboarders to connect with each other. In the United States of America there are brands that organize **skate camps**, which work just as regular summer camps or other camps, but with the difference that everything is related to skateboard, making it possible for tribe members to connect and even to meet new skateboarders, strengthening the tribe.

Skateboarders have a preference for brands that have a *skateboarder touch*, so there is a need to **work side-by-side with skateboarders**. In order to establish an emotional relation between the tribe and the brand, there is a need for the firm to show their human side and ask for feedback (e.g. social networks). Through it, the brand is able

to create an affective bond with the tribe members, and also has a way to understand the tribal behavior of skateboarders.

Another way of getting feedback is through the **skateboarders that are sponsored by the brand** (*team riders*). These skaters are inserted in the skateboarding tribe, and are a way of knowing what the global opinion about the brand is. Besides that, it is a non-intrusive way of getting nearer to the skateboard tribe.

Given the fact that there are different types of skateboarders, there is a need for the brand to adjust their product offer. Skateboard brands should **create different product lines that respond to the needs of the different skateboarding typologies** (e.g. vert and street skating). However, there are some brands that are well known for specializing in one type of skateboarding, and in these cases there should not be an attitude towards trying to reach the rest of the market, but instead supporting the typology of skateboarding in which they are known for.

Finally, one of the main ways for skateboarders to connect is by skating together in specific spots or skateparks. For that matter, skateboarding brands should have an active role in trying to **increase the number of places where skaters can come together**, for example by constructing or sponsoring the construction of a skatepark. By doing so, skateboarders would associate the brand to the skatepark, and would understand that this particular skateboarding brand is in fact supporting the Portuguese skateboard panorama.

VII. CONTRIBUTIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study contains some **contributions** in order to better understand the identified skateboard tribe and how their members interact and develop loyalty towards skateboard brands. Hereunder are presented some specific contributions of the conducted dissertation.

The **conducted literature review** includes references to the main authors and researchers in areas like consumer tribes, tribal marketing, brand loyalty and skateboarding, which is seen as a contribution for researchers that in the future are willing to study, for instance, the relation between consumer tribes and brand loyalty

Given the fact that there is no evidence of previous studies relating the skateboarding environment with tribal behavior, the present thesis can be seen as having a **pioneer nature**. The results and conclusions pointed out from this study reflect contributions on an academic level for literature review and/or further research, and on a professional level for marketers and managers who are working in the skateboard area and are willing to engage with the tribe using a tribal marketing strategy.

Being the present dissertation reflected on an **ethnographic study**, it was possible to capture tribal behavior in its natural environment, which would not be possible through a quantitative-based methodology. Additionally, given the fact that brand loyalty in skateboarding involves deep feelings towards the brand and its surroundings, it was possible through interviews to capture these emotions on a more efficient way.

When applying a specific methodology, it is almost inevitable the presence of certain aspects that could have been done in a different manner. For that matter, the present chapter serves the purpose of identifying some **limitations** of this thesis, as well as **recommendations** for further research on the same field.

The chosen **methodology** was based on ethnographic tools because it was believed to be the best way to observe and understand tribal behavior in its natural environment. However, ethnography is not an exact science and the conclusions of this work cannot be presented in a quantitative way. Additionally, the interpretation and knowledge of

the researcher is also an important aspect for ethnographic research, which could influence the results and conclusions. A suggestion for further studies could be a mixed methodology between qualitative and quantitative tools in a sense of being able to quantify some aspects of tribal behavior.

Given the fact that the interviews and observations were mainly done in the Algarve and Lisbon areas, it is **not possible to expand the results to a national scale**. Nevertheless, it must be taken in account that the present thesis follows a qualitative nature and for that matter the results and conclusions only apply to this case in particular. For further research, it could be interesting to compare the characteristics and values of the skateboarding tribe in different regions of Portugal or even expanding the study to an international basis.

Another limitation of the present thesis lies behind the fact that all **respondents are males**. It would be interesting to understand in further researcher how female skateboarders are inserted in the tribal movement, or if they form a sub-tribe among them.

For the present study **no skateboard brand in specific** was analyzed, which could be a limitation because consumers have different opinions about different brands. For that matter, a recommendation for further studies is understanding how skateboarders become loyal to one brand in specific, or even comparing loyalty towards a national skateboard brand and an international one.

The tribal marketing strategy is composed in two main phases, being the first one a non-financial approach and the second one a more financial one, where companies and brands actually profit in a monetary sense with the tribe. In this research the main phase being analyzed was the first one, but it would be interesting for further research to understand **what can be done with the tribe after establishing an emotional bond and loyalty** (e.g. co-production).

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ATTACHMENTS

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1) GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS (PT):

Sexo: ___ Idade: ___ Ocupação: _____

1. Questões Iniciais:

- 1.1. Há quanto tempo é que começaste a andar de skate?
- 1.2. Como é que tu começaste a andar?
- 1.3. Alguma vez paraste de andar? Porquê?
- 1.4. Com que frequência andas de skate por semana?

