



SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS
AND MANAGEMENT
Lund University

Fans of brands

The revival of fan clubs

LOUISE ARU, SOFIA EKLUND & ANN LILJA

MASTER THESIS 809, MAY 29, 2007

SUPERVISORS

ULF JOHANSSON

SOFIA ULVER SNEISTRUP

MASTER PROGRAMME IN INTERNATIONAL MARKETING AND BRAND MANAGEMENT

PREFACE

First of all we would like to thank our supervisors, Ulf Johansson and Sofia Ulver Sneistrup, for being a great source of inspiration. We further want to thank all our respondents who have been helpful with answering our questions, and thereby providing us with an interesting and entertaining empiric foundation for our master thesis.

A sincere Thank you is also directed to Magnus Holst at IKEA FAMILY, for giving us an inspiring interview where we got great insight in IKEA and their customer club. We would further like to thank Ida Hult, Trendnethnography, and Jon Bertilsson, PhD student at Lund University, for giving us an insight into the world of ethnography and netnography and thereby providing us with new and interesting knowledge.

Thank you, Sofi Phil, for proofreading our thesis.

Last but not least, we would like to thank our families and friends for being supporting and understanding during this period!

Lund, May 2007

Louise Aru

Sofia Eklund

Ann Lilja

ABSTRACT

TITLE	Fans of Brands
DATE OF SEMINAR	May 29th 2007
COURSE	BUS809 Master thesis in International Marketing
AUTHORS	Louise Aru, Sofia Eklund and Ann Lilja
SUPERVISORS	Ulf Johansson and Sofia Ulver Sneistrup
KEYWORDS	Fan clubs, Fans, IKEA FAMILY, Loyalty, Social groupings
THESIS PURPOSE	Our purpose is to display the meaning of fan clubs and further reveal the potential value of fans.
METHODOLOGY	This study has an abductive approach with a qualitative data collection, where empirical material has been collected through a micro netnographic study along with qualitative interviews. IKEA and IKEA FAMILY have been applied together with virtual fan clubs to study the fan club phenomenon.
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	The study is based on prior literature concerning loyalty, customer clubs and brand relations. This theoretical framework was chosen to fulfil the purpose of unveiling the meaning of fan clubs and the potential value of fans.
EMPIRICAL DATA	The empirical data is based on qualitative expert interviews, observations of online fan clubs and qualitative interviews with IKEA fans. Data was collected in order to get a better understanding of the fan club phenomenon.
CONCLUSION	Fan clubs are highly related to social groupings, which further implicates that they are a key driver of loyalty. Due to this strong resemblance, corporation can utilize this tool to get a stronger brand-consumer relation. Nevertheless, fan clubs is the tool, while it is the fans that are the core value. Wherefore it is crucial for companies to acknowledge their fans by implementing a fan club as a loyalty program, which will create a win-win situation for both parties.

TABLE OF CONTENT

1. PROBLEM DISCUSSION	9
1.1 A WORLD OF LOYALTY	9
1.1.1 Fan clubs	10
1.2 A BRANDED SOCIETY	10
1.2.1 Brand as friend	11
1.2.2 Social groupings	12
1.2.2.1 The HOG - a brand community	12
1.2.3 Social media	13
1.2.3.1 My Nutella – a virtual community	13
1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM	14
1.3.1 Theoretical problem: The meaning of fan clubs	14
1.3.2 Practical problem: The value of fans	14
1.3.2.1 Research question	15
1.3.2.2 Purpose	15
1.3.2.3 Target market	15
1.4 KEY TAXONOMY	16
1.5 OUTLINE	17
2. METHOD	18
2.1 OBJECT OF STUDY	18
2.2 SCIENTIFIC STANCE	19
2.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY	20
2.3.1 Using netnography	21
2.3.2 Data collection: Subject of study	22
2.3.2.1 Qualitative expert interviews	23
2.3.2.1.1 Expert interview: Magnus Holst	24
2.3.2.1.2 Expert interview: Ida Hult	24
2.3.2.1.3 Expert interview: Jon Bertilsson	24
2.3.2.2 Collecting micro netnography	24
2.3.2.3 Qualitative interviews with fans of IKEA	26
2.3.2.3.1 E-mail interviews	27
2.3.2.3.2 Telephone and face-to-face interviews	28
2.3.3 Transcription	28
2.4 METHOD OF ANALYSIS	28
2.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS	29
2.5.1 Internal validity	29
2.5.2 External validity	30
2.5.3 Reliability	30
2.5.3.1 Micro netnography	31
2.5.3.2 Qualitative interviews	31
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	33
3.1 OVERVIEW	33
3.2 LOYALTY	34
3.2.1 A journey towards action loyalty	34
3.2.2 Levels of loyalty	35

3.2.2.1 Promoters the true loyal customers	35
3.2.3 Criticism towards loyalty theories	36
3.3 CUSTOMER CLUBS	36
3.3.1 What characterizes a customer club?	37
3.3.2 For everyone or the special one?	37
3.3.3 Hierarchy of goals	37
3.3.4 Baits for the members	39
3.4 BRAND RELATIONS	39
3.4.1 Brand as partner	39
3.4.2 Social groupings	40
3.4.3 Opposing views of social groupings	41
3.4.4 Brand community/tribe: A key driver of loyalty	42
3.4.5 Three core commonalities	42
3.4.6 The tribal clover	43
3.4.7 Supporting virtual communities/tribes	44
3.4.8 Criticism towards brand relation theories	45
3.5 SUMMARY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	45
4. EMPIRICISM INTRODUCTION	46
4.1 EMPIRICISM FOCUS	46
4.2 INTRODUCING IKEA	47
4.2.1 Introducing IKEA FAMILY	47
4.3 INTRODUCING VARIOUS IKEA FAN CLUBS	49
4.3.1 IKEA Fans	49
4.3.2 Facebook	50
4.3.3 OHIKEA	51
5. EMPIRICISM/ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK	52
5.1 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK	52
5.2 IKEA FAMILY: A FAN CLUB?	53
5.2.1 In what way is IKEA FAMILY a fan club?	53
5.2.2 IKEA FAMILY open for everyone	53
5.2.3 Goals of IKEA FAMILY	54
5.2.4 How IKEA FAMILY gives its fans added value	56
5.2.4.1 IKEA FAMILY Live	57
5.2.4.2 IKEA FAMILY's product range and shop	58
5.2.4.3 The IKEA FAMILY website	59
5.2.4.4 Other value-added services	59
5.2.5 The future of IKEA FAMILY as a fan club	61
5.3 THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN IKEA AND ITS FANS	61
5.4 FAN CLUBS RESEMBLANCE TO BRAND COMMUNITIES/TRIBES	66
5.4.1 Consciousness of kind	66
5.4.2 Rituals and traditions	68
5.4.3 Moral responsibility	72
5.4.4 Fans' ongoing activities	75
5.5 FAN CLUBS: A KEY DRIVER OF LOYALTY	79

5.5.1 How loyal are fans?	80
5.5.2 Fans as promoters	81
5.6 SUMMARY ANALYSIS	84
6. FRAMING THE DISCUSSION	85
6.1 THE MEANING OF FAN CLUBS	85
6.2 THE POTENTIAL VALUE OF FANS	86
6.3 CONCLUSION	87
6.4 FURTHER RESEARCH	88
6.5 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS FOR IKEA FAMILY	89
6.5.1 Get to know your fans and utilize their knowledge!	89
6.5.2 Communicate with your fans!	90
REFERENCE LIST	92
APPENDIX I	
APPENDIX II	
APPENDIX III	
APPENDIX IV	

1. PROBLEM DISCUSSION

This chapter will spark an interest for the fan club phenomenon by giving the reader a background to the field of study. We will start off with our problem discussion, and further, the research problem, research question and purpose will be presented. The chapter ends with essential key definitions and an outline. This chapter will now take you on a loyalty journey, where we will make stops at different places, where we may discover fan club denominators such as social groupings and social media. Let the journey begin!

1.1 A WORLD OF LOYALTY

A lot of research today is conducted within the field of loyalty and its importance has resulted in that businesses today are searching for ways to increase their customer loyalty. Traditionally, loyalty and satisfaction have been strongly correlated, and the term loyalty has been defined as when a customer is making repeated purchases (Yi & Jeon, 2003). However, in recent years, research has revealed that loyalty goes beyond repeated purchases and there are other elements that affect loyalty as well (Fournier, 1998; Oliver, 1997; McAlexander et. al, 2003).

Within the wide definition of loyalty, there are several types of objects that customers can be loyal to, for example brands and stores. Loyalty is further a relationship between a player and an object over a long period of time (Söderlund, 2001). A metaphor used to compare consumers' loyalty towards brands or services, is to look at it as a marriage. However, the days when consumers only were loyal to one brand are gone and it is more common that people are loyal to many objects at the same time. A person can, as an example, be loyal to three brands within a product group at the same time, since variation is preferred when consuming goods. Nowadays, it is therefore more relevant to use friendship as a metaphor to explain people's loyalty towards objects (Bengtsson & Östberg, 2006).

No matter how loyal customers are, corporations always strive to increase customer loyalty. This work is done through loyalty programs such as customer clubs, with activities utilized to establish an emotional and trustworthy brand-consumer relationship (Söderlund, 2001; Butscher, 2002). However, due to tough corporate climate and competition, companies must continuously work with the development of their loyalty program.

1.1.1 FAN CLUBS

The levels of loyalty among customers vary enormously; from those who are just familiar with a brand to those who are super-loyal consumers and possess the same characteristics as fans (Raphel & Raphel, 1995:A,B). Fans are people who have reached the highest level of loyalty. True loyalty is therefore found in fan clubs where fans are gathered due to their urge to get together and share their passion with like-minded people. Fan clubs are centered around their members and Butscher (2002) argue that fan clubs can be seen as a form of loyalty program initiated by a group of people with a common interest, like an artist or sports team. To express themselves, fans are often members of socially organized groups with like-minded fans (Hills, 2005; Brown, 1997). These groups construct a world as rich and complex as any traditional perception of high or real culture (Brown, 1997).

The word “fan” originates from the Latin word *fanaticus*, which contains several meanings ascribed; enraptured, inspired, oppressed and obsessed. In order to categorize the word, fan, one can say that it is situated between obsession, enthusiasm and homage (Strage, 2005). Furthermore, a fan is someone who has a very strong interest for somebody or something (Redden, 2000; Strage, 2005). Most people are fans once in their lifetime. The word may seem depreciative, but a person may be inspired and obsessed with something, which does not mean that the person is mentally ill or confused (Strage, 2005). However, it often means that the object of obsession tends to become a significant part of the person’s life and more important than everything else (Redden, 2000).

Traditionally, fans have been distinguished as people that endorse a certain artist or sports team. However, today there is no real limit to fandom and Arvidsson (2007) argues that companies are increasingly being perceived as idols. These tremendously loyal fans, whether they are fans of pop stars or brands, are consumers with an extreme consumption drive, which Redden (2000) stresses to be “*a marketer’s dream*” (Redden, 2000, p. 322).

1.2 A BRANDED SOCIETY

The number of fans of brands has naturally increased since the population in western society lives in a world with a high degree of innovation and product development. Consumer goods are constantly increasing and the days where the consumer only had one or two products to choose from are history. A shopper in the USA has between 30,000 and 40,000 products available in a supermarket, and with this wide assortment it is impossible to make the majority of the shop-

ping decisions by rational evaluation. It is stated that people are approximately 80 percent emotional and 20 percent rational (Roberts, 2006). Since people think with their hearts, emotions naturally must be involved in the decision making process. The strong position of brands in our everyday life has turned them into a common part of our society and culture (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006).

Peoples' strong emotions towards brands can in some cases evolve into a love for a brand. This has further led to a journey from products to trademarks to brands and finally to lovemarks. Lovemarks can be seen as the future beyond brands and is defined as brands, events and experiences that people love. Roberts (2006), the creator of lovemarks, basically claims that you must fall in love with a brand in order to stay loyal to it. Lovemarks can be anything from cities to shoes and motorbikes. The biggest difference between brands and lovemarks is, "*Take away a brand and people find a replacement. Take away a lovemark and people will protest*" (Roberts, 2006 p. 16). Thus, lovemarks produce stronger emotional feelings than brands. Companies must understand their consumers and create experiences that make the brand a loved part of their lives.

1.2.1 BRAND AS FRIEND

In northern countries, our present society has most often been familiar with individualism (Cova & Cova, 2002). "*The fragmentation of our society, fostered by the developments of industry and commerce, is the most visible consequences of individualism*" (Cova & Cova, 2002 p. 596). Cova & Cova (2002) argue that our era is partaking in the beginning of the individualism's end; a search for recreation of social links has emerged. Furthermore, brand loyal consumers are often more interested in social links and identities that come with the consumption of certain brands. (Elliot & Wattansuvan, 1998; Yankee, 2007).

Relationships towards objects, symbols and other less tangible phenomena such as brands are known as parasocial relationships (Gummesson, 2002). For a brand relationship to truly stay alive, the partners must together affect, define, and re-define the relationship (Fournier, 1998). A brand should not be seen as a passive object of marketing transactions but rather as an active actor. One way to identify a brand partner relationship is to emphasize in which ways brands are humanized and personalized. Consumers can actually assert brands with personality assets, treated, as it would be a personal character (Fournier, 1998). Gad (2000) further argues that this relationship can be compared to friendship and that successful brands do things with their customers. By socializing with the customers, the brand appears to be more humane than businesslike.

Consumers' brand preferences can further create memberships of social groups and signal an ambition of belonging to a certain group or to differentiate themselves from other consumers (Elliott & Wattansuvan, 1998; Patterson & O'Malley, 2006).

1.2.2 SOCIAL GROUPINGS

12

Nowadays, social groupings such as brand communities/tribes/subcultures are a growing trend, from consumers who support luxury brands such as Harley Davidson to others who endorse convenience brands like Nutella (Cova & Pace, 2006). However, a well-known brand is not the key success factor for the creation of social groupings since affinity for a brand is personal. Social groupings hold great potential, but in order to utilize them, marketers must listen and get a full understanding of their target market to find ways to add value to the customer experience (Kalman, 2005). Consumers can belong to several social groupings, in each of which they may play a different role. This shows the present consumer's search for social links but can still be characterized as post modern, due to the fragmented society where individuals apply an image depending on the context (Firat, 1991). Social groupings have become essential for individuals, and are even more important than belonging to a class or segment (Cova & Cova, 2002).

1.2.2.1 THE HOG - A BRAND COMMUNITY

By discovering brand social groupings, corporations can find new ways to comprehend loyalty (McAlexander et al. 2002). Harley-Davidson has created their own brand community in order to invite their customers to participate and express themselves. This displays a brand community where a company is the initiator. In this case it becomes a form of a loyalty program, since it deepens customers' feelings and loyalty towards the brand.

The Harley Owners Group (HOG), which is a Harley-Davidson-sponsored organization exclusively for Harley owners, is for example organizing brandfests, thus national and international rallies for members. In addition, the HOG are providing them with information and selling Harley clothing as well as giving the members access to an online-account (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Harley-Davidson, 2007:1).

1.2.3 SOCIAL MEDIA

Technological development has increased the consumption of social media. Even if this media raises isolation from society, we are currently attempting to recompose our social surrounding. Consumers are increasingly using social media such as the Internet to interact with other consumers with a shared passion (Cova & Cova, 2002; Gad, 2000). *“There is an intimacy on the Web that is unique compared with traditional media. No medium has been more able to build relationships and create interactivity automatically and cheaply.”* (Gad, 2000 p. 48). Our social networks can now be reflected in virtual communities such as Facebook. Scholars are talking about ‘The Facebook Generation’, thus people who text-message and surf on the Internet as well as those who communicate via virtual social networks. These people are further searching for meaningful relationships in front of screens and monitors (Tucker, 2007).

Due to this development, virtual social groupings are an efficient way to reach people endorsing a certain brand since the Internet holds great opportunities for brand endorsers to get together and interact about their favorite brands (Cova & Pace, 2006). These virtual communities/tribes enable a new form of sociality and customer empowerment.

1.2.3.1 MY NUTELLA – A VIRTUAL COMMUNITY

The convenience brand, Nutella, is an example of a corporation utilizing the advantage of social media. The Italian cream spread brand have in conformity with the lifestyle brand Harley-Davidson adopted a brand community strategy. In 2004, Nutella launched an online community for their consumers. The community is called My Nutella and among other features they offer; personal pages, forums and galleries (Cova & Pace, 2006; My Nutella, 2007:1; My Nutella, 2007:3). The community is also hosting events such as Nutella Parties, where the members are celebrating the brand (Cova & Pace, 2006; My Nutella, 2007:4).

Additionally, members are able to start Nutella related fan clubs, where fans can start groups with different objectives. One group is called Nutell@ Pop Art, where members are able to upload their versions of the Nutella jar. Further, within the fan club section it is also possible to find fans all over Italy (My Nutella, 2007:2).

This example emphasizes how the Internet has moved the power from the company to the consumer. The consumer chooses what we see and when we see it; consumers are playing a greater role in this process. Dan Rosensweig, COO of Yahoo!, says *“The world is moving from mass media to my media”* (Roberts, 2006 p. 38).

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

We have now traveled through the problem discussion, which reveals the background of our study. It is now time to make a short stop to identify our research problem. The research problem is further divided into a theoretical problem; where we examine the meaning of fan clubs, and a practical problem; where we question the underlying potential value of fan clubs.

1.3.1 THEORETICAL PROBLEM: THE MEANING OF FAN CLUBS

We live in a society where brands have become increasingly important in peoples' lives. Consumers are developing parasocial relationships to brands and love-marks, thus the ones that we love and respect on a higher level (Roberts, 2006; Gummesson, 2002). However, according to our research, fan clubs from a brand perspective appear to be a new phenomenon and consequently we have identified a theoretical gap, as we have not found any literature covering this area. This ongoing discussion about brands as idols is of current interest, and therefore we find it interesting to fill this gap by revealing the meaning of fan clubs within the context of brands.

Consumers are moreover searching for a social link to other consumers with a shared passion. However, fan clubs are according to our research not discussed within the area of social groupings. Therefore, we have not found any theories explaining how the fan club concept is related to these social groupings. Several authors are giving an account within communities centered around brands (Cova & Pace, 2006; McAlexander et al. 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), however, the fan club concept is never utilized within these areas. Since we have witnessed social groupings such as brand communities, which provide companies with significant support, we find it interesting to study whether the same opportunities are enclosed in fan clubs. By investigating fan clubs, we attempt to fill this gap in theory by revealing the meaning of the fan club concept by discovering whether fan clubs can be equalized to social groupings, or if not, how they differ.

1.3.2 PRACTICAL PROBLEM: THE VALUE OF FANS

As previously discussed, different kinds of loyalty programs are attempting to strengthen the brand-consumer relation. Today, loyalty programs such as customer clubs are common marketing tools used to build strong databases, which can

be applied to analyze purchase behavior, and further used to implement adapted marketing actions (Söderlund, 2001; Butscher, 2002). However, are customer clubs the best strategy to strengthen the brand-consumer relation? Could fan clubs be a potential alternative?

There are several unofficial fan clubs endorsing brands, but it seems as though corporations have not realized the potential of developing their own fan club. Fans are super-loyal consumers and the best marketers since they in an authentic way promote their idols, such as a brand (Redden, 2000). It is therefore interesting to further study the potential value of fans. Companies do their utmost to achieve loyal customers and they should be interested in getting inside the minds of fans in order to get an enhanced understanding of them.

1.3.2.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

Since fan clubs in the context of corporations and brands are a new phenomenon, we aim to answer the general question:

Could fan clubs function as a possible loyalty program for branded goods companies?

1.3.2.2 PURPOSE

Our purpose is to display the meaning of fan clubs and further reveal the potential value of fans.

1.3.2.3 TARGET MARKET

Our research is mainly intended for corporations, preferably with strong brands, which are interested in ways to increase their customer loyalty. The thesis studies consumers in order to provide our target market with implications that could be valuable in companies' work with loyalty programs.

1.4 KEY TAXONOMY

BRAND COMMUNITY

“A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand.”

Albert Muniz & Thomas O’Guinn (2001) p. 412

16

CUSTOMER CLUB

“A customer club is an at least communicative union of people or organizations, which is initiated and operated by an organization in order to contact these members directly on a regular basis and offer them a benefit package with a high perceived value, with the goal of activating them and increasing their loyalty by creating an emotional relationship.”

Stephan Butscher (2002) p. 5

LOYALTY

“A deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior.”

Richard Oliver (1997) p. 392

LOYALTY PROGRAM

“A loyalty program is a marketing program that is designed to build customer loyalty by providing incentives to profitable customers.”

Youjae Yi & Hoseong Jeon (2003) p. 230

SUBCULTURE

“A distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity. Other characteristics of a subculture of consumption include an identifiable, hierarchical social structure; a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargons, rituals, and modes of symbolic expression.”

John Schouten & James McAlexander (1995) p. 43

TRIBES

“...network of heterogeneous persons – in terms of age, sex, income, etc. – who are linked by a shared passion or emotion; a tribe is capable of collective action, its members are not simple consumers, they are advocates.”

Bernard Cova & Veronica Cova, (2002) p. 602

1.5 OUTLINE

1. PROBLEM DISCUSSION

This chapter will spark an interest for the fan club phenomenon by giving the reader a background to the field of study. We will start off with our problem discussion, and further, the research problem, research question and purpose will be presented. The chapter ends with essential key definitions and an outline. This chapter will now take you on a loyalty journey, where we will make stops at different places, where we may discover fan club denominators such as social groupings and social media. Let the journey begin!