2. Características e valores associados à tribo do skate:

- 2.1. O que é o skate para ti? Há algo mais no skate para além do desporto? O que te ensinou? O que é que tu “amas” no skate? Qual o papel/peso do skate na tua vida? Quais as melhores sensações e sentimentos que tiveste em cima da tua tábua?
- 2.2. Costumas andar sozinho ou acompanhado? Se andas com outras pessoas, essas pessoas consideras como teus amigos? Conheceste elas através do skate?
- 2.3. Na tua perspectiva o que faz os skaters ficarem unidos?
- 2.4. Qual o sentimento que tu tens quando vês outro skater passar por ti, por exemplo na rua (quer tenhas nesse momento um skate ou não)?
- 2.5. Achas que características físicas como a idade, o sexo a classe social são relevantes no skate?
- 2.6. Costumas ir a campeonatos de skate? O que é que eles representam para ti? Há algo em particular que tu esperas atingir com o skate?

3. Lealdade dos membros da tribo de skate face a marcas de skate:

- 3.1. Achas que a divisão entre *street* e *vert* é suficiente para enumerar os diferentes tipos de skaters que existem?
- 3.2. Em qual deles é que te inseres?
- 3.3. Achas que esses diferentes tipos de skaters se interrelacionam ou formam subgrupos entre eles?
- 3.4. Achas que o tipo de skater que tu és influencia as marcas de skate que compras e às quais és leal?

- 3.5. Geralmente, quando decides comprar e ser leal a uma marca de skate, tu baseias a tua escolha em que factores? É mais nos valores que a marca transmite ou nos produtos e serviços que a marca oferece? Ou seja, formas uma ligação mais de utilidade com a marca ou emocional?

2) GUIDE FOR INTERVIEWS (ENG):

Gender: ___ Age: ___ Occupation: _____

1. Initial questions:

- 1.1. How did you start skateboarding?
- 1.2. When did you start skateboarding?
- 1.3. Did you ever stop skateboarding? Why?
- 1.4. How frequently do you skate in a week?

2. Characteristics and Values of the Skateboard tribe:

- 2.1. What is skateboarding for you? Is there more to it than a sport? What has it taught you? What do you love about it? What kind of importance does skateboarding have in your life? What are the best feelings you had on a board?
- 2.2. Do you skateboard by yourself or with other skateboarders? Do you consider these other skateboarders friends? Did you meet them through skateboarding?
- 2.3. In your opinion, what brings skateboarders together?
- 2.4. What do you feel when you see another skateboarder (even if you do not have your skateboard at that time with you)?
- 2.5. Do you think that gender, sex, age, race are aspects that matter when skateboarding?
- 2.6. Do you attend to skateboarding competitions frequently? What do they represent to you? Is there something in particular that you hope to achieve through skateboarding?

3. Loyalty of members from the skateboard tribe towards skateboarding brands:

- 3.1. Do you consider that the division made between *street* and *vert* skateboarders is sufficient to establish all the different types of skateboarders?
- 3.2. In which of the type of skateboarders do you fit in?

- 3.3. Do you think that those different types of skateboarders relate to one another or do they form sub-tribes?
- 3.4. Do you think that being a specific type of skateboarder influences the skateboarding brands you decide to purchase?
- 3.5. In general, when you decide to buy and be loyal to a skateboard brand, what is truly important for you? Do you base your choice more on the values the brand transmits or on the products and services they offer? Is it a more emotional or rational decision?

3) ILLUSTRATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY'S OF CLOTHING STYLE



Skateboarder using a shoelace as a belt (left) and worn skateboard shoes

3) ADDITIONAL EXAMPLES OF OWN VOCABULARY

Name	Definition	Source
Demos	<i>“They are demonstrations of skate, where people who are sponsored by a certain brand are put together in a skatepark or even in a street skate spot, and people who are not from that brand are just watching, forming a circle around them. The skaters of that brand are doing tricks in front of us.”</i>	In-depth Interviews
Grinds and Slides	<i>“(…) a grind or a slide is to use your trucks or even the board to slide on top of an object.”</i>	
<i>Quina</i>	A pyramidal object that is used to skate.	Participant Observations
Quarter	A short term for quarter-pipe and is half of a half-pipe.	
D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself)	When they skate an object or ramp that was built or installed by them at a skatepark or elsewhere.	
<i>Toque</i>	Making a certain trick. It usually reveals a trick that look really good in the eyes of the skateboarders.	
Drop	When you drop a ramp from vert skating. For instance a quarter-pipe or a half-pipe.	
Gap	It represents an empty space between two surfaces that is jumped by skateboarders.	
Curb	Usually it is a surface that stands higher than the ground and where skaters perform grinds or manuals.	
Manual	A set of tricks that are done by being on top of the skateboard with only two of the four wheels on the ground (nose manual is done with the front wheels and manual with the back ones).	
Funbox	It represents a skate obstacle that can be grinded or even jumped over.	
<i>Espeta</i>	When a skateboarders falls of his board. Also know for slam or bail.	
Flip	Includes all the flip tricks, which are tricks where the skate rotates in some direction. The most popular include kick-flip or heelflip.	
Tail	The back part of the skateboard.	
Nose	The front part of the skateboard.	