17

2. METHOD

This chapter will act as a guide for the continuing journey by introducing the reader to our methodological framework and different strategies for data collection and analysis. Our qualitative method will be conducted with a netnographic approach along with qualitative interviews, which is applied in order to collect empirical material. Finally, the trustworthiness of our research will be discussed.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This part of the journey will present our theoretical framework, which will be used as a platform for our research and further a tool to analyze our data in the analysis. We hope to provide the reader with knowledge in the field of loyalty and branded society and show how these are related to our purpose.

4. EMPIRICISM INTRODUCTION

Our journey will continue by introducing the reader to our empiricism. We will start by presenting IKEA and their customer club, IKEA FAMILY. IKEA FAMILY will further function as our main case supported by three other relevant cases, in order to analyze the fan club phenomenon. These relevant cases consist of several virtual fan clubs.

5. EMPIRICISM/ANALYSIS

The reader has now traveled through our problem discussion, method, theoretical framework, and recently made a stop at empirical introduction. The journey will now continue to apply theories and data continuously in order to analyze the area studied. Prepare yourself for a chapter, which will take you from IKEA FAMILY to their fanatic fans.

6. FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Our challenging journey has come to its end, and in this final chapter we will present our findings within the field of fan clubs. We will give the reader a summary of our results where we will begin by discussing the meaning of fan clubs and further the potential value of fans. Subsequently we will present inspiration for further research within this field. Since we have applied IKEA as case company, we will also deliver managerial implications, specifically directed to IKEA Family. We hope you have had a pleasant journey, and we are very grateful that you chose to travel with us through the world of loyalty!

2. METHOD

This chapter will act as a guide for the continuing journey by introducing the reader to our methodological framework and different strategies for data collection and analysis. Our qualitative method will be conducted with a netnographic approach along with qualitative interviews, which is applied in order to collect empirical material. Finally, the trustworthiness of our research will be discussed.

2.1 OBJECT OF STUDY

During our research about fans and fan clubs we realized that this marketing tool is inadequately researched. As mentioned in section 1.3.1 *Theoretical problem: The meaning of fan clubs*, there is a gap in literature regarding fan clubs in a corporate context. This new area, which we have discovered, is of great interest to study from a corporate view, since all companies strive to increase customer loyalty. Fans are extremely loyal customers. They are fanatics! Therefore it is of interest for companies, to reveal and understand how these fanatics think and behave. Since fan clubs endorsing brands is a new phenomenon we had to use an explorative method. Due to the lack of existing theories, we had to take alternative routes and find theories, which in various ways were related to our research area in order to understand the meaning of the phenomenon (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

Our knowledge production will focus both on mode 1 (academic research) and mode 2 (practice), as we attempt to solve a theoretical as well as a practical problem (Bryman & Bell, 2003). There are two main objectives with our study; the first one is to provide knowledge about the meaning of fan clubs, which will lead to an extension of theory. The word 'meaning' is used to evaluate fan clubs against other social groupings and to understand how fans behave towards the brand and other consumers. Further, our second objective is to reveal the potential value of fans, thus contributing to practice. This is of interest because we want to show companies how important fans are to a brand. After careful consideration, a theoretical as well as a methodological framework was decided upon.

In order to fulfill our purpose, thus understanding the meaning of fan clubs and to reveal the potential value of fans, we found it crucial to study real-life examples. Our field of research was originally only to study IKEA FAMILY, due to an interest evoked during a guest lecture by Communication Manager, Magnus Holst in January 2007. When doing research about IKEA FAMILY we came across a statement on their website, claiming IKEA FAMILY to be a fan club. From there

we continued our journey, looking further into the fan club concept and realized that this phenomenon would be interesting to study on a more general level. We believed this customer club, IKEA FAMILY, to be an interesting case to study, in order to investigate if the fan club concept can be utilized in practice. In addition, IKEA is a large corporation working on the global arena and IKEA FAMILY is now in an expansion phase where they are entering new markets and also developing their concept.

However, the IKEA FAMILY case alone will not shed light on the fan club situation. Additionally, to get a better understanding and map the current situation, IKEA fans have been studied through different IKEA fan related websites. Through these, we will be able to produce knowledge about fans and fan clubs in order to fulfill our purpose.

2.2 SCIENTIFIC STANCE

To answer the research problem of this study it was of importance to get a comprehensive understanding of fans and fan clubs. Before delving into the strategy of achieving knowledge and to be able to fulfill the aim of our study, it was of great significance to comprehend the “reality” and clarify what type of knowledge we searched for. In order to achieve this we had to make different choices regarding assumptions of reality (Bryman & Bell, 2003). When conducting research within social science there are two contrasting views on how to do it, positivism and social constructionism (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

This research aims to understand the meaning of fan clubs and identify the potential value of fans. To unveil this, a general understanding of how fans think and behave was necessary. Fan clubs are a social phenomenon and can be viewed as interactions between social actors, who construct reality (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). With this in mind, the research is favorably conducted from the social constructionism view (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

Social constructionism is a reaction to the old views of positivism and advocates that reality is neither objective nor exterior, thus reality is given meaning by people and is socially constructed. It is an ontological standing point on how we perceive the nature of reality (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). This view is appropriate since our research focus on ways people make sense of the world, which they especially do by sharing their experiences with others (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2003). We have tried to get inside the minds of fans to understand their way of thinking and additionally identify meanings that they give to their experience (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Thus, the reality of a fan club is constructed

when people, in our case fans, interact with one another.

This perspective further leads us into the epistemological position, which refers to the way we acquire knowledge (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2003). Since reality is seen as socially constructed, it is favorably understood through interpretation (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Accordingly, knowledge has been gathered through interpretation and decoding of interaction between members of fan clubs, since we found it interesting to examine how participants interpret their social world (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

Together, these choices construct a base for our research; however, one last decision regarding the relationship between theory and research was needed in order to have a stable foundation for the study. Due to our previous choices, we found it essential to apply an abductive approach. This means that we are utilizing a combination of an inductive and a deductive method in order to study the research phenomenon, fan clubs. In order to understand the abductive approach we find it necessary to explain the inductive and deductive perspectives. An inductive approach allows description and exploration as well as emergence of new findings by first collecting data. The inductive approach consents to interpretations, while the deductive approach is rather based on hypothesizing. In other words, the deductive approach is in general more connected to quantitative research where the theories are tested by the data collected (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

An abductive approach was chosen due to the following procedure. We started off, inductively by choosing to study IKEA FAMILY (IKEA's customer club). Our data collection was in some way guided by theory, since the chosen theories have influenced our interview guides and the overall way of studying the fan club phenomenon. This further indicates that our research was influenced by some degree of deduction. Because of the object of study and the theories chosen, we also identified existing IKEA fan clubs which we started to observe. This process displays how theory and data were collected continuously during the research process, which also illustrated how we have explored the phenomenon. Since complexity is to a certain point rather emphasized than ignored, we believe this approach has allowed us to gain a deeper insight into the fan club phenomenon.

2.3 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY

Concerning our constructionist view of the research, the best way to collect data is through a qualitative method (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Additionally, as we were researching a new phenomenon it was not possible to measure it quantitatively since we did not know specifically what to measure (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002).

It is further not possible to construct a questionnaire without knowledge about the reality. The choice of a qualitative design allowed us to use interpretative techniques, concerned with description, interpretation, and translation to understand the meaning of the fan club phenomenon in the social world.

Our main intention was to conduct an ethnographic study since it is a suitable method when trying to achieve an overall understanding of small-scale groups. Ethnography has its roots in cultural anthropology and is arguably the oldest method of social research (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003). In order to get more knowledge about collecting ethnographical data, we interviewed Ida Hult, consultant at Trendethnography in Stockholm, Sweden. We got some good input, however we realized that a valid ethnographical study required time that we did not possess. Furthermore, if we had made observations at IKEA stores, it would have been impossible to locate the fans among the customers. Additionally, it would have been even more difficult selecting the respondents for our interviews. Therefore we found it most suitable to conduct a micro netnographic study along with in-depth interviews, thus conducting a triangulation (Elliott & Jankel-Elliott, 2003; Bryman & Bell, 2003). Triangulation when conducting netnography, is further strengthened by Kozinets (1998) who argues that netnography is the most valuable as an adjunct methodological tool, used in combination with face-to-face or telephone interviews. Furthermore, this adjunct method is favorable especially when studying cyber cultures or virtual communities (Kozinets, 1998).

2.3.1 USING NETNOGRAPHY

As discussed above, we decided to approach the ethnographic perspective by using a netnographic method, due to various reasons such as time and distance, to our interview respondents in real-life. Netnography is a method where cultures and communities, emerging through computer-mediated-communications, are studied through ethnographic research techniques (Kozinets, 2002). As Internet participation increases, real-life groups and organizations are increasingly developing their communities online (Kozinets, 1998). While studying fans, we found the Internet to be the best way to get in contact with the right people, since cyber cultures are increasingly being recognized as an important new place of human cultural activity (Kozinets, 1998).

In order to get a perception of what factors drive people to become fanatics, we chose to observe fans of IKEA at the selected fan related websites. Like ethnography, netnography focus on full partaking in the culture being studied, as a cultural member. However, due to limitations of resources and time, we have taken part as non-participating observers (Kozinets 2002; Kozinets, 1998,). Additionally,

netnography enabled us to work from our homes, which was of great advantage since most IKEA fans are found abroad (IKEAFans, 2007:2; Facebook, 2007:2, OHIKEA, 2007:1).

2.3.2 DATA COLLECTION: SUBJECT OF STUDY

22

As mentioned in section 2.3 *Qualitative research strategy*, we have conducted a triangulation where a micro netnography has been supported by interviews (e-mail, telephone and face-to-face). Further, to get an overall picture of IKEA FAMILY as well as a better understanding of ethnographic studies and online interaction, we conducted three expert interviews. Since this is data collected from primary sources specifically for our purpose, this is referred to as the thesis's primary data (Jacobson, 2002). In order to fulfill the objectives of the research we have also collected literature originally conducted by other researchers for different purposes. This is known as our secondary data and has been collected using the library facilities at Lund University (Jacobson, 2002). Search engines such as ELIN, LIBRIS and LOVISA have been used in order to find appropriate literature; books, articles compendiums and electronic journals. Public search engines such as Google have further been used for sporadic searches. The following keywords are a sample of words, which were mainly used during these searches: fans, fan clubs, brand communities, loyalty, customer clubs, netnography and IKEA. Hence, Figure 1 illustrates the overall focus of our data collection and the relation between the primary and secondary data.

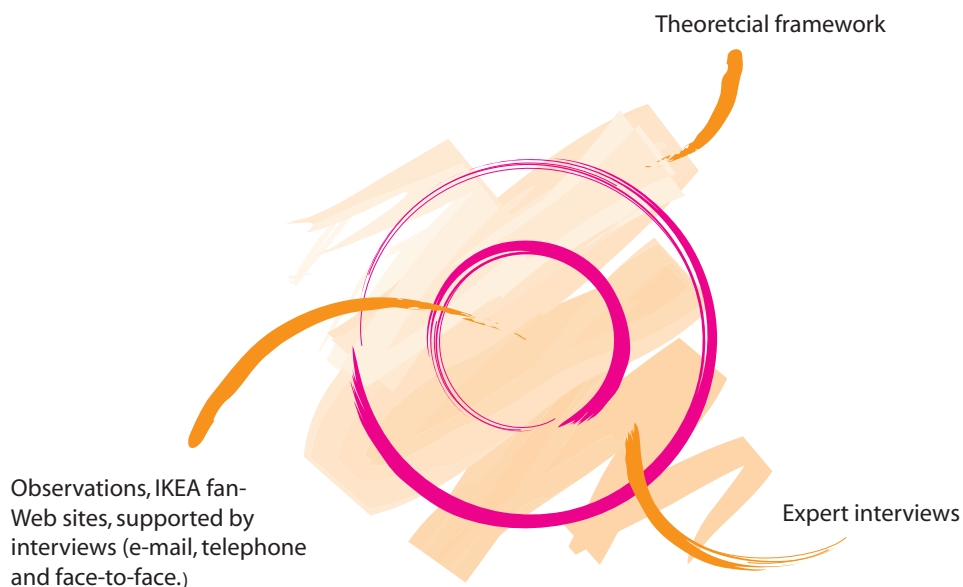


Figure 1. Fieldwork focus.

To reveal the nature of the fan club phenomenon, we conducted:

- Semi-structured expert interviews with Magnus Holst, Communication Manager at IKEA FAMILY Global and Ida Hult, Consultant at Trend-ethnography.
- Unstructured expert interview with Jon Bertilsson, PhD student at Lund University.
- Online observations of IKEAFans, Facebook and OHIKEA.
- Structured e-mail interviews with members of IKEAFans, Facebook and OHIKEA.
- Semi structured telephone and face-to-face interviews with Swedish IKEA fans.

2.3.2.1 QUALITATIVE EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Qualitative face-to-face interviews were conducted with three experts within different areas in order to get information that could support our research. The interview respondents were contacted by e-mail. However, only two of them received the interview guide in advance (Appendix 1). The three interviews were conducted by two of us and lasted approximately one hour each (Bryman & Bell, 2003). The questions directed at Magnus Holst and Ida Hult functioned more as a guideline, since we found it appropriate to work with semi-structured interview guides. The motive behind this choice was that we did not want to tie up the respondent around fixed questions (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Semi-structured interviews are preferred when the investigation has a fairly clear focus as well as when there is more than one person conducting the interview (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Additionally, it gave us the opportunity to ask new questions as they emerged during the interview. Further, we believed it to be necessary not to interrupt when the respondents were speaking to get as much information from them as possible.

Concerning the interview with Jon Bertilsson, we did not send any questions in advance since we had mentioned the topic of interest when contacting him. Therefore we conducted an unstructured interview. The interviews with each expert will be further displayed in the next section.

2.3.2.1.1 EXPERT INTERVIEW: MAGNUS HOLST

As explained in part 2.1 *Object of study*, a guest lecture by Magnus Holst sparked our interest for IKEA FAMILY. Consequently, our first step was to contact Holst in order to get an interview. After his positive response, a face-to-face interview was scheduled for the 30th of March 2007. The aim of the interview was to get more knowledge about IKEA FAMILY and further to receive information that could be used as a foundation for our IKEA FAMILY case. The interview was carried out at the global IKEA FAMILY office in Helsingborg, Sweden.

2.3.2.1.2 EXPERT INTERVIEW: IDA HULT

We have already in section 2.3 *Qualitative research strategy*, touched upon the objective for interviewing Ida Hult, which was to broaden our knowledge about ethnographic studies. Additionally, we wanted to get tips about relevant literature. After having read an article about Trendethnography in *Sydsvenskan* (Andersson, 2007), we saw an opportunity to get some relevant information about this area. We contacted Hult, who works as a consultant, and she was willing to participate. The interview was carried out on the 4th of April 2007 at their office in Stockholm, Sweden. The interview was definitely educational, but turned out to be less useful when we changed our purpose along with the method. However, we got many good tips, which could be applied to our netnographic study.

2.3.2.1.3 EXPERT INTERVIEW: JON BERTILSSON

Furthermore, we conducted an unstructured interview with Jon Bertilsson, PhD student, on the 10th of April 2007 at the Business Department at Lund University. Bertilsson was contacted because of his knowledge within social groupings and netnography. With the help of Bertilsson's knowledge, we were able to get some good input to our research and additional tips on available literature, which was helpful since our object of study is a new phenomenon.

2.3.2.2 COLLECTING MICRO NETNOGRAPHY

In order to understand the meaning of fan clubs and how valuable they are, we decided to start searching on the Internet for existing IKEA fan clubs. We found several IKEA fans websites to explore. In order to choose the most relevant websites, we observed the content and ongoing activities, the layout, structure and level of member interaction. The websites observed included Facebook, IKEAFans,

IKEA Hackers, Lovemarks, OHIKEA and Positive Fanatics (see references for URL). Of these six websites, three significant fan clubs were chosen because we found them to be the most relevant and trustworthy sites in order to function as an instrument to understand the meaning of fan clubs. We chose to keep our main focus on IKEAFans as this website had the most ongoing interactions (Figure 2).

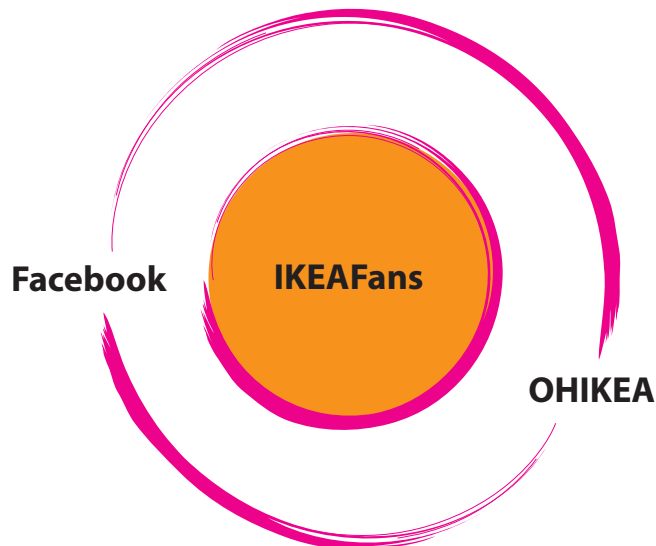


Figure 2. Our focus on the micro netnography.

Further, in order to attain a better understanding of the fans of IKEA, we also made smaller observations of a group on Facebook, as well as on OHIKEA. Due to time and resource limitations, two of us conducted a micro netnography. (Bryman & Bell, 2003). IKEAFans was observed daily from the 15th of April to the 30th of April. We decided to limit the observation to two sub-forums at IKEAFans; 'Introduction' and 'Got Questions?'. These were chosen due to their relevance to our purpose. Facebook and OHIKEA were, on the other hand, observed a couple of times a week in-between the 15th of April and the 10th of May. On Facebook we chose to observe the group I have an unhealthy obsession with IKEA, since it is the largest IKEA related group with more than 500 members thus the most interaction. Contrarily, OHIKEA is a smaller fan club and therefore the whole website was observed. During the chosen time periods we tried to learn as much as possible about the websites and forums selected as well as how the members behaved (Kozinets 1998, 2002).

According to Kozinets (2002) p 6, there are two types of data collection regarding netnography:

- (1) The data that the researcher directly copies from the computer-mediated communications of online community members.
- (2) Data that the researcher inscribes regarding his/her observations of the community, its members, interactions and meanings.

The data collected during our micro netnography involved field notes together with the artifacts of the culture and website. Furthermore, we copied conversations, which were illustrative for the specific website as well as conversations that in some way displayed fan behavior. From IKEAFans, we also collected pictures of members' renovation processes of their kitchens, and from OHIKEA some images were selected in order to show members' real-life activities. Photos are directly connected to reality; therefore it is also evident that reality exists (Kozinets, 2002). Through this data we were able to get a deeper insight of IKEA fans' behavior and further found that photos can be a tool to add symbolic meaning (Cova & Pace, 2006). The overall observation of these websites gave us a feeling of the atmosphere within an IKEA fan club and how members interact and express themselves.

2.3.2.3 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS WITH FANS OF IKEA

To complement our observations we also conducted interviews (e-mail, telephone and face-to-face) in order to increase the reliability of our findings. It further gave us the opportunity to study the subject from a different view and to make sure that our online data was trustworthy (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994). The respondents were contacted by e-mail, and if they were willing to participate, we sent the questions in advance. The interview guides contained questions regarding the members' background, their passion for IKEA and fan clubs. When conducting e-mail interviews we used structured interview guides, whereas semi-structured interview guides were used for our telephone and face-to-face interviews. The questions are closely connected to our theoretical framework in order to better analyze and thus understand fans in order to fulfill our purpose. Our interview guides and their connection with our theories can be viewed in Appendix III.

In order to get as much valid research as possible, we wanted to collect data until we got a small-scale saturation effect (Bryman & Bell, 2003). All in all, 35 potential IKEA fans from seven countries have been contacted. From this, sample interviews have been conducted with a total of 15 respondents and the

rest are our non-response rate. Six of them are IKEAFans members, another six are members of Facebook, one is involved in OHIKEA and the last two have an IKEA FAMILY membership card (Table 1). We have further been able to attain the gender balance by collecting data from nine women and six men as well as a wide age span between the ages 17-52. Since the typical IKEA FAMILY member is a woman within the age group 25-49, we believe we have collected a reasonable sample of IKEA's target market (Holst, interview, 2007). Further details about our respondents can be found in Appendix IV.

Fans of IKEA			
IKEAFans	Facebook	OHIKEA	IKEA FAMILY
Carolyn	Hanna	Jen	Anne
Dave	Kyle		Maria
Eva	Lewis		
Nicole	Marianne		
Susan	Ryan		
Thomas	Sunil		

Table 1. Respondent overview.

2.3.2.3.1 E-MAIL INTERVIEWS

In order to get in contact with members of IKEAFans, we had to become members ourselves. The advantage of being a member is that you can visit all forums and blogs as well as search for other members through a search engine. We wanted to get in contact with active IKEAFans members, which had posted a certain amount of messages in the different forums. With help of the advanced search engine, we found the most active IKEAFans members who had posted more than 100 comments. In addition we also contacted Susan Martin, the co-founder of IKEAFans, in order to get more information about the fan club.

In order to get an overall and trustworthy perception of other existing online fan clubs, we also conducted e-mail interviews with members involved in other IKEA-related websites. Therefore, we contacted members of the Facebook group; "I have an unhealthy obsession with IKEA". Once again we wanted to get in contact with active members, and therefore people who had posted messages on the group wall were chosen. Further, in order to get more information about OHIKEA, we got in touch with its founder, Jen Segrest.

Due to the fan club members' enthusiastic attitude towards our research, we received instant replies from all these persons. They were further pleased that we wanted them to participate as respondents and answered our questions in no time.

2.3.2.3.2 TELEPHONE AND FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS

Since IKEA is a Swedish brand, we thought it was essential to find existing Swedish IKEA fans. Magnus Holst, Communication Manager at IKEA FAMILY Global, helped us to get in contact with Maria (32), who exhibited her apartment and summerhouse in IKEA FAMILY's magazine *IKEA FAMILY Live* in the year 2006. Due to geographical distance, we conducted a semi-structured telephone interview, which lasted approximately 25 minutes.

A second Swedish IKEA fan was found using the snowball effect method (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Through a friend of one of the group members, we came in contact with Anne (24), who is employed at IKEA Helsingborg, Sweden. We conducted a 25 minute long face-to-face interview at her home.

2.3.3 TRANSCRIPTION

The expert interviews with Magnus Holst and Ida Hult as well as the interviews with the Swedish fans were recorded on a dictaphone. The reason was to make sure that all the respondents' answers were captured and understood correctly and further we believed it to be a disturbing factor to take notes. Tape recording is moreover a preferred method when doing qualitative research (Bryman & Bell, 2003). The interviews were conducted in Swedish, since we did not want the respondent's answers to be influenced by the ability to communicate effectively in another language.

2.4 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

When conducting research from a constructionist approach, the Grounded Analysis method is preferable due to the reason that we analyze data with feeling, rather than numbers (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Furthermore our task is to understand the context in the collected data. We aim to construct patterns and themes, which can be utilized as a platform for our interpretation. The theoretical framework functioned as a tool to categorize our data collected. However, we found it complicated to apply the respondents' answers in our analysis since we have collected data from both a face-to-face and virtual surrounding.

The exploratory research will put emphasis on identifying certain goals of the research (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Our objective with the research is to generate new theories within the fan club phenomenon, and further to bring practical advice to corporations. We are rather interested in products of research, shaped by the data collected rather than from a fixed set of deduced theoretical frameworks (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Bryman & Bell, 2003).

2.5 TRUSTWORTHINESS

29

When conducting research, a careful evaluation of the methodological platform is crucial to prevent it from being criticized by other researchers. The denomination for criteria used within the evaluation varies between different methodological scholars (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Inspired by Bryman and Bell (2003), we chose to evaluate our research through the terms: internal, external validity and reliability. Furthermore, the meaning of these terms varies depending on the philosophical viewpoint adopted.

2.5.1 INTERNAL VALIDITY

From a constructionist viewpoint, internal validity refers to an examination of the results, whether right sources and valid information have been collected (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Regarding the internal validity of our thesis, one could question whether we have interviewed the right experts in order to answer our research question and fulfill our aim. We argue that we interviewed the right experts in two of the cases. However, in the case of Ida Hult, the interview could have been utilized better if we would have conducted a real-life ethnographical study.

The Internet offers an enormous amount of virtual gathering places. However, we realized early on that the number of relevant communities was quite limited and this made our selection easier. Due to this, we argue that the internal validity of the communities observed cannot be questioned. Nevertheless, we are aware of the fact that we analyze the content of an online fan club's communicative acts, rather than a complete set of acts of consumers in a particular fan club (Kozinets, 2002). Further, the short period assigned to the micro netnography may imply that potential relevant data might be missing (Bryman & Bell, 2003). We did however experience a small-scale saturation effect during our observation, and therefore maintain that with the time limits given to this research, we were still able to collect sufficient empirical data.

In order to fulfill our purpose, we had to identify super-loyal customers, thus fans of IKEA. Regarding the fans we chose to conduct interviews with, one could question whether they are significant for our study. We argue that we found true IKEA fans through our interviews, and therefore we find these interviews relevant for our research, which thus strengthens the internal validity of our findings. However, the internal validity is also related to the trustworthiness of the information given from the respondents (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Due to the interviewees' passion towards IKEA, they have been very excited about participating and answering our questions. Therefore we argue that the respondents would probably not lie about something they have such a strong passion for and that the information collected is most likely accurate.

2.5.2 EXTERNAL VALIDITY

When conducting research, it is further vital to determine the external validity, thus if the constructs and concepts derived from our thesis could be relevant in other settings (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Some scholars also refer to external validity as generalizability (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Generalizing a micro netnography conducted on certain online communities to other websites is not easy and it requires multiple methods of triangulation because of our narrow focus within online fan clubs (Kozinets, 2002). With this study we can overcome this situation since we do not aim to generalize our results to other online fan clubs. Further, we observe these fan clubs to unveil specific traits of the members' personalities and behavior in order to fulfill our purpose and provide companies with useful information.

2.5.3 RELIABILITY

In all research it is essential to question whether a measure or interpretation is reliable or not (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Reliability is further concerned with the question whether there is transparency in the sense-making of raw data (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). Both the research approach as well as we as researchers affect the data collected from the respondents. In qualitative research it is often the researchers who are the main instrument of the data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Hence, our study is reliant upon what we heard and observed. Thus, our characteristics such as background, gender, age, personality etcetera may affect the research.

As we are three women conducting this study and therefore do not have any gender diversity, we have to be aware of the fact that we may miss essential inter-

pretable issues. The gender aspect can further be stressed from another viewpoint. Even though a majority of IKEA's customers and IKEA FAMILY's members are women (Holst, interview, 2007), we were able to find men passionate about IKEA and thus have a gender balance within the respondents. This of course strengthens the reliability of our study.

2.5.3.1 MICRO NETNOGRAPHY

When evaluating reliability of observations, Bryman and Bell (2003) discuss the concerns with inter-observer consistency, which might occur when more than one researcher is conducting observations (Bryman & Bell, 2003). Since two of us have been conducting the micro netnographical study, this can affect the reliability of our research. We have attempted to overcome this situation by being as consistent as possible in evaluating and interpreting the data. However, we cannot speak of total consistency and thereby the reliability is affected negatively. Further, there are other problems which might occur when conducting team netnography. Togetherness in team research can be divided into two different kinds; *"togetherness in building the team and togetherness in doing of fieldwork"*, and both can cause problems (Erickson & Stull, 1998 p. 37). New teams have to spend time together in order to get to know each other and at the same time researchers have to be able to work independently. The reason is that the observers need to get used to the feeling of being a *"stranger in a strange place"* (Erickson & Stull, 1998 p. 37).

Moreover, another difficulty when making observations is the problem concerning understanding the culture being visited (Bryman & Bell, 2003). The researchers must, according to Bryman and Bell (2003), learn the language within the culture, since members often use special words and slang. This further implies that the reliability of our observations can be questioned; whether or not we interpreted the websites correctly. We realized that this could be a problem, and in order to make our thesis more reliable we complemented our observations with e-mail interviews.

2.5.3.2 QUALITATIVE INTERVIEWS

The qualitative interviews (face-to-face, telephone) were conducted by two of us, which is a preferred method when doing semi-structured interviews (Bryman & Bell, 2003). We believe the interviews strengthen our reliability since they were conducted at the respondents' offices respectively home. An artificial setting might change the behavior of the interviewee and therefore a natural setting for

example office or home is preferable (Jacobsen, 2002). Even though we might have been able to avoid the context effect, one should be aware of the possibility that we as researchers have influenced the respondents during our interviews and thus created an interviewer effect (Bryman & Bell, 2003; Jacobsen, 2002). The reliability of our interviews could further be questioned since some of them had to be translated into English, which might lead to some distortion of the data. To overcome this problem, Bryman and Bell (2003) suggest a back-translate; however, due to time limits we were not able to conduct this process.

Furthermore, we attempted to be as consistent as possible in evaluating and interpreting the data to strengthen the reliability. We also attempted to be trustworthy in our interpretations. In our analysis we have, in a clear and structured way, displayed the source of information in order to present our findings to the reader in the best manner possible (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This part of the journey will present our theoretical framework, which will be used as a platform for our research and further a tool to analyze our data in the analysis. We hope to provide the reader with knowledge in the field of loyalty and branded society and show how these are related to our purpose.

3.1 OVERVIEW

In order to explore this new phenomenon, we had to collect theories related to the area studied, because we have not found any literature about fans of brands. Since members of fan clubs are loyal consumers, our focus is directed to the area of loyalty. Therefore, we have constructed a theoretical framework where loyalty is our main platform. The overall loyalty platform will be applied in order to determine the value of fans, by investigating how loyal fans are and further if and how they promote branded goods.

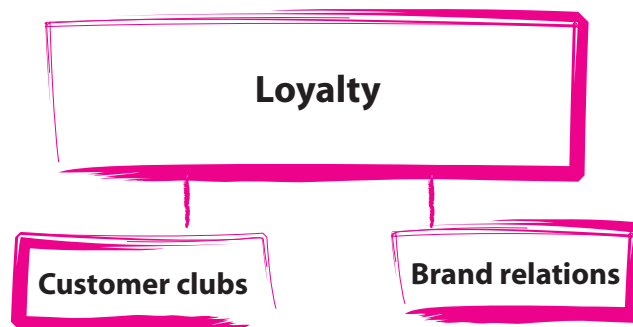


Figure 3. Theoretical framework.

Our loyalty platform will further be connected to a couple of underlying categories: customer clubs and brand relations. As we have chosen to study IKEA's customer club, the first underlying category, customer clubs, will function as a tool to analyze IKEA's loyalty program, IKEA FAMILY. Customer club theories will together with data collected, identify what characterizes IKEA FAMILY and analyze the connection between their customer club and fan club. An identification of IKEA FAMILY is necessary in order to get a deeper understanding of their fan club concept.

The second category, brand relations, will function as a tool to understand the meaning of fan clubs, by investigating what relation consumers have to a certain brand and if and how fan clubs can be related to social groupings. Our theoretical framework is illustrated in Figure 3 above.

3.2 LOYALTY

34

In this section we will present three loyalty theories. The first one will illustrate the contemporary view of loyalty and describe the four phases of loyalty with emphasis on behavior and attitude. Further, the final two will account for the different levels of loyalty and delve into the most loyal consumers, the promoters.

3.2.1 A JOURNEY TOWARDS ACTION LOYALTY

The traditional view of loyalty has in recent years developed, and research shows that loyalty goes beyond repeated purchase. From Oliver's (1997) perspective, loyalty is a two-dimensional phenomenon, which consists of both a behavioral and an attitudinal dimension. Thus, even if consumers buy a product twice it does not necessarily mean that they have a positive attitude towards the brand. It might be consumed due to habit, financial situation, convenience or other circumstances. However, if one has a positive attitude to a brand that does not automatically mean that one will choose to consume it. Oliver (1997) has further developed four loyalty phases. (1) Cognitive loyalty, the consumer evaluates the product or service attributes available and decides which alternative is preferable. This knowledge can for example be based on recent experienced-based information. Phase (2), affective loyalty, occurs when the consumer is developing an attitude toward the product or service on basis of a number of satisfying consumption occasions. (3) Conative loyalty, happens when a consumer intends to re-purchase a product or service since a feeling of commitment has been evoked. However, it is not obvious that the intention will lead to the action of purchase. The final phase is therefore, (4) action loyalty, thus where the intention is transformed into readiness to act.

3.2.2 LEVELS OF LOYALTY

Loyalty can be considered as a hierarchy with different levels. Raphael and Raphael (1995:A, B) have developed a loyalty ladder, which aims to identify the customers of a business (Figure 4). The goal for businesses is to have customers who promote the brand and these are named advocates. In order to become an advocate the person must climb up the five step ladder. (1) Prospect: a person who knows about the brand, but has never bought it. (2) Shopper: someone who does not buy the brand frequently. (3) Customer: a person who buys the brand on a regular basis. (4) Client: Those customers which, apart from buying the brand, also have a long-term relationship with it and finally (5) Advocate, holding the meaning mentioned above (Raphael & Raphael, 1995:A, B; Gummesson, 2002; Elinder 1993).

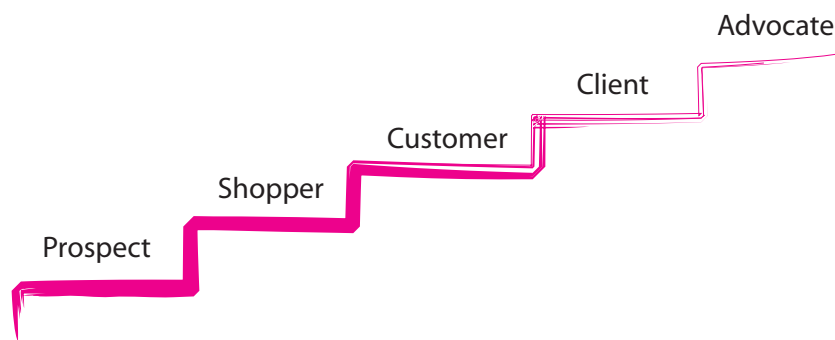


Figure 4. Loyalty ladder. Raphael & Raphael (1995:A,B).

3.2.2.1 PROMOTERS THE TRUE LOYAL CUSTOMERS

In loyalty literature it is said that only customers promoting a brand are true loyal customers. In the loyalty ladder model described in section 3.2.2 *Levels of loyalty*, these customers were named advocates, but in recent years they have also been referred to as promoters (Söderlund, 2001; Reichheld, 2003). Promoters can be seen as the part-time marketers of organizations (Gummesson, 2002) and are further defined as “those who say they are extremely likely to recommend the company to a friend or colleague” (Reichheld, 2003, p. 51). This type of marketing is not driven by the marketers of companies and is known as word-of-mouth. The term has further been developed to ‘word-of-mouse’ as the Internet has become an important marketing tool within virtual marketing (De Pelsmacker et al., 2004). Since the number of available products and services are constantly increasing, word-of-mouth is at the same time also becoming more and more important. When customers only had two products to choose from, they did not need word-

of-mouth. However, today the purchase decisions are more complex and customers hand over their decision-making processes to people whom they trust (Roberts, 2006). Promoters spreading word-of-mouth can be ordinary people as well as opinion-leaders who are experts or adored within a field (Söderlund, 2001).

3.2.3 CRITICISM TOWARDS LOYALTY THEORIES

36

During our research within the field of loyalty, we came across various definitions and meanings of loyalty. The loyalty literature is complex, and terms such as customer loyalty and brand loyalty are used in different ways. This results in the difficulty as a researcher to get an overall picture of the field and use the loyalty terms in an accurate manner.

3.3 CUSTOMER CLUBS

In order to increase customer loyalty, corporations need to develop and implement activities creating greater bonding between their brands and customers. In turn, these activities can stimulate customers' purchase patterns (Söderlund, 2001). This section will therefore start by characterizing a customer club and its levels of goals, further, we will describe the different benefits they may offer.

The idea of a customer club originated in Germany in the mid-1980s and at present times they can be found in every industry and in different sizes around the globe (Butscher, 2002; Dowling & Uncles, 1997). Scholars within this field argue that the aim with loyalty programs is two-fold. (1) To boost sales revenues by increasing purchase levels or cross-product buying, firstly by existing customers and secondly by new customers. (2) Creating a strong emotional relationship between the brand and customers (Uncles et al., 2003; Dowling & Uncles, 1997; Butscher, 2002, Elinder, 1993). Dowling & Uncles (1997) further argues that fears of competitive parity are another reason for launching a customer club.

Today, there is an ongoing discussion whether loyalty programs such as customer clubs generate loyalty towards the brand or towards the customer club. Since customer clubs are based on benefits, there is a risk that the normal patterns of behavior are disturbed and consumers act on self-interest rather than pure loyalty (Dowling & Uncles, 1997; Uncles et al., 2003). Customer clubs are run by organizations and even though benefits are offered for the members, the main purpose is to collect data about their customers (Butscher, 2002).

3.3.1 WHAT CHARACTERIZES A CUSTOMER CLUB?

There are four strong characteristics of a customer club. (1) It is planned and run by an organization, either profit or non-profit oriented. (2) Communication between the customer club and its members is carried out on a regular basis. (3) Value is created for members by offering financial and non-financial benefits. It is important for the organization to find the perfect mix of benefits. Financial incentives such as discounts are highly valued by customers. However, competitors can imitate them easily. Therefore, non-financial benefits are preferably utilized in order to establish an emotional, trustworthy partnership and relationship with the members. The fourth (4) and final component which characterizes a customer club, is its ability to organize its members through a database (Butscher, 2002).

3.3.2 FOR EVERYONE OR THE SPECIAL ONE?

A customer club can either be classified as limited or open. When the customer needs to go through a formal enrolment process in order to become a member, the club is limited. It is not unusual that a member needs to pay a fee or has to purchase certain volumes in order to become and remain a member. An advantage of the limited customer club is the organization's possibility to control that the members belong to the primary target market. An open customer club is the opposite, a club anyone can join and the application form is less formal. This results in a more complete database where customers and competitors' customers can be reached more easily (Butscher, 2002).

3.3.3 HIERARCHY OF GOALS

When managing a customer club, there are three levels of goals: core goals, primary goals and secondary goals. Increasing profit, revenue and market share are the three core goals and these are essential to secure the stability and existence of the organization, thus these have a long-term focus. To achieve these core goals, five primary goals need to be reached (Figure 5). (1) To build a relationship with the customers, which may result in long-term loyal customers. (2) Win new customers who have the potential of becoming long-term loyal customers. (3) Build a strong database, and the organization will have access to a very powerful marketing tool. (4) Gather as useful information as possible which other departments within the organizations can utilize and thus develop the company forward. (5) Create communication opportunities to strengthen the connection with the club members.

Communication with members can be done regularly, irregularly or passively and the goal is to inform the member about the club, its offerings and activities. An important communication tool is a magazine, since this can be a forum for advertising and the member or reader can identify oneself with the organization. The magazine may contain customer club related news, articles on a variety of topics or other useful information connected to the organization. It is only available for members or offered to the public at a certain price (Butscher, 2002). Further, telephone hotlines, the Internet and e-mail, are forums, which encourage spontaneous consumer interaction. These are not only available for current members, but also for potential members. The development of the Internet has also made it possible for members to communicate with each other through online chat rooms. Other member-member interaction can be done through events and meetings where they can get together in real life (Butscher, 2002).

Further Elinder (1993) argues that a loyalty program should focus on keeping and developing existing customers and secondly to attract new members. This is due to the fact that it is more expensive to get new customers (Elinder, 1993; Gummesson, 2002).

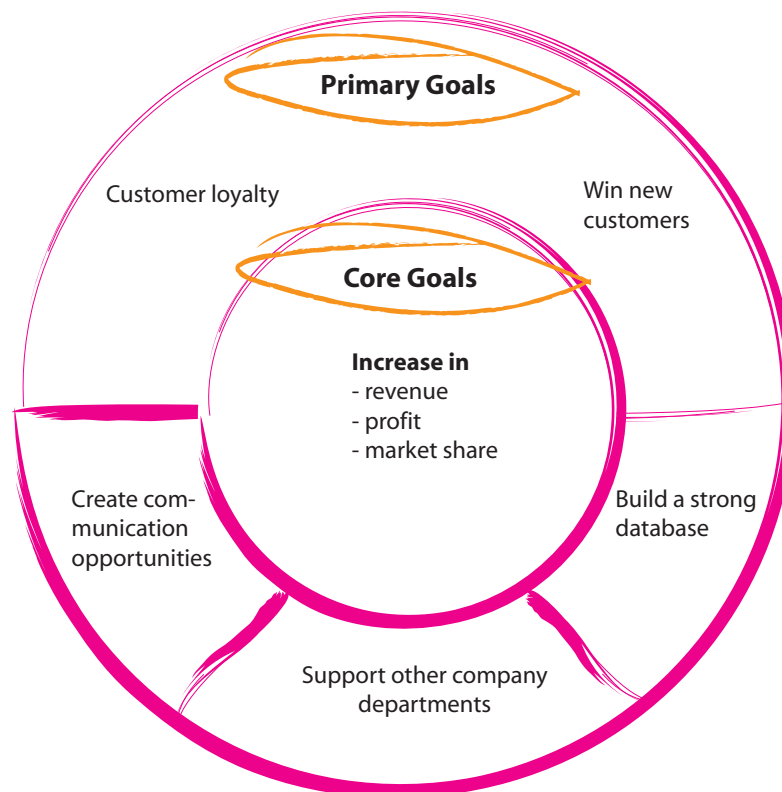


Figure 5. Hierarchy of goals of customer loyalty programs. Adapted from Butscher (2002) p. 42.

3.3.4 BAITs FOR THE MEMBERS

As mentioned in section 3.3.1 *What characterizes a customer club?*, it is important to find the perfect mix of financial and non-financial rewards. Butscher (2002) further defines two types of benefits: hard and soft benefits. Discounts, rebates and coupons are examples of hard benefits and members typically recognize these because they lead to savings. It is also common that the customer club offers a bonus to the member depending on their purchase level (Elinder, 1993).

Soft benefits are things and actions that make the customer club successful, such as a magazine, special products or other value-added services. It is the soft benefits that can differentiate the customer club from competitors' loyalty programs and make it unique. Moreover, it is these benefits that make the member feel special, which in turn makes them more loyal. However, it is usually the hard benefits that initially attract customers to the customer club. Therefore, the benefits are inefficient one by one, but together they become powerful (Butscher, 2002). The attractiveness of the customer club also depends on the availability of benefits. Scholars argue that immediate rewards are preferable to delayed ones, since loyalty programs are more likely to gain loyalty with this strategy (Dowling & Uncles 1997; Elinder, 1993).

3.4 BRAND RELATIONS

In this part of the theoretical framework we delve into theories, which illustrate the 'linking value to brands'. We will begin by describing Fournier's (1998) six key constructs and secondly we will explain brand communities/tribes linking value between consumers-brands-consumers and finally how one can support virtual communities.

3.4.1 BRAND AS PARTNER

Within the branding literature, scholars are determined that brands have personalities and apart from being functional, they consequently become meaningful for the consumers. These relationships are further known as brand-consumer relationships (Patterson & O'Malley, 2006). Fournier (1998) has come up with six key constructs to identify brand-consumer relationships. (1) Love and passion: the relationship is so strong that the consumers feel separation anxiety when they do not have access to the brand or feel empty if they have not used it for a while. (2) Self connection: the brand functions as identification to one's past, current or future self. (3) Interdependence: the consumer has frequent interaction with the brand or

brand-related activities. (4) Commitment: the consumer intends to behave in a certain way for example only buying a specific brand in order to achieve a long-term relationship. (5) Intimacy: beliefs about superior product performance, which lead to deeper meanings and more long-lasting relationships. (6) Brand partner quality: protection of the relationship by making the consumer feel respected and cared for as well as offering a reliable, predictable and desired brand.

3.4.2 SOCIAL GROUPINGS

In contemporary consumer society the dyad relationship, brand-consumer (Figure 6), has moved towards a triad relationship, consumer-brand-consumer (Figure 7) (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001).

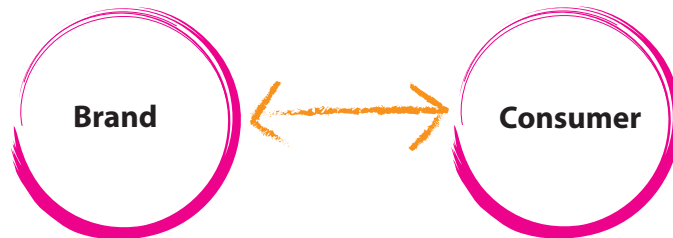


Figure 6. The dyad relationship (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

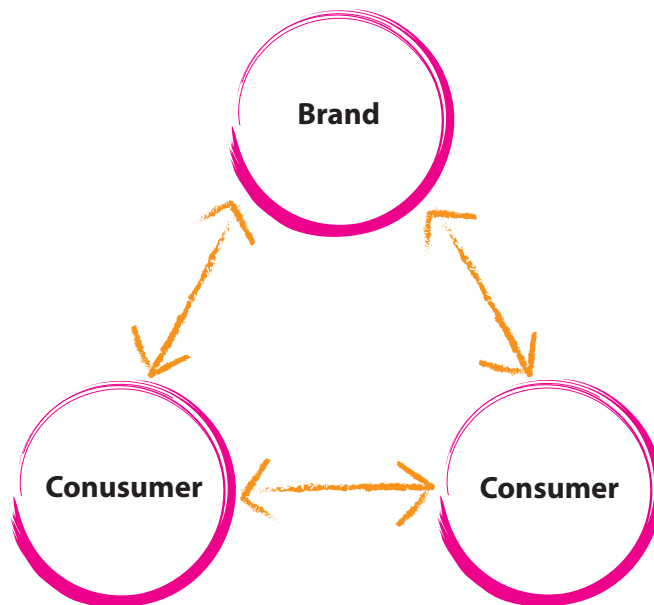


Figure 7. The triad relationship (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

These brand-focused relationships have more social interaction and consumers are trying to become part of communities representing who they are (Cova, 1997; Patterson & O'Malley, 2006; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). Cova (1997) further argues that "*the link is more important than the thing*" (Cova, 1997, p. 307). Thus, it is not the brand-consumer relation which is important, rather the relationships within a group, which emerge through consumption of a certain brand. These communities are a fabric of relationships, labeled brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

3.4.3 OPPOSING VIEWS OF SOCIAL GROUPINGS

Previous research has introduced us to different kinds of social groupings such as brand communities, tribes and subcultures. In literature there are contrasting views whether brand communities can be formed around any brand or a category of brands. Patterson (2006) argues that not all brands can develop communities whereas Muniz & O'Guinn (2001) claim that brand communities must be commercial and can center around any brand. However, they usually develop around brands with a strong image, a heavy history, and a threatening competition. Further, they emerge around brands, which are publicly consumed.

Several authors have attempted to clarify the distinction between brand community, tribes and subcultures (Cova, 2003). Balmer (cited in Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006) has made a clear distinction regarding these social groupings. However, when discussing tribes, he suddenly mentions tribes as tribal communities, which confuses the reader. Some authors claim that tribes are more temporary and fragmented in comparison to brand communities and subcultures (Schroeder & Salzer-Mörling, 2006, Cova & Cova, 2002). Cova and Cova (2002) argue that the common denominator of tribes is the community of emotion and passion and also claim that tribes can be "*described as temporary and momentary communities*" (Cova & Cova, 2002, p. 598). Further, it is impossible to say whether any agreement exists concerning these proposed differentiations. Anglo-American authors appear to be less concerned with the lack of a differentiation since they are "*moving seamlessly within one and the same text from the concept of community to tribe, or even subculture.*" (Cova & Pace, 2006).

Because of these blurry distinctions between brand communities, tribes and subcultures, for the sake of our research, we will as Cova and Pace (2002) "*depict indifferently as a brand community or brand tribe any group of people that possess a common interest in a specific brand and create a parallel social universe (subculture) rife with its own myths, values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy.*" (Cova & Pace, 2006 p. 1089).

Further, it is essential not to mix brand communities/tribal groups with reference groups or psychographic segments. They do not focus on the normative impact of the group or of members' impact on each other. Instead tribes focus on the linking components which make individuals stay in the group. They differ from psychographic segments due to the tribal groups' short life cycle and the diversity of individuals (Cova & Cova, 2002).

3.4.4 BRAND COMMUNITY/TRIBE: A KEY DRIVER OF LOYALTY

Prior research shows that brand communities/tribes positively affect brand equity, thus the value of the brand (Armstrong & Kotler, 1999). Aaker (cited in Muniz & O'Guinn 2001) argues that brand equity has four components; (1) Perceived quality, (2) Brand loyalty, (3) Brand awareness and (4) Brand associations and all of these are affected as a result of brand communities. Especially brand loyalty, the mental commitment between a consumer and a brand (De Pelsmacker et al., 2004), tends to increase due to the membership in brand communities. Studies show that re-purchase situations and even hyper-loyalty is the case of brand communities and not the overall satisfaction (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). A study by McAlexander et al. (2003) further shows that even customer loyalty is influenced by brand communities.

3.4.5 THREE CORE COMMONALITIES

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) have introduced three constructs which, can be applied in order to distinguish the main features of the brand community or tribe; (1) Consciousness of kind, (2) Rituals and Traditions as well as (3) Moral responsibility.

CONSCIOUSNESS OF KIND

This is the most important element of brand communities/tribes and refers to the 'we-ness' emotion, which is evoked between members. The brand builds bridges between members and they feel like they know each other even though they might never have met. A community/tribe is open for everyone who is seriously devoted to a certain brand and members distinguish true members from less devoted ones. This process is called legitimacy and is used to maintain the authentic brand feeling. To pin point; brand communities are easy to join but at the same time not difficult to withdraw from. Consciousness of kind is further a way of making members feel special compared to people using other brands, thus brands

are used to both identify and exclude oneself from various lifestyles (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

A brand community/tribe is built on history and consumption experiences among members. The continued existence of the communities is dependent on this knowledge and experience being reproduced within and beyond the brand community/tribe, through rituals and traditions. Brand history is important to a brand community and knowing historical happenings is a sign of devotion and therefore gives the member a certain status. Further, storytelling is an important action of creating and sustaining brand communities, since they strengthen consciousness of kind and members may identify other like-minded people. Greetings are a simple way of interacting with members and reproducing meaning of the brand. Finally, advertisements and logos are important components since they represent evidence of the brand development and history (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Within a brand community/tribe there is an obligation towards the community and its members and this is known as moral responsibility. Present members must strive towards long-term survival by integrating and maintaining relationships with old and new members. This can be done by helping other people with their consumption of the specific brand, telling brand stories or explaining what is right or wrong behavior within the brand community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Bengtsson & Östberg, 2006).

3.4.6 THE TRIBAL CLOVER

The tribal clover (Figure 8) will mainly be applied in a virtual context, due to the reason that we investigate social groupings virtually. We have investigated virtual communities/tribes such as IKEAFans, Facebook and OHIKEA; the tribal clover will help us to plot behavior and ongoing activities of these virtual communities/tribes.

The visible axis (horizontal axis) shows the physical evidence of brand communities/tribes including moments when members gather for their rituals, the physical get-together places (institutions and virtual spaces for example the Internet) where tribes interact. The invisible axis (vertical axis) illustrates the signs connected to day-to-day activities (the personal and shared experiences), the trends and other essentials of fantasy and imagination which travels rapidly through society.

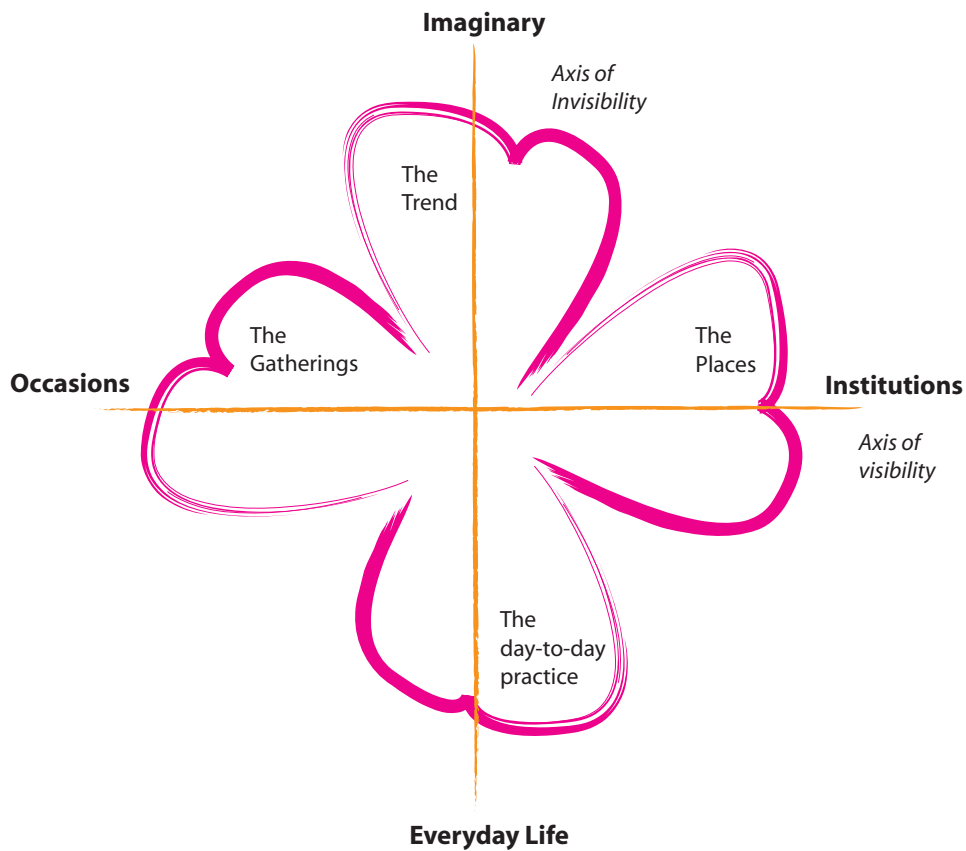


Figure 8. The tribal clover. Cova & Cova (2002) p. 606.

3.4.7 SUPPORTING VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES/TRIBES

Virtual communities/tribes, where consumers can share their passion for a brand, are growing increasingly and corporations need to consider these tribes carefully. *“Online consumers are much more active, participative, resistant, activist, loquacious, social and communitarian than they have previously been thought to be”* (Kozinets, 1999 p. 261). Corporations can yield from supporting these communities/tribes, however, the corporations should not only focus on launching their own website, but rather to support the existing ones. The objective is not to control these websites; the corporations can use this information intelligently to build long-term customer relationships (Kozinets, 1999). Nevertheless, this is still not enough as consumers are willing to take part in the decision making process of companies. Even if corporations are not willing to cooperate with these consumers, they will have the power to do so anyhow. The company will be forced

by these consumers to adopt ‘Societing’, which is an approach that attempts to establish mutually advantageous compromises between market and society (Kozinets, 1999).

3.4.8 CRITICISM TOWARDS BRAND RELATION THEORIES

Several authors have written about brand relations and brand communities/tribes. These areas are often glorified, and thereby, they have not been studied from a critical perspective. When do consumers have an unhealthy relation with a brand? How does a brand community/tribe affect consumers? Nevertheless, Cova and Pace (2006) are mentioning problematic facets that can affect marketers, for example discussing oppositional brand loyalty, the abandoned tribe and about “*who owns the brand?*” (Cova & Pace, 2006, p. 1089).

45

The tribal clover is one way to identify brand communities or brand tribes. However, there are other member motives, which need to be distinguished. Brand communities/tribes all have their unique character, which means that it is a complex task to generalize them by using pre-existing measures in order to identify these social groupings (Rosenberga & Silko, 2005). This tribal framework is constructed for brand communities/tribes existing in real-life, where face-to-face communication is possible. Due to the increasing number of brand communities and tribes, this framework needs to be adapted to virtual life.

3.5 SUMMARY THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter has centered around loyalty and we have displayed theories which we argue are related to the fan club field. The reader has been invited to a world of loyalty, and in this chapter we began to describe how consumers can be loyal on different levels. Further, the reader was given a picture of customer clubs, and finally theories within social groupings ended this world of loyalty.

We have conducted a qualitative method, and even if we cannot measure loyalty in the same way as one could do when applying a quantitative method, we are still able to identify loyalty in different ways. When utilizing these theories we are able to discover what relation consumers have to brands and like-minded consumers. These theories have further been utilized continuously during our research process to abductively discover this new phenomenon. The theory has so far guided us through this research; it has mainly functioned as an instrument to collect data and it will further be a tool to structure the analysis and most importantly, analyze our data collected.

4. EMPIRICISM INTRODUCTION

Our journey will continue by introducing the reader to our empiricism. We will start by presenting IKEA and their customer club, IKEA FAMILY. IKEA FAMILY will further function as our main case supported by three other relevant cases, in order to analyze the fan club phenomenon. These relevant cases consist of several virtual fan clubs.

46

4.1 EMPIRICISM FOCUS

In order to fulfill our purpose we chose to use IKEA and their loyalty program IKEA FAMILY as our case company due to the fact that IKEA claims to be both a customer and a fan club. However, as mentioned in section 2.1 *Object of study*, the IKEA FAMILY case alone would not shed light on the fan club situation and therefore we have collected data from three IKEA fan related websites; IKEAFans, Facebook and OHIKEA. Since there is more interaction on IKEAFans website than on the other two, this case will carry greater weight. Our empiricism focus is further illustrated below (Figure 9):

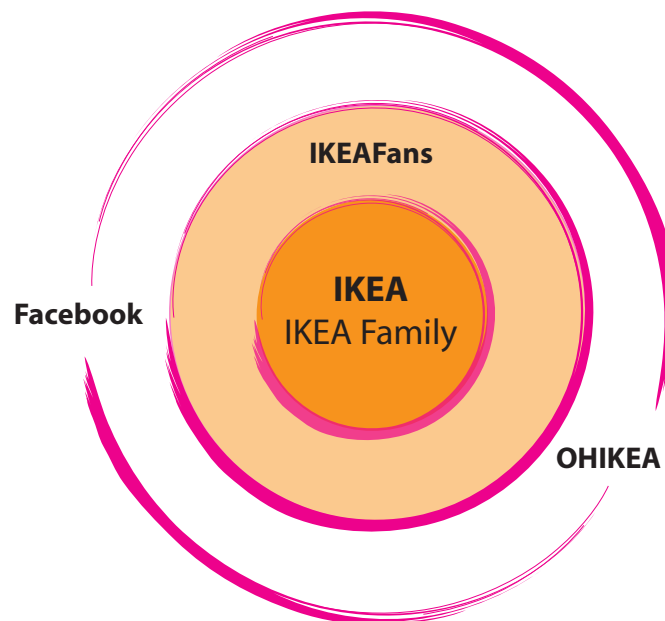


Figure 9. Empiricism focus.

4.2 INTRODUCING IKEA

At the age of seventeen, Ingvar Kamprad registered the name IKEA, which became the starting point for an incredible journey (IKEA, 2007:1). As a true entrepreneur, Kamprad began his journey at the age of five when he started to sell matches to his neighbors (Holst, interview, 2007). With an amazing sense for business this boy from Småland, Sweden, managed to build a global home furnishing empire.

“Democratic design”, is an idiom coined by Kamprad when visiting Milan Design Fair in 1995 (Edvardsson et al., 2006). The phrase gives a good description of IKEA’s concept and their vision is further “*to create a better everyday life for the many people*” (IKEA 2007:3). This conceptualizes the three dimensions of democratic design: form, functionality, and low price (Edvardsson et al., 2006). However, low prices demand a high degree of cost-efficiency and therefore, cost-consciousness is one of the sacred terms within IKEA (Edvardsson & Enquist, 2002; Holst, interview, 2007).

IKEA is today one of the largest brands in the world (Hållbus, 2007). IKEA is currently operating in 34 countries, with a grand total of 253 stores (IKEA, 2007:2). According to Edvardsson & Enquist (2002), part of IKEA’s success is derived from a radical business innovation, since IKEA achieves their competitive advantages by always being one step ahead. They do things in new and different ways compared to their competitors. Kumar et al (2000) refers to this type of company as a market driving company.

4.2.1 INTRODUCING IKEA FAMILY

IKEA has a group of customers frequently visiting them. These customers have a lot of knowledge, which IKEA in turn can use to improve their business. This is also the main idea behind IKEA’s customer club, IKEA FAMILY. The aim of IKEA FAMILY is thereby to give something in return to the customers. In relation to their vision, IKEA wants to give their customers something, which can make the everyday life better for the many people (Hållbus, 2007).

Currently, customer clubs are a well-known marketing tool used by many companies in different industries. However, when Kamprad and two of his employees in the 1960s came up with the idea of finding a concept, which could affiliate customers closer to IKEA, no one had heard of such a concept. Nevertheless, the first IKEA FAMILY club was not established until 1984, in Stockholm, Sweden, and since then the loyalty program has taken several different shapes (Johansson

et. al., 2006). At first IKEA FAMILY sold products positioned to men and they had a special men's playground in-store. Then IKEA FAMILY was put on hold for a while and came back as a concept for knowledge and inspiration (Holst, interview, 2007).

Today IKEA FAMILY exists in fourteen markets, for example in Norway and the United Kingdom. The customer club has 12 million members of which 1.7 million members are situated in Sweden (Holst, interview, 2007; Hellblom, 2007). IKEA Family has further a share of 60 percent women and these are in most cases within the age group 25-49. In addition, they usually have children in the ages of 5-15 and their interest for home decorating as well as their level of education is above average (Holst, interview, 2007).

The current IKEA FAMILY concept, with the orange color scheme, was created approximately two years ago and offers the members a number of benefits. When this concept was developed they also started calling themselves a fan club (IKEA, 2007:8; Holst, interview, 2007).

Among other things, IKEA FAMILY members receive discounts on the ordinary IKEA product assortment as well as on the IKEA FAMILY product range. The product range is focused on safety, relaxation, inspiration, and traveling (IKEA, 2007:5). Members additionally receive the club magazine IKEA FAMILY Live four times a year and together with the magazine, members of IKEA FAMILY also receive invitations to seminars, workshops and other events hosted by IKEA (Holst, interview, 2007; IKEA 2007:4,6). Further, IKEA give donations to relief organizations every time a member swipes their IKEA FAMILY card in connection with a purchase. According to Holst (2007) there are a few collaborations with other organizations on a global level; offers are usually chosen on a country basis. However, it is important that the partners IKEA FAMILY chooses to collaborate with are in-line with how IKEA wants to be perceived (Holst, interview, 2007).

Tools, concepts and templates are developed at IKEA FAMILY Global in Helsingborg, Sweden and these guidelines are further implemented by stores around the world (Holst, interview, 2007). The strength of IKEA FAMILY is found in their knowledge about their customers, which no one else at IKEA possesses. However, Magnus Holst (2007) believes that IKEA FAMILY needs to improve the use of this information, to make the loyalty program more relevant to the customers.

4.3 INTRODUCING VARIOUS IKEA FAN CLUBS

During our research of the fan club phenomenon, we discovered several IKEA fan clubs started by consumers independent of IKEA. In this part we present the three selected websites where we found the majority of our interview respondents and where observations were conducted.

4.3.1 IKEAFans

In March 2005, Susan and James Martin in Virginia, USA launched the IKEAFans website as a hobby. Their goal was to share information about IKEA products and further guide and inspire people when assembling these products (IKEAFans, 2007:1). The focus was initially to assist people assembling IKEA kitchens, but the site is now discussing all types of products and has developed into the world's leading resource for IKEA help and information (IKEAFans, 2007:2). The site's motto is, "*Personalizing the IKEA Experience*" (IKEAFans, 2007:1). IKEAFans is run by Susan and James Martin, but also various people such as fans of IKEA, IKEA co-workers, contractors and shoppers are participating in order to make it a valid website and network. These people are called moderators, and together with other members, they are the fan club's most important asset (IKEAFans, 2007:3). Furthermore, the membership is free and IKEAFans survives on donations of individuals and the commitment of its members (IKEAFans, 2007:1; IKEAFans, 2007:2).

The website consists of forums, blogs, a gallery, a library and an IKEApedia with information about stores and installers. There are different forums depending on the members' questions. Some services are available for everyone, while some only are accessible for members (IKEAFans, 2007:1; IKEAFans, 2007:4). For instance there are galleries and blogs which allow members to document their projects by up-loading pictures and sharing their ideas, lessons and experiences with fans, friends and family around the world (Martin, interview, 2007). Members can also search for other IKEAFans members by their name, local IKEA store etcetera. The members are further grouped depending on how many posts they have written in the different forums. A new member starts as an IKEAFAN, and is then able to move up the ladder to become an IKEAFANatic (100 posts), IKE-Aaddict (300 posts) and finally an IKEAholic (700 posts) (IKEAFans, 2007:5).

Due to word-of-mouth and Google, IKEAFans has grown rapidly since its launch. Current members are also able to become ambassadors and get IKEAFans gear such as t-shirts and club cards in order to attract potential members. The membership has doubled every quarter for over 18 months and now has over 6000

members and visitors from 107 countries around the world (IKEAFans, 2007:6; IKEAFans, 2007:7; Martin, interview, 2007).



Picture 1. IKEAFans logo.

4.3.2 FACEBOOK

Facebook is an online social network originally available to college and high school communities. Since its launch in February 2004, the network has grown rapidly due to media attention and word-of-mouth between existing and potential members (Facebook, 2007:1; Acquisti & Gross, 2006). Today Facebook is made up of many region-, school- and company networks and anyone is free to join. The only requirement to join the different networks is a valid email address. Facebook's aim is further to "*connect people with friends and others who work, study and live around them*" (Facebook, 2007:2).

The idea behind Facebook is to have an online network that reflect peoples' real-life community and where one can learn more about the people in one's surroundings. Every member has a profile where personal information is presented. In addition, the members can share interests, join groups, send messages, share links and videos, write notes and post photos. It is the members themselves who decide how much of their information they would like to share, but a general rule is that only confirmed friends and people in their networks have access to their profile (Facebook, 2007:2, Facebook, 2007:1). This makes the online network impressively valid (Acquisti & Gross, 2006). Presently, the website has over 19 million active users and the number is constantly increasing. Additionally, Facebook is the sixth most trafficked site in the United States (Facebook, 2007:1).



Picture 2. Facebook logo.

4.3.3 OHIKEA

OHIKEA is a news and fan blog run by web designer and IKEA fan, Jen Segrest from Ohio, USA (OHIKEA, 2007:1). It started due to a rumor back in 2004 about IKEA looking for building sites in Columbus. Segrest started a blog to inform other IKEA fans about the development of the store being set up. The website took off from there and with information from other people such as IKEA employees and zoning board workers, it has grown. In fact, several announcements from IKEA have been known to OHIKEA website visitors for months (Segrest, interview, 2007; OHIKEA, 2007:1).

The website is open for everyone and visitors do not have to become members in order to get access to the information. There is a guest book where IKEA fans and other interested people can send messages with tips, confessions or pictures (Segrest, interview, 2007; OHIKEA, 2007:2). Visitors can also sign up to get alerts to their e-mails about news updates on the OHIKEA website, to be sure that they are not missing out on anything (OHIKEA, 2007:2). One can also buy OHIKEA products for example t-shirts, mugs and scarves or participate in any of the meetings planned now when the building site is in progress (Segrest, interview, 2007). Further, the website offers games and an IKEA song for anyone who is interested (OHIKEA, 2007:1).



Picture 3. OHIKEA logo.

5. EMPIRICISM/ANALYSIS

The reader has now traveled through our problem discussion, method, theoretical framework, and recently made a stop at empirical introduction. The journey will now continue to apply theories and data continuously in order to analyze the area studied. Prepare yourself for a chapter, which will take you from IKEA FAMILY to their fanatic fans.

52

5.1 ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This analytical framework is an instrument to discover the meaning of fan clubs and to further display the value fans may possess. In order to analyze our collected data in a structured way, we have as mentioned in section 2.4 *Method of analysis*, utilized the theoretical framework in section 3.1 *Overview*, to structure the content of our analysis. However, the theoretical framework will be applied from an opposite view, since we will end our analysis with a discussion about loyalty (Figure 10). Even though the analytical framework is inspired by the theoretical framework, we aim to inspire and guide the reader with captions, which are connected with the object of study, fan clubs.

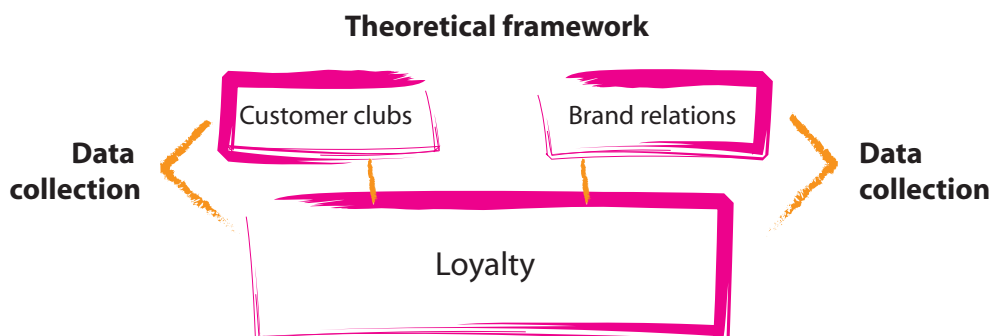


Figure 10. Analytical framework.

The customer club theories and the empiricism from Magnus Holst and IKEA FAMILY members will mainly be applied in order to analyze IKEA FAMILY. The interviewed and observed fans of IKEA will further be studied with the help of the brand relation theories (brand as partner and social groupings) to understand the meaning of the fan club phenomenon. Finally, the last part, loyalty, will string together our analysis by identifying the level of loyalty the fans possess and further if and how they promote the brand.

5.2 IKEA FAMILY: A FAN CLUB?

IKEA FAMILY has existed since the beginning of the 1980s, but has only been calling itself a fan club for two years (Holst, interview, 2007). In order to understand the meaning of fan clubs, we need to understand the relation between IKEA Family and their fan club concept.

5.2.1 IN WHAT WAY IS IKEA FAMILY A FAN CLUB?

IKEA FAMILY is a loyalty program, structured in a way, which follows Butscher's (2002) four characteristics of a customer club. It is further planned and run by an organization, IKEA, which regularly communicates with their members along with creating value for them through different benefits (IKEA, 2007:8). Finally, they organize their members through their database. According to Butscher's (2002) characteristics, IKEA FAMILY fulfills the requirements of being a customer club. However, compared to similar customer clubs the following statement distinguishes them.

"In a way, it's also an IKEA fan club."

IKEA (2007:8)

IKEA FAMILY is presented as an IKEA fan club on their website, and further, as a club for people who appreciate IKEA's mission of making functionally designed furniture available for everyone. On IKEA FAMILY's website it is stated that if you like IKEA, you will love IKEA FAMILY due to the extra value you will receive as a member (IKEA, 2007:7). Further, Holst (2007) maintains that the fan club is a way of providing loyal consumers with added value. However, he is unsure of whether the term fan club is the best designation (Holst, interview, 2007).

IKEA fulfills Butcher's characteristics for being a customer club. However, fan clubs are another type of loyalty program (Butscher, 2002), which means that IKEA FAMILY is trying to combine the two of them. We will further continue to analyze if and how this is a winning concept.

5.2.2 IKEA FAMILY OPEN FOR EVERYONE

According to Butscher's (2002) criteria for customer clubs, IKEA FAMILY would be characterized as an open customer club without any limitations, since they strive to convince everyone to become an IKEA FAMILY member. The true fans of IKEA have emotional feelings attached to the brand which has to be

addressed in a certain way, while some members just want the regular benefits such as special offers and the magazine (Holst, interview, 2007). Even though it is an open club, Holst (2007) stresses that it is important to recognize and satisfy both groups irrespective of their level of interest in IKEA.

Further, even though IKEA FAMILY is positioned as an open customer club there are many potential members, intimidated by the name. Some get the impression that the customer club is only for families (Holst, interview, 2007). Holst (2007) points out that it is a sensitive topic and that it might have been easier to call it IKEA Club or something similar. However, there is a history behind the name and Ingvar Kamprad is very keen on keeping the name IKEA FAMILY (Holst, interview, 2007). The name is therefore permanent and instead they must communicate their message in a better way.

“We try to communicate that you do not need to have a family to join the club. Instead we want to welcome you into the “family of IKEA”.”

Holst, interview (2007)

In order to further address how the fan club concept is connected to IKEA’s customer club, we need to identify IKEA FAMILY’s goals. These will be presented and analyzed in the next section.

5.2.3 GOALS OF IKEA FAMILY

In similarity with other organizations, the core goals of IKEA FAMILY is to increase profit, revenue and market share, or as Holst (2007) explains it:

“IKEA FAMILY’s goal is to create loyalty towards IKEA and to sell more Billy bookcases”.

Holst, interview, 2007

As Butscher (2002) points out, five primary goals are necessary in order to achieve the core goals. The *first* primary goal is to build a relationship, which will result in long-term loyalty. IKEA FAMILY strives to form a genuine relationship with their members, where they focus on trust; a loyal customer almost becomes like a family member through IKEA FAMILY (Edvardsson & Enquist, 2002). *Secondly* the customer club has to attract new customers. IKEA FAMILY’s original aim was to invite everyone who was interested in interior design (IKEA 2007:4). However, today they focus on attracting as many members as possible, interested in interior design or not, in order to increase the overall awareness of

IKEA (Holst, interview, 2007). This is further evident since they plan to launch IKEA FAMILY on new markets.

“During the forthcoming year the goal is to have IKEA FAMILY in every IKEA country and to increase the number of members on an international level to 30 million.”

Holst, interview, 2007

The *third* primary goal concerns building a strong database (Butscher, 2002), which is one of IKEA FAMILY’s main focus areas. A strong database will in turn provide IKEA with a competitive advantage against their competitors as well as with a powerful marketing tool.

“One intention with the customer club is that members buy products and swipe their card to get a lower price, which in turn gives us purchase information. With that information we can learn more about the customer and thereby be more relevant in our communication and offers. The customers need to understand that the more they tell about themselves the more we can give them back.”

Holst, interview, 2007

However, some members do not know when to swipe the card, and as long as members are unaware of this, we argue that IKEA FAMILY will not be able to generate a complete database.

“Since one do not get any points when shopping I often forget to swipe my card. I also often forget my FAMILY card at home. I would like to see more communication that emphasizes that they donate money to Save the Children every time one swipes the card.”

Anne (24), Swedish, Sweden

The *fourth* primary goal of a customer club is determine how the relationship with members can provide useful knowledge, which can be utilized by other parts of the organization (Butscher, 2002). IKEA FAMILY fulfills this goal by using their ‘q-index’, which is a panel of IKEA FAMILY members who are giving input to IKEA regarding product development. When a certain product is bought, the customer will receive an e-mail asking if they are pleased with the product and if it was easy to assemble. A couple of weeks later, they will receive a new e-mail where IKEA inquires if they still are satisfied with the product, or if a noticed problem has been solved. The customer feedback is sent to IKEA of Sweden, the company developing the product range (Holst, interview, 2007). According to Holst (2007), this process works smoothly, but he believes that IKEA FAMILY

in a better way could encourage their members to share their experiences and thoughts about IKEA. Holst (2007) says that there is a need for a forum on the website where these types of discussions could be held, but due to operative and budget related decisions this is not of priority at the moment.

"Communication opportunities should absolutely be available on the Internet in shape of some kind of member forum."

Holst, interview, 2007

Furthermore, as fans enjoy socializing with other fans, a forum would definitely open up for interactions between members. However, in order to do so, IKEA FAMILY needs to focus on the *fifth* primary goal, thus to strengthen the communication with their members.

Today, IKEA FAMILY does not have a forum for interaction. However, IKEA Family communicates with its members and fans through other communication channels such as their magazine IKEA FAMILY Live, the IKEA FAMILY Shop, and the website. These benefits and communication channels will be studied next in order to view how these channels give the fans added value and also how the fan club concept is communicated.

5.2.4 HOW IKEA FAMILY GIVES ITS FANS ADDED VALUE

The whole IKEA FAMILY concept with its adherent benefits gives the fans added value in many ways, ranging from the magazine to donations. In line with the name IKEA FAMILY, they wish to invite the customer into a family where every member is taken care of (Holst, interview, 2007). IKEA FAMILY can be seen as an extended arm to IKEA, which adds value to the whole IKEA experience. This is further elucidated through this quote:

"At IKEA FAMILY we have the ability to guide the customer through the huge IKEA jungle. We can assist the members and help them find things that they are interested in. All in all, we can be more relevant than IKEA can."

Holst, interview, 2007

Initially it is the *hard benefits* that attract customers (Butscher, 2002) such as monetary bonuses, which displays a behavioral reason for the membership. Since members in IKEA FAMILY do not get any monetary bonuses they become members for other reasons. According to Johansson et al. (2006), the most common reason to why people are members in IKEA FAMILY is due to the different

benefits, such as the magazine, IKEA FAMILY Live. Others pointed out that they are members because IKEA gives donations to different aid organizations while some did not have any specific reason for their membership (Johansson et al., 2006). Thereby the reason for being a member is more connected to an attitudinal dimension.

"I believe I am a member of IKEA FAMILY, because I wanted the magazine. It is a free magazine that I like."

Anne (24), Swedish/Sweden

57

The members do not receive any monetary bonuses due to the reason that IKEA FAMILY wants the customers to become members because of an inherent passion for furnishing, a sense of belonging to IKEA and an apprehension of added value through their membership (Holst, interview, 2007). To fulfill this, IKEA FAMILY offers knowledge and activities rather than monetary rewards (Johansson et al, 2006). However, members do receive different discounts on various goods within the IKEA assortment, the restaurant as well as on all IKEA FAMILY products (Holst, interview, 2007). Holst (2007) also points out the continuous work of developing hard benefits.

"An idea is to find some kind of scale that could give customers benefits after how active they are."

Holst, interview, 2007

Butscher (2002) refers to the *soft benefits* as those which make a customer club successful, such as special products, a magazine and other value-added services. Being a member of IKEA FAMILY, one will receive several soft benefits.

5.2.4.1 IKEA FAMILY LIVE

The most appreciated soft benefit is the club magazine, IKEA FAMILY Live (Holst, interview, 2007; Johansson et al., 2006). One of the advantages with the magazine is that it enables IKEA FAMILY to communicate with their members on a regular basis. However, in order to get the magazine, a member must visit an IKEA store at least three times a year and register their purchase by swiping their IKEA FAMILY card (Holst, interview, 2007). Holst (2007) further stresses the importance of the magazine.

"Many of our members have our magazine as their only source of inspiration for home decorating. Not all can afford to buy fancy magazines."

Holst, interview, 2007

This quote displays the enormous power that IKEA possesses through their magazine. For some members IKEA FAMILY Live is their only source of inspiration and therefore IKEA has a great influence on how people choose to decorate their homes (Holst, interview, 2007).

We have also seen that IKEA FAMILY has made a weak attempt to communicate with their fans through the magazine, by suggesting fans to go on a trip to Älmhult in Sweden (IKEA FAMILY Live, 2007). However, as the magazine is such a strong communication channel, we argue that the magazine could further be utilized much more as a tool to communicate the fan club concept.

5.2.4.2 IKEA FAMILY'S PRODUCT RANGE AND SHOP

IKEA FAMILY also offers soft benefits in form of special products, found in the IKEA FAMILY shop. This is the embodied form of the customer club and the main reason with the shop is to get members to buy products and swipe their club cards so that as much customer-data as possible can be collected (Holst, interview, 2007).

"We try to explain to the customer that the more you give, the more you get"

Holst, interview, 2007

It is also a way for IKEA FAMILY to directly convince customers about the value they receive as a member in the customer club (Holst, interview, 2007). The shop and product assortment is a way for IKEA FAMILY to give their members something extra, and also to stress that they are a caring company. The different categories clearly show that IKEA highly values their customers' safety and well-being along with a wish to provide them with some extra features to enrich their everyday lives. Below, Maria (32) explains why she likes the IKEA FAMILY shop.

"I think the shop is excellent. I like that they sell hygiene products; they have broaden their range. I enjoy the fact that it is not all about furniture but also more aimed at health."

Maria (32), Swedish/Sweden

Furthermore, there is a thought behind every product category, which according to Holst (2007) needs to be communicated more efficiently, since there is a risk that customers do not see the connection between IKEA FAMILY's product assortment and IKEA (Holst, interview, 2007).

5.2.4.3 THE IKEA FAMILY WEBSITE

Apart from the magazine and the shop, IKEA FAMILY communicates with their members through their website. IKEA FAMILY's aim with the website is to provide existing and potential members with a place where they can be inspired and get useful information about IKEA and the customer club. However, the IKEA FAMILY website has not been operating for a long time, which means that there is still a lot of work that has to be done in order to utilize this communication tool better (Holst, interview, 2007). Some of our respondents hardly know that the IKEA FAMILY website exists, while others are frequent visitors.

"I think I've never visited the IKEA FAMILY website."

Anne (24), Swedish/Sweden

"The website offers a lot of good information, tips and ideas, which I find very useful."

Maria (32), Swedish/Sweden

The website also functions as the current channel, where IKEA FAMILY states that they are a fan club. However, we had to study the website thoroughly before we found this statement. The fan club statement is only mentioned in a few sentences. This indicates that it is not communicated in an optimal way since the message is not clearly exposed and not communicated enough. Therefore members seem to be unaware of this fan club concept.

"Is that what they call themselves? I had no idea of that, but it might be true. That is exactly the way I would have liked to describe IKEA FAMILY."

Maria (32), Swedish/Sweden

"No, I didn't, but now that I do, I think I might have to join!"

Ryan (17), Canadian/Ireland

5.2.4.4 OTHER VALUE-ADDED SERVICES

IKEA are further cooperating with other organizations in order to give added value to their customers. These partnerships can either focus on the members or on other groups in the society. An example of a value-added service is that they at present times are collaborating with EON and inviting members to energy sa-

ving seminars together with EON (IKEA 2007:9). Other value-added services are IKEA's donations to aid organizations in order to help vulnerable groups in the society, but also to emphasize the picture of IKEA as a caring company.

"We want to display that IKEA is much more than just a home furnishing company; it is also an environmental friendly and safety thinking company."

Holst, interview, 2007

The existing soft benefits certainly give the fans some amount of added value, but what do fans actually want get out of a fan club? Due to the fact that IKEA FAMILY is not present on all markets, not all of our respondents are IKEA FAMILY members. Therefore we were not able to ask them about IKEA FAMILY's benefits. However, since the majority of them are members of an IKEA fan club, we asked them what they would like to get out of a fan club.

"Camaraderie, information, resources and support."

Eva (45) American/USA

"Camaraderie. Friendship. A fun place to "hang out". Information. A place to express my excitement about IKEA."

Nicole (37) American/USA

"Opinions, news, friends with the same interests as myself."

Ryan (17) Canadian/Ireland

"Maybe idol pictures of Ingvar Kamprad. Haha."

Maria (32) Swedish/Sweden

The respondents' answers show that they want to socialize with other like-minded people, additionally, we argue that a forum on the website would be a good way to deliver added value to the fans.

We have just identified the added value that IKEA FAMILY give their members. In the next section we will develop this discussion and thus talk about the future of IKEA FAMILY.

5.2.5 THE FUTURE OF IKEA FAMILY AS A FAN CLUB

Looking further into IKEA' customer club and fan club we have revealed some shortages in the IKEA FAMILY concept and this is mainly concerning their lack of communication. We argue that their communication towards their members fails in certain aspects. This is apparent when interviewing members (Qualitative interviews, 2007). Holst (2007) is aware of the fact that they need to communicate certain areas in a better way. He stresses the importance of actively working on increasing customers' awareness of IKEA FAMILY's existence along with a focus on how to communicate the ideals of IKEA in the best way possible.

When interviewing fans we have noticed that their knowledge about IKEA FAMILY is far from satisfactory compared to their knowledge about IKEA (Qualitative interviews, 2007). We argue that the fan club statement is closely linked to their communication problem, since we argue that they have not been able to get this concept across to their members. Holst's (2007) hesitation about the term fan club further gives us the feeling that the concept is not well reasoned.

According to theory, IKEA FAMILY functions as a customer club, but IKEA FAMILY also refers to their organization as a fan club. We believe that IKEA FAMILY is having an identity crisis, as it is attempting to combine two different loyalty programs; a fan club and a customer club. If they are willing to create value for their members, they have to further implement the fan club concept not only by stating that they are a fan club. In order to continue searching for the meaning of fan clubs and the value of fans, we have to start analyzing the existing IKEA fan clubs, found on the Internet. We will in the following section apply Fournier's (1998) six brand relations in order to describe the relation between IKEA and its fans.

5.3 THE FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN IKEA AND ITS FANS

In order to analyze the relation between IKEA and its fans (Figure 11), we will apply Fournier's (1998) six key brand-consumer constructs.

62



Figure 11. The brand-consumer relationship, Muniz & O'Guinn (2001).

By observing IKEA fan clubs and interviewing consumers passionate about IKEA, we have identified that these fans have a relationship towards IKEA characterized by Fournier's (1998) first construct, *love and passion*. The fans are expressing their love towards the brand, by showing evidence of separation anxiety when they have not visited IKEA for a while. Below we present the emotions that are evoked with some of our respondents if they do not visit IKEA regularly.

"Aaaarrggghh!"

Susan (38) American/USA

"Like I want to go see what I'm missing"

Kyle (19) American/USA

"Withdrawal. Even my husband has been known to say, 'Let's go to IKEA. We haven't gone in a while and I need to go.' This is when we don't even need anything. It's like a drug!"

Nicole (37) American/USA

"Have' to go there – see their new stuff"

Marianne (23) Norwegian/Norway

These and other similar quotes show how our fans have an addiction to IKEA. We further believe these comments stress the strong brand-consumer relationship between the parties and also that this is not only reflected in their attitude; expressing their love and passion for IKEA, but also in their behavior; due to their separation anxiety.

Fournier (1998) defines her second construct, *self connection*, and the discussion below illustrates how self connected these customers are to the IKEA brand. During our observation of IKEAFans we noticed how new members tend to introduce themselves in the 'Introduction' forum, by mentioning where they come from and expressing their love for IKEA. Some of them also mention that they will upload pictures from their ongoing or previous renovations, if they are not already available in the gallery. There is further an ongoing discussion regarding which IKEA products they consume, in what color and material etcetera (IKEAFans, 2007). The fans are thus using the IKEA assortment as a tool to identify their current self, by comparing themselves with other IKEAFans members. The inspiration they get from other members' pictures is further a way of identifying their future self. However, at the same time the pictures are used to distinguish themselves from others. In order to have a strong brand-consumer relation there are usually several brand elements which consumers may feel connected to. In order to further analyze why our respondents have this strong connection towards IKEA, we asked them in what way they identify themselves with the brand.

"I like to keep things simple and there's more to me than meets the eye."

Eva (45) American/USA

"My Mom's family is from Norway, so there's the Scandinavian connection there. I love seeing all the names in Swedish. I like reading them out loud (when I'm with somebody!) because it's almost comforting to me, I have been surrounded by Norwegian, which is very close to Swedish, for my whole life."

Ryan (17) Canadian/Ireland

"I get my love of Swedish design from my folks...especially my mother. She's always loved the simplicity. Less is more...personal credo...and the same applies to IKEA."

Lewis (24) American/USA

In order to analyze the brand-consumer relation, one can further study the third construct, *interdependence*, thus the interaction with the brand (Fournier, 1998). In this case we distinguish between two types of interaction, real-life and virtual interaction. Anne (24) works part time at IKEA, which means that she regularly interacts with the IKEA brand. The other IKEA fans visit an IKEA store between one and fifteen times a year depending on how close they live to one. On an average they visit once every couple of months (Qualitative interviews, 2007). Kyle (19) says:

“I try to get there as much as possible, maybe once a month, but during a project of mine, I could be there every day in a given week.”

Kyle (19) American/USA

When discussing virtual interaction, IKEA fans can interact directly with the brand on the official website or about the brand in the virtual fan clubs studied. The official IKEA website is regularly visited and one of our respondents Sunil (19) argues that if you miss visiting the IKEA store, the website is a good substitute for interaction with the brand. Further, members on IKEAFans, Facebook and OHIKEA frequently interact with others about the brand by discussing the brand and brand-related activities in different blogs and forums. When members of these fan clubs interact with others about the brand, we argue that they indirectly interact with IKEA, because they may strengthen the brand-consumer relation to it by discussing the brand. Since our respondents interact with the IKEA brand both in real-life and virtually, it clearly indicates our respondents' strong interdependence to IKEA.

Fournier (1998) describes her fourth relation, *commitment*, as when the consumer behaves in a certain way as for example only buying a specific brand to achieve a long-term relationship. Our respondents mainly consume products from IKEA's assortment since 10 out of 15 fans own between 50-90 percent IKEA furniture in their homes (Qualitative interviews, 2007). Ryan (17) tries to buy all his furniture at IKEA, he says:

“I'm a snob when it comes to other furniture companies; if I can get it at IKEA I won't buy it from anywhere else.”

Ryan (17) Canadian/Ireland

This shows explicitly how committed our respondents are to IKEA, and thus how they have a long-term relationship with the brand. As IKEA is selling durable goods, the products (especially furniture) are usually kept for a while, which also may increase the long-term commitment to IKEA. This has been shown through several respondents' kitchen renovations, where they spent a long time-period renovating their kitchens (IKEAFans, 2007:10).

These long-term relationships are further shaped on the different IKEA fan club websites. Especially on IKEAFans and OHIKEA, where there are constant discussions about for example products regarding kitchen renovations and information about store openings. On these sites we have witnessed a high frequency of activity which illustrates how committed the fans are towards the IKEA brand (Fournier, 1998).

Hence, to show why fans may create long-lasting relationships with IKEA, we further asked our respondents about Fournier's (1998) fifth construct, *intimacy*. We were interested in knowing what they like about the brand and thereby what they think is IKEA's superior performance.

"Contemporary. Clean lines. Reasonably priced. Allows for independent users (read: we put the furniture together and can buy what we want when we want). Products are on the shelves ready to take home. Fun. Makes me feel like I've got style even if I don't."

Nicole (37) American/USA

65

"I like IKEA because it sells good quality furniture for a good price. I also like the ice cream and the hot dogs. I especially like to go to IKEA here in San Diego because they sell Swedish candy!"

Hanna (24) Swedish/USA

These quotes show that these respondents have a passion towards the whole IKEA experience. In addition to Nicole (37) and Hanna (24) other fans have also expressed their positive attitude towards the IKEA concept and that no other home decorating company is as good as IKEA. Since our respondents favor IKEA over other home decorating companies, it is a sign of how IKEA may create stronger mental commitment, thus a deeper meaning to the fans that in turn creates a close relationship between IKEA and their fans.

Brand partner quality is Fournier's (1998) sixth and final key construct. This is referred to as offering a reliable, predictable and desired brand and thus showing respect and care for the consumer. As mentioned in section 5.2.4.2 *IKEA FAMILY's product range and shop*, IKEA FAMILY offers a special product assortment. This product assortment is divided into four product categories with focus on safety, traveling, relaxation and inspiration, which is IKEA's attempt to show care for their customers. Apart from the IKEA Family assortment, another brand partner quality factor is IKEA's partnership with aid-organizations, which, as mentioned in section 5.2.4.4 *Other value-added services*, is one reason for why customers are members of IKEA FAMILY.

To summarize the analysis of fans with help of Fournier's six key constructs, we have seen strong relationships between IKEA and their fans. They do not only have a good attitude towards the brand, but their behavior is also reflective of their passion and thus their relationship. In the next section we will continue to focus on the meaning of fan clubs and the value of fans, by studying the connection between fan clubs and brand communities/tribes.

5.4 FAN CLUBS RESEMBLANCE TO BRAND COMMUNITIES/TRIBES

Members in brand communities and tribes always have a shared denominator, which is also the case in our study where the observed fans having a shared passion for the IKEA brand. Therefore they are socially linked in real-life as well as on the virtual communities. This relationship is illustrated in Figure 12 below:

66

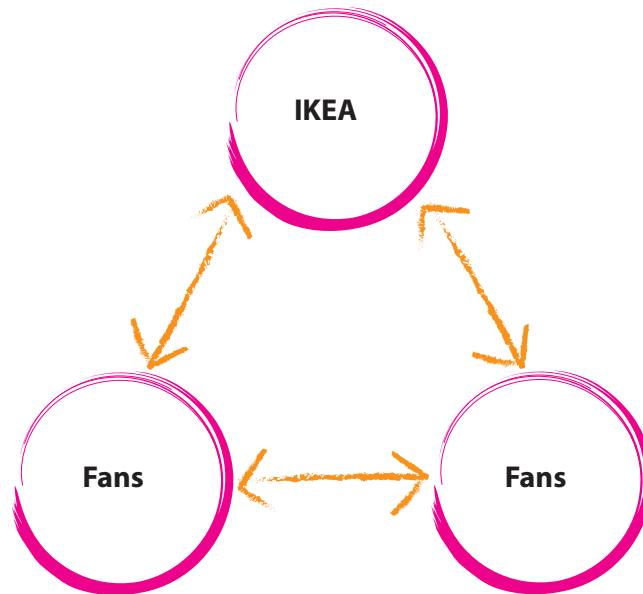


Figure 12. The triad relationship. Muniz & O’Guinn (2001).

In order to analyze how fan clubs are related to social groupings such as brand communities/tribes we will apply Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) three constructs; *consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and moral responsibility*. This theory can be applied in order to distinguish the main features of a brand community/tribe and these features are in turn displaying actions and attitudes of the people within these communities/tribes.

5.4.1 CONSCIOUSNESS OF KIND

Brands have the ability to evoke feelings of belonging and Muniz & O’Guinn, (2001) refers to this as ‘we-ness’. This is the most important element of brand communities/tribes, because without this feeling the communities/tribes would not exist. It is further this connection that distinguishes true members from less

devoted ones, which in turn reveals the real fans.

The feeling of we-ness is also present within the IKEA community/tribe. The Swedish respondents claim to have a feeling of belonging to the social group around IKEA due to nationalistic feelings evoked during international experiences. IKEA is seen as typically Swedish by Swedish and foreign people, and is even perceived as an institution (Holst, interview, 2007). Due to this, Swedish IKEA fans might experience a different kind of we-ness than non-Swedish fans.

“When I was in the US as an au-pair in 1994-1995, we often went to IKEA to eat meatballs, potatoes, lingonberries and cream sauce. At those times I became very patriotic towards Sweden.”

Maria (32) Swedish/Sweden

“As a Swede I am almost indoctrinated with IKEA”

Anne (24) Swedish/Sweden

“I can identify myself with IKEA more now when I live here in San Diego, since Ikea is a big Swedish company. When I miss Sweden, I go to IKEA!”

Hanna, (23) Swedish/USA

The respondents' answers and our observations is further evidence of we-ness within the virtual fan clubs studied. We have witnessed the we-ness feeling as one of the main reasons for joining a fan club; people/fans tend to gather in groups with those sharing the same obsession (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Another sign of we-ness is spotted in the 'Introduction' forum on IKEAFans. People often start by introducing themselves and several moderators are always greeting the new members with a personal welcome message where they emphasize the friendliness of the fan club. Members posting questions often get several answers from different members to the same question. Susan (38) further explain that galleries and blogs are used to document projects, share experiences and thus inspire one another, locally or globally. This shows the friendliness and trustworthiness of IKEAFans, and further how essential it is to help other IKEAFans members in different situations.

To further strengthen the feeling of we-ness, IKEAFans and OHIKEA sell fan club products such as t-shirts, mugs and scarves to their members. None of our respondents have bought any products, but those who are involved in the fan clubs have received t-shirts as gifts.

“I have a T shirt that was given to me by the moderators, along with a bunch of IKEAFans cards.”

Eva (45) American/USA

“No, I haven’t bought any products, but I would.”

Dave (35) American/USA

68

The fans studied are true members and truly devoted to the IKEA brand. As displayed, they are people who do not hesitate to help other fans. They do everything in their power to enhance other fans’ experiences of IKEA, especially within IKEAFans where the members are very keen on taking care of each other. In a way they resemble a family, with rituals and traditions, which will be displayed further on.

5.4.2 RITUALS AND TRADITIONS

History and consumption experiences are essential when building a brand community/tribe. IKEA and its founder Ingvar Kamprad have a special history, which is forwarded by IKEA fans. IKEA’s history is usually well known by Swedes, but even fans in other countries have knowledge within this field. We asked our respondents what they know about IKEA’s history and its founder and received the following answers:

“Ingvar Kamprad started selling pencils and matches from the back of his car when he was young, and the business grew into a furniture company. Flat-packing came about when an employee took the legs off a table to fit it in the trunk/boot of the car. Much more, but no time to write it all down!”

Susan (38) American/USA,

“Quite a bit, I’ve seen several documentaries on TV as well as on the net, and read much.”

Jen (36) American/USA

“I know it was founded in the 50s and their philosophy of value remains a guiding principal. The founder’s name was Kramfors...his first name starts with an I and his hometown name is represented by the “EA” in IKEA.”

Eva (45) American/USA

“Not as much as I should. His name is Ingvar (?) Kramp-something (sorry, my Swedish isn’t good) and he started out delivering furniture on his bicycle. He has grown the company over the last 50 years and is now one of the wealthiest men in the world.”

Nicole (37) American/USA

Susan (38) and Jen (36) seem to have a great interest and knowledge about IKEA’s history and its founder. However, we are not surprised since they are the founders of IKEAFans respectively OHIKEA. The moderators of IKEAFans, Eva (45) and Nicole (37), also show knowledge about IKEA’s history and all of the respondents were able to mention something about IKEA, either about its Swedish ancestry or Ingvar Kamprad. Even if they did not know Kamprad’s name, they could still mention facts about him and his background. This further emphasizes the role of Kamprad, and how some fans perceive him as an icon for the fans. Further, Maria (32) perceives Ingvar Kamrad, the founder of IKEA, as a religious icon.

“It sounds a bit weird, but my boyfriend and I usually say that IKEA is our religion, the IKEA catalogue our Bible and Ingvar Kamprad is our God.”

Maria (32) Swedish/Sweden

This knowledge about IKEA is a sign of devotion and therefore gives these members a certain status. Furthermore, knowledge about history is important for the continued existence of a brand community/tribe (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). The respondents’ quotes show that some IKEA fans possess information about IKEA’s history, which in turn can be shared with other people visiting IKEAFans or OHIKEA. The latter further links its visitors to other websites where more history about IKEA can be found (OHIKEA, 2007:3).

A way to strengthen the brand community/tribe further is to share consumption experiences. This can be done by for example organizing journeys or events connected to the brand. An IKEA fan describes:

“Some friends of mine who also are IKEA fans and I usually organize trips to IKEA.”

Marianne (23) Norwegian/Norway

During our observations on IKEAFans we also found discussions regarding shopping trips to IKEA. The members are clearly experiencing their visits to IKEA stores as more than just purchasing home furnishing. The trip is more perceived as a vacation or an event. Susan (38) even brings her trailer to IKEA even if she has not planned any purchases.

IKEAFans
Forum: Got Questions

- Babbling **good morning**
For me, a trip to Ikea is a planned event. The drive isn't bad (hour and a half) but because the drive alone will suck up 3 hours, we usually try to plan in advance. When my friend Rebe kah and I decided we were due for an Ikea trip, she sent me this site. So, here I am. 29 year old, female, wannabe decorating genius.
- Susan
 Moderator **Hi Babbling! Welcome to IKEAFANS!**
Good to have you here! You have a great friend, sending you here! Road trips to IKEA are always exciting. Sometimes we bring our trailer, cuz you never know what you might find! Again, welcome and we look forward to your participation.
- Doreen
 Moderator **Re: good morning**
good morning babbling and welcome to IKEAFANS! IKEA is a 2 hour trip for me ... so I plan my trips too... IKEA trips are always fun!! You'll find lots of info and friendly people here...
- Eva
 Moderator **Re: good morning**
Welcome! Glad you're here. IKEA is a couple of hours away from us, too, so we plan a whole day for it. It's like a little vacation for us!

(IKEAFans, 2007:8)

Marianne (23) and her friends, as well as the IKEAFans members in the discussion above, plan more casual IKEA gatherings. However, these can also be organized more professionally. As mentioned in part 4.3.3 *OHIKEA*, *OHIKEA* is now planning meetings for its website visitors and in addition, IKEAFans are preparing a group meeting with all moderators (Jen, interview, 2007; Susan, interview, 2007). Nicole (37) explains with enthusiasm:

"There is going to be an IKEAFans Moderator Convention (really just a fun weekend where we get to meet each other – finally!) in July. I'm so excited to go to stay at one of the other moderator's house and spend time with everyone."

Nicole (37) American/USA

Susan (38) also mentions the Moderator Convention as well as the gatherings they have for all IKEAFans members at IKEA stores.

"We've organized a Meet and Greet at the store in Atlanta, GA and are planning to do the same at other stores. We have a group gathering planned in Seattle, WA this summer."

Susan (38) American/USA

71

These quotes display how important traditions and rituals, such as journeys to IKEA and official gatherings, become when people endorse something as much as the observed fans do with IKEA. In addition, the we-ness feeling is enhanced when they get together to share the IKEA experience.

As mentioned in section 5.4.1 *Consciousness of kind*, there are special greetings to all new members on IKEAFans. According to Muniz & O'Guinn, (2001) greetings are a simple way of interacting with members and reproducing the meaning of the brand. Logos and advertisements can also function as value creators for the brand community/tribe since they are evidence of the brand history (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). IKEA's logo and its colors, blue and yellow, are well known by its fans, and the fan clubs dedicated to IKEA also have the same color scheme (IKEAFans, 2007:2; OHIKEA, 2007:1; Facebook, 2007:3). An IKEA fan expresses her feelings about IKEA's logo:

"When I see the IKEA logo, then I actually feel quite satisfied"

Maria (32) Swedish/Sweden

To stress advertisements as a value creator for the IKEA brand, we found a discussion board within the Facebook group, 'I have an unhealthy obsession with IKEA', where members are posting comments regarding IKEA commercials. The members are revealing their favorite commercials and even quote lines from them.

Group: I HAVE AN UNHEALTHY OBSESSION WITH IKEA

Discussion Topic: Best IKEA Commercials

Tammy, Canada

"Start the car, start the car!" hahah I love it, the woman thinks that she is stealing cause her bill was so cheap!

- Kara, USA *Outside my town on the freeway there's a billboard for Ikea that says: "Check out these stool samples!" and then it shows a bunch of different chairs.*
- Mandy, Canada *Was the commercial where the car had rugs/carpets rolled on it, and kept knocking over people in the streets an ikea commercial?*
- Del, Canada *"Yes, that was an Ikea commercial, too. My favourite: "You feel sorry for the little creamer? That is because you're crazy. Tacky items can easily be replaced with better Ikea."*
- Classic. *Oh, and the "Celebrate Knut" ads from a long time ago with the guy tripping over the Christmas tree that had been thrown out the window. Ah, memories.*

(Facebook, 2007:4)

As has been displayed, IKEA fans get together in different forums and discuss for example advertisements as well as their trips to IKEA. Rituals and traditions are utilized in order to strengthen the fan club, which in turn enhances the feeling of we-ness.

5.4.3 MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Within brand communities/tribes members have obligations to one another in order to strive towards a long-term social group. This can be done by helping other people with their consumption of the brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). As mentioned in part 4.3.1 *IKEAFans*, the aim of *IKEAFans* is to assist and inspire people assembling IKEA products.

In the 'Got Questions?' forum people interact by solving problems regarding instructions, installations and general design advice. Members often have questions, especially about their kitchens. The questions are often about cabinets and counter tops; which to choose, measurements etcetera. They often describe their kitchens in detail, show pictures and especially emphasize which cabinets they have. By interaction on this website, the moderators can help members in most situations, even if they have not seen any pictures of the member's home. But of course,

moderators do encourage members to upload pictures in the gallery because then it is easier to give members better advice. Some members need design tips, like how to build in a microwave oven. In these cases the moderators often tell the members to first visit the website gallery as a source of inspiration (IKEAFans, 2007:11). During our observation on IKEAFans website we came across the following discussion, which is evidence of what previously has been discussed:

IKEAFans

Forum: Got Questions?

73

Connie

Built In Microwave

I am planning my kitchen remodel using Ikea Ulriksdahl cabinets. I welcome ideas for how to design a built-in microwave in an upper cabinet. Pictures of your installation would be very welcome! Thanks in advance

Eva

Moderator

Re: Built In Microwave

Hi Connie and welcome!

Are you talking about a microwave on a shelf, or an actual built in (over the counter) microwave? For an OTC, you get a mounting bracket with the microwave and it hangs on the wall below the bottom of the cabinet, just like an over-the-range microwave does. You just need a shorter wall cabinet to go above it. Most countertop microwaves are deeper than the wall cabinets are, though, so you need the extended shelf for it to sit on if you want to put it on a shelf. Some people have used countertop microwaves in base cabinets and trim them out to look built in, if that's an option for you, or you could install one in a deep tall pantry.

(IKEAFans, 2007:9)

The discussion between Connie and Eva once again pin points that IKEAFans is a friendly fan club where members are helpful and reliable.

Moral responsibility can further be characterized by members telling brand stories (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). OHIKEA's founder Jen Segrest is following the construction work of IKEA West Chester at her website and updates her visitors about the development. We argue that this can be seen as telling brand stories. The Groundbreaking day for the new IKEA store was on the 8th of May 2007 and of course Jen visited this happening. Below you will find OHIKEA news posted before the event as well as photos from the ceremony (Picture 4, 5, 6).

“Groundbreaking day! I am sharp! At least I know I won’t be the only fan there.”

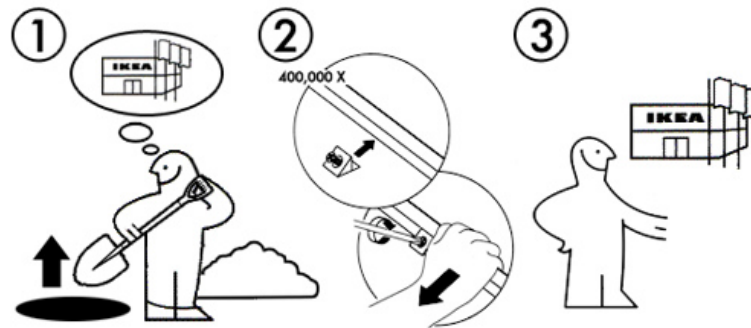
(OHIKEA, 2007:4)



Picture 4. Illustration of groundbreaking day, in an IKEA way, OHIKEA (2007:4).

“After this bit is done, the rest should go quickly... at least according to the instructions...”

(OHIKEA, 2007:4)



Picture 5. Illustration of groundbreaking day, in an IKEA way, OHIKEA (2007:4).



Picture 6. Groundbreaking day IKEA Ohio, OHIKEA (2007:4).

When analyzing the fan clubs by applying moral responsibility, we have seen how fans help each other in different situations, as well as how fans tell brand stories, such as the story about Groundbreaking day. We have now utilized Muniz & O’Guinn’s (2001) three core commonalities in order to identify if and how fan clubs are connected to brand communities/tribes. So far, the connection between them is strong and many similarities are identified. We will continue by studying how fan clubs are related to brand communities/tribes by further emphasizing fans’ ongoing activities by applying Cova & Cova’s (2002) tribal clover.

5.4.4 FANS’ ONGOING ACTIVITIES

The tribal clover (Cova & Cova, 2002) will help us to further emphasize the relation between fan clubs and brand communities/tribes. We will be able to identify fans’ activities by investigating where they interact, how they gather, their day-to-day practice and the trend. This is also done in order to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the fan club phenomenon (Figure 13).

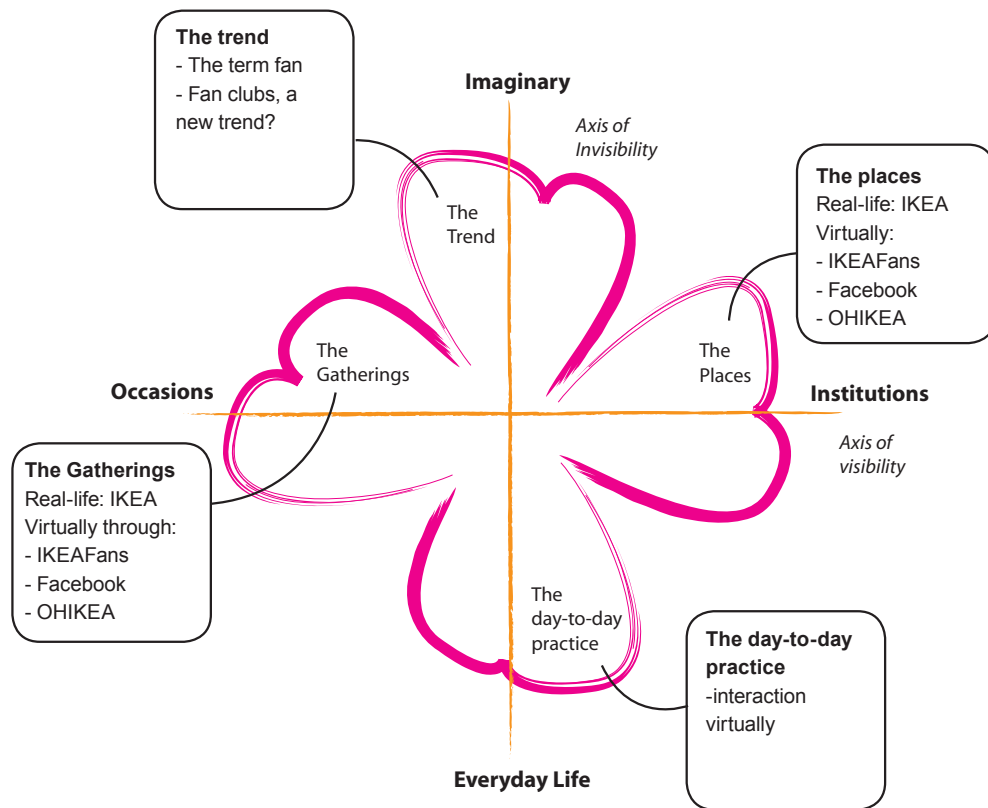


Figure 13. The tribal clover, Cova & Cova (2002) p.606.

The interaction between IKEA fans is mainly coordinated to the website's institutions such as IKEAFans, Facebook and OHIKEA. All these websites function as the place where fans interact virtually. As previously discussed in section 5.4.2 *Rituals and traditions*, several gatherings take place in real-life at IKEA as well as through other get-together trips. Virtual gatherings take place on the website where members are able to interact in forums. When observing the forums we have seen that it is common that members become friends due to their everyday activity and discussions on the forums, which in turn increases the willingness to gather. We have further witnessed that the common interest for IKEA and home decorating have resulted in that several members have had encounters prior to their interactions on IKEA fan websites. An example that enlightens this is how several respondents know Susan (38) from a previous community/tribe where she was working as a moderator.

“The owner, Susan, was very active on another website GardenWeb/ThatHomeSite (ths.gardenweb.com/forums) in the Kitchen forum. She was one of the women who were actively posting on the massive IKEA Kitchen threads. When she mentioned she was starting her own site w/the archives of those postings and other IKEA info I quickly got involved in the site. I think I am member 16 on IKEAFans.”

Nicole (37) American/USA

77

Observing IKEA fans’ day-to-day practice we have as mentioned earlier in section, 5.3 *The friendship between IKEA and its fans*, identified a high degree of interactions between members on the fan club websites. The highest frequency of interaction has been witnessed on IKEAFans website, where members interact by asking questions in forums about IKEA and interior design. The moderators are actively working to answer these questions and people are uploading pictures to show other members their renovation process (Picture 7, 8).



Picture 7. Kitchen re-modeling (Before) IKEAFans (2007:10).



Picture 8. Kitchen re-modeling (After) IKEAFans (2007:10).

It is amazing to see how much time fans put into expressing their emotions towards IKEA and further to help other fans with their problems. By interacting with other members, they are able to increase the positive feeling of the IKEA experience.

Most of the people observed and interviewed are true fans. Nevertheless, we have to ask ourselves the question: how trendy are fan clubs? We have in our research discovered that the My Nutella community offers their members to start Nutella-related fan clubs on their website, as well as IKEA FAMILY claiming to be a form of fan club (IKEA, 2007:8). The Swedish magazine *Diego* (2007) argues that corporations are our new idols. However, besides this statement, the fan club concept is rarely mentioned in the context of corporations. Fan clubs have more or less been a long-time trend in the entertainment and sports industry; which further has given fan clubs a certain label, not always in its favor. Some of our respondents argue that the word 'fan' has an unpleasant ring, which further gives Anne (24) a hard time realizing she is a fan.

"I think fan is a very strong word. Since I am not a fan of anything else either, it would be very strong to say that I am a fan of IKEA. I like IKEA, and I can probably say that I love IKEA, but I am probably not an IKEA fan. Fan sounds a bit geeky. I am very elated of IKEA, but I would not call myself a fan."

Anne (24) Swedish/Sweden

Furthermore, Carolyn (52) does not either consider herself a fan and she does not perceive IKEAFans as a fan club.

"I don't consider Ikea fans a fan club. I see it as an online discussion forum."

Carolyn (52) American/USA

Compared to Anne (24) and Carolyn (52), there are other respondents who admit that they are true IKEA fans, and further explain how people in their surroundings have reacted to their passion.

"All of my friends think I'm nuts and aren't nearly as interested in IKEA as I am."

Nicole (37) American/USA

"Of course... I have been derided. My college once said that if I get a baby, I would probably name it IKEA."

Maria (32) Swedish/Sweden

As we have seen, the word ‘fan’ strongly emphasizes certain emotional assets. The strong word results in some individuals not wanting to use this word to describe their love for a brand since it further gives people a reason to tease them. Another reason to why some do not want to call themselves fans might be that fan clubs in the context of branded goods have not been present for a long time. Since it is still not trendy, it might be more difficult for people to state that they are fans of brands. However, we believe this attitude may change as brand related fan clubs become more common.

The tribal clover has helped us to gain more insight as to whether there are any similarities between fan clubs and brand communities/tribes and has thereby extended our understanding of fan clubs. It is important to establish the meaning of fan clubs since they enable fans to intermingle; they function as a platform for interaction. As one can see by utilizing the tribal clover, we have identified additional similarities between fan clubs and brand communities/tribes. Now when we have understood the meaning of fan clubs we need to further investigate the value of fans by studying loyalty in connection to fans and fan clubs.

5.5 FAN CLUBS: A KEY DRIVER OF LOYALTY

Prior research shows that brand communities/tribes positively affect brand equity, thus the value of the brand (Armstrong & Kotler, 1999). Aaker (cited in Muniz & O’Guinn 2001) argues that brand equity has four components; (1) Perceived quality, (2) Brand loyalty, (3) Brand awareness and (4) Brand associations, and all of these are affected as a result of brand communities. As one can see, we have earlier discussed the relation fans have to the IKEA brand and how our IKEA fan clubs are related to brand communities/tribes. We will in this section strengthen the arguments for how fan clubs can affect brand equity in the same way as brand communities/tribes do.

We argue that the IKEA fan clubs might affect the *perceived quality* of IKEA due to the help customers get, to solve problems concerning IKEA products, especially at IKEAFans. When members interact and thus help one another, they may receive a more positive experience and image of IKEA.

Especially *brand loyalty*, the mental commitment between a consumer and a brand (De Pelsmacker et al., 2004), tends to increase due to the membership in brand communities/tribes. When fans become members at IKEAFans we argue that brand loyalty increases both on an attitudinal and a behavioral level

as members at IKEAFans interact both about IKEA and their own renovations. Since they share knowledge about the IKEA brand, and express how happy they are about IKEA's products, we argue that this displays their positive attitude towards IKEA. This may further increase re-purchase decisions and create hyper-loyalty towards the brand (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Fans' brand loyalty towards IKEA is also affected due to the interaction on Facebook and OHIKEA. On these websites there are ongoing discussions about why people like the brand and further when and where new IKEA stores will open. Due to their interest in IKEA we argue that there is a sign of attitudinal brand loyalty, and we further believe that there is also a behavioral loyalty if members would decide to participate for example in a store opening.

Further, by setting up websites such as IKEAFans, Facebook and OHIKEA, the *brand awareness* also increases towards the IKEA brand. Both IKEAFans and OHIKEA provide their members with updates regarding IKEA as well teaching their members about IKEA through interaction with one another. This further increases the *brand associations* towards IKEA.

We have now revealed that fan clubs, in the same way as brand communities/tribes, have positive effects on brand equity. Loyal customers are crucial for corporations, and this is why we are researching how valuable fans may be for them. In order to further understand the value of fans, we will continue by analyzing how and why fans function as promoters.

5.5.1 HOW LOYAL ARE FANS?

The term loyalty has in recent years developed from implying repeated purchase to something more complex where a *behavioral* and an *attitudinal dimension* needs to be considered (Oliver, 1997). Oliver (1997) as well as Raphel and Raphel (1995:A, B) have developed loyalty theories which categorize the steps towards action loyalty, correspondingly the levels of loyalty. As mentioned earlier in our analysis we have come across several IKEA fan clubs initiated by private persons; true IKEA fans. During our analysis we have found that the fans interviewed and observed have reached the action loyalty phase. Both their positive attitude and their behavior towards IKEA, show how much they love the IKEA brand.

In order to display their loyalty, we will discuss their behavior and attitude towards the brand. Fans' behavior towards IKEA is illustrated by how often they visit IKEA, how much IKEA products they have at home and further how often they visit IKEA's website. This behavioral components have already been analyzed in section, *5.3 The friendship between IKEA and its fans*, where we found that fans have a very strong relation to IKEA, thus visiting IKEA often, consuming large amounts of IKEA furniture and visiting the website frequently.

These fans do not only consume the IKEA brand for habitual reasons. Fans' behavior is strongly correlated to their attitude towards IKEA, as mentioned earlier when discussing Fournier's six constructs (*5.3 The friendship between IKEA and its fans*). Most of the fans interviewed and observed can identify themselves with IKEA and clearly express what they like and love about the brand. As mentioned earlier in the analysis, many of our respondents also have great knowledge and interest in the product assortment and thus a positive attitude towards IKEA. These fans are further running or supporting virtual communities and tribes, which are evidence that they want to influence the company by customer empowerment. The fans' involvement in the brand is something IKEA should utilize, and this can be done by for example supporting these virtual fan clubs (Kozinets, 1999).

This section has proved the fact that fans are super-loyal consumers and thus, have climbed up the loyalty ladder and become advocates who promote the brand, which will further be discussed in the next section (Raphel & Raphel, 1995:A, B).

5.5.2 FANS AS PROMOTERS

The most evidential promoters are Susan (38) the co-founder of IKEAFans and Jen (36) the founder of OHIKEA, since they have developed these virtual communities/tribes in order to discuss IKEA with other IKEA enthusiasts. They are actively spreading *word-of-mouth* to other consumers, IKEA fans, which in turn promote it further to others.

Further, the moderators of the IKEAFans website as well as other active members can be seen as *opinion-leaders* since they are experts within this field (Söderlund, 2001). IKEAFans' moderators have good knowledge about

IKEA, especially about the assortment and therefore help the members in an impressive way (IKEA Fans, 2007:12). Further, moderators and fanatic members help other members cooperatively.

IKEAFans
Forum: Got Questions

82

- Thomas **finish**
I have a question regarding 2 finishes for the AKURUM kitchen cabinets. Are the AERLIG white and APPLAD white matt or glossy? what is the difference between them? how are the edges treated? thank you very much for your help.
- Narf **Re: finish**
*I think you mean ARLIG ...
Arlig is just a white melamine finish that's somewhat textured. The top/bottom edges are covered with a strip of plastic; the left/right edges are rounded and terminate in a sharp edge on the back. The board is regular particle board. Applad is smooth and flat throughout, with slightly rounded edges all the way. The finish is semi-gloss, and the board is MDF.*
- Kristen **Re: finish**
Narf's got it right. And IMHO, for the small price difference, Applad is much more attractive and higher end looking.
- Narf **Re: finish**
*I agree on the higher-end looks. With the right pull, an Applad can look very modern. If nothing else, at least MDF is a lot more substantial than regular particle board. The hefty feeling when you open/close 'em is more "upscale".
I have yet to see an Arlig white kitchen that can pull off a "more expensive than it looks" feeling, in due part to the textured finish. It feels more "at home" in a storage area than a kitchen. Arlig beech and medium brown, yeah, those budget doors you can use and have a nice looking outcome ... but not white.*

(IKEAFans, 2007:12)

Apart from spreading word-of-mouth on the Internet, our respondents are also promoting the IKEA brand with the help of *word-of-mouth* in real-life situations such as discussions with friends and colleagues (De Pelsmacker et al., 2004). Three fans explain:

“Of course I promote IKEA. If I’m in a discussion about IKEA I mention positive things about the brand and if someone has a negative attitude towards it, I almost feel like leaving the group. I have friends calling me before they go to IKEA; they call me to hear my opinion and since they know that I know a lot about IKEA’s offer.”

Maria (32) Swedish/Sweden

“I know many of their products, so if anyone asks me where to get something I always say IKEA, with a sure attitude because I know so much about their products.”

Kyle (19) American/USA

“I support and defend IKEA. To some extent I can admit that IKEA has flaws, but I think I’m a defender anyway. I also try to give my friends a picture of what IKEA is like”

Anne (24), Swedish/Sweden

Even though some members do not realize off-hand that they are promoters, their actions have revealed them. This is how one respondent answered the question, whether she had ever bought any fan club products.

“No, but I carry some of the little cards with me to give away to people who have questions about Ikea kitchens.”

Carolyn (52) American/USA

The way the respondents promote the brand display how loyal they are towards IKEA. They do not only spread a positive word-of-mouth, they also function as opinion-leaders by spreading knowledge about the product assortment to their friends and family. Therefore, we argue that these fans are a valuable resource for IKEA. However, although we have revealed traces of an overwhelming positive word-of-mouth, there is a risk for negative word-of-mouth. The quotes below display our respondents’ opinions about the IKEA website.

“Worst search engine I’ve ever seen. Too much flash animation, and inaccurate (at best) information. Anna isn’t helpful.”

Susan (38), American/USA

“Horrible. Why bother if not all the items shown in the catalogue are available to view online? Heavy pages w/lots of Flash. Not always easy to use. I wish they would hire me to fix both the website and their planner tools. That would be a DREAM job.”

Nicole (37), American/USA

As one can see, fans of IKEA can promote the IKEA brand both positively and negatively, if they in addition are opinion-leaders it gives them great power that in turn can affect the brand, IKEA. However, even if there always is a risk of negative word-of-mouth, the IKEA fans are truly loyal towards the IKEA brand. Due to this strong loyalty, they are all keen to promote their beloved brand in the best possible way. From what we have witnessed we argue that not much could stop them from interacting with the IKEA brand in real-life as well as virtually.

5.6 SUMMARY ANALYSIS

The analysis has come to its end, and we have revealed the meaning of fan clubs and the value of fans. By first analyzing in what way IKEA FAMILY is a fan club, we have found that they have not implemented the concept thoroughly, and therefore people are unaware about the concept. We have identified that IKEA FAMILY at the moment is handling two types of loyalty programs; a customer club and a fan club. If they want to be a fan club, the fan club concept needs to be developed further.

We have studied the brand-consumer relation and further how fan clubs and brand communities/tribes are connected in order to understand the meaning of fan clubs. The connection between IKEA and its fans fulfills Fournier’s (1998) six constructs and the analysis has also shown that fan clubs are strongly correlated with brand communities and tribes.

Finally we have discussed how loyal fans are and how they promote the IKEA brand. The fans’ attitude and behavior towards IKEA clearly emphasizes how passionate they are about the IKEA brand, and how willing they are to share knowledge and experience with others.

6. FRAMING THE DISCUSSION

Our challenging journey has come to its end, and in this final chapter we will present our findings within the field of fan clubs. We will give the reader a summary of our results where we will begin by discussing the meaning of fan clubs and further the potential value of fans. Subsequently we will present inspiration for further research within this field. Since we have applied IKEA as case company, we will also deliver managerial implications, specifically directed to IKEA FAMILY. We hope you have had a pleasant journey, and we are very grateful that you chose to travel with us through the world of loyalty!

6.1 THE MEANING OF FAN CLUBS

The reader may view fan clubs as something associated with the 1980s and moreover connected to the entertainment and sports industry. However, our research shows the potential of making fan clubs trendy again. Corporations are becoming our new idols; real-life and virtual communities are evolving around brands. We have discovered many IKEA fans, and the majority of these interact with like-minded people with the same passion towards the home furnishing retailer, IKEA. People are becoming fans of brands, and these IKEA fans are therefore evidence of the existing demand for brand-related fan clubs in our western society.

The incredible force behind fan clubs seems to be unfamiliar to many companies. Therefore, companies with strong brands, striving to increase their customer loyalty, need to pay attention! By looking further into the fan club concept, and comparing fan clubs with brand communities/tribes, we have found a new powerful loyalty program for corporations. Throughout our analysis we have found evidence of the resemblance of fan clubs to brand communities/tribes. Brand communities/tribes are known to be a key driver of loyalty and so are fan clubs. Just as brand communities/tribes, fan clubs are functioning as a platform for interaction, where fans can find a social link and a sense of belonging. When we equalize fan clubs with brand communities/tribes we refer to the communities that functions in an organized manner; where fans do not only need a social link to other like-minded people, but also an official membership. Thus it is said, that fan clubs should not be compared to brand communities/tribes that just are associated with a social link between people.

Fan clubs, which function as a platform for fans, are able to increase loyalty due to the emotional feelings that are evoked when interacting with other members and in turn boost the level of satisfaction. Fans trigger each other with new tips and ideas, which extends the whole brand experience and thus deepens the loyalty to

the brand. Further, when studying IKEA fan clubs, we have found that especially IKEAFans has different levels of fans. IKEAFans invite and support everyone with questions about IKEA and their product assortment. This means that a fan club does not necessarily have to be a loyalty program just for the fanatics, but for everyone with an interest in the brand.

We have seen two ways of how the fan club concept could be implemented. Firstly, the fan club concept can be implemented within a brand community, which we have identified in the case of Nutella mentioned in section *1.2.3.1 My Nutella-A virtual community*. Secondly, IKEA FAMILY has made an attempt to combine a fan club and a customer club, which could work if communicated properly.

To summarize, we have observed that fans and fan clubs are living in symbioses, creating a positive cycle, which further increases loyalty. We argue that fan clubs could not exist without fans, and without the social link fans would not be as fanatic. It is therefore crucial to comprehend that fan clubs are the tool, while fans are the core value. Fan clubs can further convey regular consumers into becoming fans; since these groups can evoke feelings that one may not be aware of. We have now revealed the meaning of fan clubs and will now continue by discussing the potential value of fans.

6.2 THE POTENTIAL VALUE OF FANS

When a customer is truly loyal to a brand, there is a special brand-consumer relationship. Our analysis has shown how fans form strong relationships with their beloved brands, which is of interest to a company with a product portfolio of branded goods. As has been discussed, interactions with other like-minded people often lead to stronger emotions towards the brand, which will deepen the relationship further. For some, the brand-consumer relation has gone as far as being an obsession, where the brand is almost perceived as a religion.

Determining the value of fans can be difficult since it varies from situation to situation. We have been fortunate to explore true fans, and these people have invited us into a world of fanatics and enlightened us with knowledge within this area. We have found that IKEA fans have both a strong attitudinal and behavioral dimension of loyalty, which make them super-loyal. No matter what, they will stand by their brand. We have witnessed how fans love to talk about their adored brand as well as how they defend it when being criticized. The super-loyal customers are thus acting as promoters for the brand and with this information, it is even more important that companies take care of these fans in particular.

During our analysis we have exposed the value of fans, which companies should be aware of. We have realized that fans have an incredible knowledge about the brand, which companies need to utilize better. This knowledge is a goldmine for companies. They need to realize that no one can be more loyal than fans are, and that it could be worthwhile to invite the customer into the development process of the brand. Further, they need to utilize fans in a proper way, thus functioning as a source of information and inspiration. If corporations are able to reveal what makes their fans super-loyal, they will be able to apply this knowledge to strengthen the relationships with present and potential customers.

Corporations need to maintain the value of their fans, either by supporting the already existing fan clubs or/and by implementing a fan club as a loyalty program where a website functions as a tool to communicate and interact with the fans. A company can support a fan club, either financially or by showing the club appreciation, especially when the fan club functions as an additional help desk to the brand. A fan club, run by the company itself, is advantageous for both parties, as the corporation can provide the fans with a virtual platform where they can interact. In turn the corporation can utilize the fans' interactions to strengthen their customer relations.

6.3 CONCLUSION

By studying IKEA and its fans, we have been able to display the meaning of fan clubs and the value of fans. We have taken the reader on a journey through the world of loyalty; studying fans from a new perspective, fans of brands.

We argue that companies can implement fan clubs for their brands and that this concept can function as a loyalty program. The fan club can serve as a platform for fans, where they can interact with like-minded people and express their passion towards the brand. However, the fan club is the tool and the core value is to be found in their fans. By implementing a corporation maneuvered fan club, we uphold that a win-win situation will be created for both parties. An interaction platform will enable companies to get closer to their super-loyal customers as well as the fans will be able to intermingle. The companies get more knowledge of their consumers and fans get more information about their idol, the brand. A strong brand-consumer relation can be developed, where the aspect of give-and-take is in focus. Furthermore, since there is no standardized way of implementing these loyalty programs, companies should adapt the fan club concept depending on their customers, and mission and vision.

This study has given us insight into the fan club phenomenon, which enables us to provide IKEA and similar companies with recommendations to implement a fan club concept for their brands. However, no matter if you are IKEA, or any other branded goods company, fan clubs can function as a possible loyalty program. We argue that fan clubs are an upcoming trend. Therefore, companies need to think outside the box and take an alternative route by developing a fan club concept. Revive the fan club!

6.4 FURTHER RESEARCH

During our research process about the fan club phenomenon we found several interesting areas, which can be studied further.

As discussed in section 6.3 *Conclusion*, we have suggested that companies should create fan clubs in order to increase customer loyalty. However, due to time limitations we have not been able to research this area on a deeper level. Therefore, we suggest that a development of a fan club concept can be further investigated, by for example a quantitative study.

One of the reasons of developing a fan club concept is to utilize the fans' knowledge about a brand. However, how willing are companies to invite the customer into the product development process? Further, how much freedom should be given to the fans and how much control do corporations need to have? We find it important to research what the future holds for this kind of customer empowerment.

When it comes to fans, it is further important to be aware of the thin line between fanatics and those having an almost unhealthy obsession towards their idol. When adoration turns to anger, perhaps because the fan might feel rejected, it can harm the one being endorsed. This transformation has been witnessed in the entertainment and sports industry, where several celebrities have become victims of obsessive fans. For further research it would therefore be interesting to investigate if fans of brands in any way can harm the brand. Cova and Pace (2006) discuss hijackers, thus how consumers can take over brands and their meaning, and it would be interesting to look at this from a fan club perspective.

Since brand communities and tribes are glorified in literature, we believe that it would be of interest to look at these social groupings from a critical perspective. We live in a consumption society and consumers are members of several brand communities/tribes, even if they sometimes do not even realize it. Is it possible that brand communities/tribes can influence the consumer in a negative way?

What happens when the consumer gets too obsessed with a brand? There are many types of misusages, is it further possible that people are not able to control their consumption of a brand?

Social media such as Facebook is becoming more and more popular due to the fact that people are searching meaningful relationships on the Internet. Virtual interactions between people are increasing, and members of Facebook and other similar networks are expressing an addiction towards these websites. Therefore, we find it interesting to investigate how addictive this kind of social media can become.

6.5 MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

We have found that IKEA FAMILY is attempting to combine two loyalty programs; a customer club and fan club. The customer club is fully functioning, while the fan club concept is only in the introduction phase. The mixed messages confuse the member and therefore we argue that IKEA FAMILY suffers from an identity crisis. Further, the current IKEA FAMILY concept cannot be seen as a fan club due to the lack of fan related activities. We argue that there is a huge potential for the fan club concept, since we have identified an enormous interest for IKEA. The fact that there already are several unofficial IKEA fan clubs, allows us to conclude that fans of IKEA want to interact and socialize with other like-minded people.

We will provide IKEA FAMILY with some implications on what they should consider if they decide to develop the fan club concept further. Through our analysis we revealed two main areas:

- Get to know your fans and utilize their knowledge!
- Communicate with your fans!

6.5.1 GET TO KNOW YOUR FANS AND UTILIZE THEIR KNOWLEDGE!

We have found that IKEA fans are super-loyal consumers and further function as promoters for the brand. Due to this, IKEA can gain a lot if they manage to establish a connection with these people. The founders of IKEAFans and OHIKEA have an incredible passion towards the brand. We consider them as the most devoted IKEA fans, due to the fact that they spend many hours updating the website and answering members' questions. Thus, they do not only have the knowledge

about the IKEA brand, but they are also experts in the field of how to develop an Internet based fan club. Benchmarking could be applied to get inspiration from these fan clubs in order to develop IKEA FAMILY's fan club concept. Both IKEA and IKEA FAMILY can utilize the knowledge available on fan clubs such as IKEAFans and OHIKEA as well as the IKEA group on Facebook. It is a good resource as the members, especially on IKEAFans, have daily discussions about relevant problems and issues regarding IKEA and their product assortment.

If IKEA and IKEA FAMILY want to utilize these resources, they should additionally support these unofficial fan clubs. Due to the fact that they are functioning as IKEA's extended arm, they are helping IKEA's customers by solving different kinds of IKEA related problems and promoting the brand. The help customers get at the fan club, IKEAFans, can in turn give them a more positive attitude towards IKEA, since the products are perceived as easy to assemble and use. This will further lead to a positive image of IKEA, which can be forwarded to other people by word-of-mouth and word-of-mouse. Since these members are promoters, it is very important for IKEA to care about these fans.

To conclude, IKEA needs to get to know their fans, since these people possess a huge amount of valuable information, which can be utilized within the company.

6.5.2 COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR FANS!

As previously displayed through the analysis, one of IKEA FAMILY's weaknesses is their communication, wherefore we would like to stress the importance of communicating the message. The flaws in their communication are further evident since even fanatics are unaware of the fan club concept. If IKEA FAMILY would develop the fan club concept further, their marketing and communication must focus on communicating what they are, and what added value they can give their members.

In order to make members and potential members aware of the fan club, the concept has to be fully implemented. When communicating the fan club concept, it is further important to emphasize that the fan club is not just meant for IKEA fanatics, but also for everyone that likes IKEA. IKEA FAMILY must therefore stress their main idea; that everyone is welcome into the family of IKEA.

Since consumption of social media is increasing, it is vital for IKEA FAMILY to focus on developing their website. IKEA FAMILY's website is an important communication channel, which can be utilized if the fan club concept would be further developed. We also find it crucial for them to implement a members forum

on the website, due to the fans' wish of interacting with other IKEA enthusiasts.

IKEA FAMILY could definitely be a good platform for hosting a fan club, since it is a customer club where everyone is welcome and where members do not have to strive for monetary bonuses. This means that all fans are welcome, independently on how fanatic they are. IKEA FAMILY is further characterized as a caring customer club, which means that they also should care more about their existing fans. Nevertheless, as we have seen from the analysis of IKEA FAMILY, the fan club concept needs to be further implemented and communicated. If doing so IKEA FAMILY will most likely strengthen their customer relations.

REFERENCES

PUBLISHED SOURCES

- Acquisti, A. & R. Gross (2006) "Imagined Communities - Awareness, Information Sharing, and Privacy on the Facebook", *Carnegie Mellon University*.
http://petworkshop.org/2006/preproc/preproc_03.pdf
- Andersson, J. (2007) "De listar ut framtidens trender" *Sydsvenskan*.
<http://sydsvenskan.se/ekonomi/article224162.ece>
- Armstrong, G. & P. Kotler (1999) *Marketing – An Introduction*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.
- Arnould, E & M. Wallendorf (1994) "Market-oriented ethnography: interpretation building and marketing strategy formulation", *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol 31 Issue 4, pp.484-504.
- Arvidsson, E. (2007) "Företagen-Vår tids megaidoler", *Diego*, Vol 2 Issue 2, p. 64.
- Bengtsson, A & J. Östberg (2006) *Märken och Människor*, Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Brown, J.A. (1997) "Comic book fandom and cultural capital", *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol 30 Issue 4 pp. 13-33.
- Bryman, A. & E. Bell (2003) *Business Research Methods*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Butscher, S. (2002) *Customer clubs and loyalty programs*, Hants: Gower Publishing Limited.
- Cova, B. (1997) "Community and consumption: Towards a definition of the linking value of product and services", *European Journal of marketing*, Vol 31 Issue 3-4, pp. 297-316.
- Cova, B. & V. Cova (2002) "Tribal marketing. The tribalisation of society and its impact on the conduct of marketing", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol 36 Issue 5/6, pp. 595-620.
- Cova, B. & S. Pace (2006) "Brand community of convenience products: new forms of customer empowerment – the case "my Nutella The Community", *European Journal of marketing*, Vol 40 Issue 9/10, pp. 1087-1105.
- De Pelsmacker, P., M. Geuens & J. Van den Bergh (2004) *Marketing Communications – A European Perspective*, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Dowling, G. R. & M. Uncles (1997) "Do customer loyalty programs really work?", *Sloan Management Review*, Vol 38 Issue 4, pp. 71-82.
- Easterby-Smith, M., R. Thorpe & A. Lowe (2002) *Management Research: An Introduction*, London: SAGE Publications Limited.
- Edvardsson, B. & B. Enquist (2002) "The IKEA Saga: How Service Culture Drives Service Strategy", *The Service Industries Journal*, Vol 22 Issue 4, pp. 153–186.

- Edvardsson B., B. Enquist & H. Michael (2006) "Values-based service brands: narratives from IKEA", *Managing Service Quality*, Vol 16 Issue 3, pp. 230-246.
- Elinder, S. (1993) *Kundklubbar: En skrift om hur man får lönsammare kunder med lojalitetsprogram*, Stockholm: Posten Brev.
- Elliott R. & N. Jankel-Elliott (2003) "Using ethnography in strategic consumer research" *Qualitative Market Research*, Vol 6 Issue 4, pp. 215-223.
- Elliott R. & K. Wattanasuwan (1998) "Brands as symbolic resources for the construction of identity", *International Journal of Advertising*, Vol 17 Issue 2, pp. 131-144.
- Erickson, K. & D. Stull (1998) *Doing team ethnography-Warnings and Advice*, London: Sage Publications.
- Firat, A. F. (1991), "The consumer in postmodernity", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol 18, pp. 70-76.
- Fournier, S. (1998) "Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research", *The Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol 24 Issue 4, pp. 343-373.
- Gad, T. (2000) *4D Branding – Cracking the corporate code of network economy*, Stockholm: Bookhouse Publishing.
- Gummesson, E. (2002) *Total Relationship Marketing*, Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Hellblom, O. (2007) "IKEA senaste säljknep - Svenska hem", *Dina Pengar*. <<http://dinapengar.se/Avdelningar/Artikel.aspx?ArticleID=2007%5C03%5C14%5C7505>>
- Hills, M (2005) "Patterns of surprise: The 'aleatory object' in psychoanalytic ethnography and cyclical fandom" *American Behavioural Scientist*, Vol 48 Issue 7, pp. 801-821.
- Hållbus R. A. (2007) "Ingvar Kamprad – Mannen, myten, möbelmissionären" *IKEA Family Live*, Summer 2007.
- IKEA Family Live*, Summer 2007.
- Jacobsen, D. I. (2002) *Vad, hur och varför – Om metodval i företagsekonomi och andra samhällsvetenskapliga ämnen*, Lund: Studentlitteratur.
- Johansson S., N. Neste & U. Österåker (2006) "Välkommen in i familjen – värdeskapande genom interaktion" *Master Thesis*, Karlstad Universitet.
- Kalman, D. M. (2005) "Brand communities, marketing and media", *Terrella Media*. <<http://www.brandmagnet.com/pdf/bcmarketingwpfinal.pdf>>
- Kozinets, R.V. (1998) "On netnography: Initial reflections on consumer research investigations of cyberculture" *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 25, pp. 366-371.
- Kozinets, R.V. (1999) "E-Tribalized marketing?: The strategic implications of virtual communities of consumption" *European Management Journal*,

- Vol 17 Issue 3 pp. 252-264.
- Kozinets, R.V. (2002) "The field behind the screen: Using netnography for marketing research in online communities" *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol 39 Issue 1, pp. 61-72.
- Kumar, N., L.Scheer & P. Kotler (2000) "From market driven to market driving", *European Management Journal*, Vol 18 Issue 2, pp. 129-142.
- McAlexander, J. H., J. W. Shouten & H. F Koenig (2002) "Building brand community", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol 66 Issue 1, pp. 38-54.
- McAlexander, J. H., S. K. Kim & S. D. Roberts (2003) "Loyalty: The influences of satisfaction and brand community integration", *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, Vol 11 Issue 4, pp. 1-11.
- Muniz, A. M. & T. C. O'Guinn (2001) "Brand Community", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol 27 Issue 4, pp. 412-432.
- Oliver, R. (1997) *Satisfaction: A Behavioural Perspective on the Consumer*, New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Patterson, M. & L. O'Malley (2006) "Brands, consumers and relationships: A review", *Irish Marketing review*, Vol 18 Issue 1-2, pp. 10-20.
- Raphel, M. & N. Raphel (1995:A) "Up the loyalty ladder", *Progressive Grocer*, Vol 74 Issue 4, pp. 21-22.
- Raphel, M. & N. Raphel (1995:B) "Reaching the top", *Progressive Grocer*, Vol 74 Issue 5, pp. 23-24.
- Redden, J., C. J. Steiner (2000) "Fanatical consumers: Towards a framework for research" *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol 17 Issue 4, pp. 322-327.
- Reichheld, F. (2003) "The one number you need to grow", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol 81 Issue 12, pp. 46-54.
- Roberts, K. (2006) *The lovemarks effect-Winning in the consumer revolution*, New York: PowerHouse Book.
- Rosenberga L. & L. Silko (2005) "Application of tribal marketing in Latvia: The case of snowboarders" *Working Paper*, Rigas Ekonomikas Augst Skola: Stockholm School of Economics in Riga.
- Schouten, J. W. & J. H. McAlexander (1995) "Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol 22 Issue 1, pp. 43-61.
- Schroeder, J.E. & M. Salzer-Mörling (2006) *Brand Culture*, New York: Routledge.
- Strage, F. (2005) *Fans*, Stockholm: Natur och Kultur.
- Söderlund, M. (2001) *Den lojala kunden*, Malmö: Liber Ekonomi.
- Tucker, P. (2007) "The over-mediated world", *The Futurist*, Vol 41 Issue 1, pp. 12-13.
- Uncles, M. D., G. R. Dowling & K. Hammond (2003) "Customer loyalty and customer loyalty programs", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol 20 Issue 4, pp. 294-316.

- Yankee, S. (2007) "Building your own fan club", *EventDV*, Vol 20 Issue 2, p. 41.
- Yi, Y. & H. Joen (2007) "Effects of loyalty programs on value perception, program loyalty, and brand loyalty", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol 31 Issue 3, pp. 229-240.

ELECTRONIC SOURCES

Facebook website:

1. 2007-04-22
<http://www.facebook.com/press.php>
2. 2007-04-22
<http://www.facebook.com/about.php>
3. 2007-04-22
<http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2204894692>
4. 2007-04-22
<http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=2204894692&topic=1802>

Harley-Davidson website:

1. 2007-05-04
http://www.harley-davidson.com/wcm/Content/Pages/HOG/HOG.jsp?locale=en_US

IKEA website:

1. 2007-03-31
http://www.IKEA.com/ms/en_GB/about_IKEA/timeline/full_story.html
2. 2007-03-31
http://www.IKEA-group.IKEA.com/corporate/about_IKEA/IKEA_group_stores.html
3. 2007-03-31
http://www.IKEA-group.IKEA.com/corporate/about_IKEA/index.html
4. 2007-04-04
<http://www.IKEA.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/DisplayPage?layout=whatIsIKEAFamily&storeId=10001&langId=-99&catalogId=10103&localStore=12507>
5. 2007-04-04
<http://www.ikea.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/DisplayPage?layout=familyProducts&storeId=7&langId=-20&catalogId=10103&localStore=12003>
6. 2007-04-6
<http://www.ikea.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/DisplayPage?layout=browsePrintedMagazine&storeId=7&langId=-20&catalogId=10103&localStore=12003>

7. 2007-04-09
<http://www.ikea.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/DisplayPage?layout=whatIsIkeaFamily&storeId=7&langId=-20&catalogId=10103&localStore=12003>
8. 2007-04-08
<http://www.ikea.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/DisplayPage?layout=whatIsIkeaFamily&storeId=2&langId=-11&catalogId=10103&localStore=10009>
9. 2007-05-15
<http://www.ikea.com/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/DisplayActivitiesPage?localStore=10005&storeId=2&langId=-11&catalogId=10103&layout=displayActivities>

IKEAFans website

1. 2007-04-23
<http://www.ikeafans.com/index.php?page=press>
2. 2007-04-23
<http://www.ikeafans.com/index.php?page=aboutUs>
3. 2007-04-23
<http://www.ikeafans.com/index.php?page=guidelines>
4. 2007-04-23
<http://www.ikeafans.com/index.php?page=features>
5. 2007-04-23
<http://www.ikeafans.com/forums/members/list/>
6. 2007-04-23
<http://www.ikeafans.com/index.php?page=facts>
7. 2007-05-08
<http://www.ikeafans.com/forums/ikeafans-marketplace/>
8. 2007-04-16
<http://www.ikeafans.com/forums/introductions/6573-good-morning.html>
9. 2007-04-25
<http://www.ikeafans.com/forums/got-questions/6748-built-microwave.html>
10. 2007-04-22
<http://www.ikeafans.com/blogs/nyflicka/done-done-434/>
11. 2007-04-23
<http://www.ikeafans.com/galleries/>
12. 2007-04-16
<http://www.ikeafans.com/forums/got-questions/6579-finish.html>

My Nutella website

1. 2007-05-04
<http://www.mynutella.it/homepage.phtml?flash=si&>
2. 2007-05-04
http://www.mynutella.it/fc_search.phtml
3. 2007-05-04
<http://www.mynutella.it/mygadgets.phtml>
4. 2007-05-04
<http://www.mynutella.it/wcc.phtml?na=3&pagina=home&ref=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.mynutella.it%2Fhomepage.phtml%3Fflash%3Dsi%26>

OHIKEA website

1. 2007-05-08
<http://ohikea.com/contact/>
2. 2007-05-08
<http://ohikea.com/guestbook/>
3. 2007-05-08
<http://ohikea.com/2005/06/04/good-articles-on-ikea-history-and-philosophy/>
4. 2007-05-08
<http://www.ohikea.com>

Other IKEA fan websites

- IKEA Fans 2007-04-02
<http://www.ikea-fans.dk>
- IKEA Hackers 2007-04-02
<http://www.ikeahacker.blogspot.com/>
- Lovemarks 2007-04-13
<http://www.lovemarks.com/nomination/163>
- OHIKEA 2007-04-02
<http://www.ohikea.com>
- Positive Fanatics 2007-04-02
<http://www.positivefanatics.com>

INTERVIEWS**FACE-TO-FACE:**

Anne, IKEA fan, Lund, 25th April 2007

Bertilsson, Jon, PhD Student Lund University, 10th April 2007

Holst, Magnus, Communication Manager IKEA FAMILY, Helsingborg, 30th March 2007



Hult, Ida, Consultant Trendethnography, Stockholm, 4th April 2007

TELEPHONE:

Maria, IKEA fan, 19th April 2007

E-MAIL

Anne, Carolyn, Dave, Eva, Hanna, Jen, Kyle, Lewis, Maria, Marianne, Nicole, Sunil, Susan, Ryan and Thomas

GUEST LECTURE

Holst, Magnus, Communication Manager IKEA FAMILY, Lund, 29th January 2007.

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW GUIDE: MAGNUS HOLST

(Face-to-face interview)

Vad är IKEA FAMILY för dig?

Vad är önskan med IKEA FAMILY?

Vilka delar av IKEA FAMILY anser du är viktigast?

Vet ni hur de olika delarna uppfattas hos medlemmarna?

Vem är IKEA FAMILY medlem?

Vet ni hur medlemmarna utnyttjar medlemskapet?

Vi har förstått att ni tar hjälp av medlemmar vid produktutveckling och liknande. Hur går ni tillväga då? Vilka tar ni hjälp av?

Enligt hemsidan ser ni IKEA FAMILY som en fanclub. Kan du utveckla detta?

Var kommer idén med IKEA FAMILY fanclub ifrån?

Vem är det typiska IKEA FAMILY-fanet?

Vilken koppling ser du mellan ett lojalitetsprogram och en fanclub?

Vad är tanken bakom de fyra produktkategorierna i IKEA FAMILY?

På vilket sätt är IKEA FAMILY produkterna kopplade till IKEA sortimentet?

Vem är IKEA FAMILY Shoppen till för? Riktas den sig mot en specifik målgrupp av medlemmarna?

Vad är tanken och önskemålen med shoppen?

Vad är tanken bakom placeringen av shoppen i varuhuset?

IKEA FAMILY har precis lanserat en heminredningsbok "Älskade Hem". Hur valdes hemmen ut?

Hur kom ni i kontakt med personerna i hemmen?

Vi har förstått att ni har erbjudanden från andra företag. Vad är detta för erbjudanden?

Vilka företag kan det gälla?

Hur viktigt tror du IKEA FAMILY's samarbete med Rädda Barnen är för kundklubben?

INTERVIEW GUIDE: IDA HULT

(Face-to-face interview)

Berätta lite allmänt om företaget

Vad har ni för uppdrag från era kunder?

Vilken typ av etnografiska studier utför ni? Kombinerar ni olika metoder? Netnografiska studier?

Har ni kunskap av netnografiska studier?

I så fall hur utförs de bäst?

Hur går ni tillväga när ni utför en observation?

Hur delaktiga är ni under observationerna?

Hur kommer ni väljer ni ut personerna som ska intervjuas?

Hur kommer ni i kontakt med dem?

Hur sammanställer ni observationerna? Använder ni någon speciell metod?

Fördelar/nackdelar med etnografiska studier

Vad är det svåraste med etnografiska studier?

Tips och ideer på hur vi bör gå tillväga?

APPENDIX II

GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDE: IKEA FANS

(E-mail interview)

Tell us a little bit of yourself. (age, occupation, family, interest etc.)

When did you come in contact with IKEA for the first time?

Why do you like IKEA?

What do you love about IKEA?

How often do you visit IKEA?

How do you feel when you haven't been to IKEA for a while?

In what way can you identify yourself with IKEA?

How much IKEA products do you have at home? (You can give an approximate answer in percent)

How do you perceive IKEA compared to other home decorating companies?

What do you know about IKEA's history and its founder?

What do you miss at IKEA?

Is there anything that is dissatisfying with IKEA?

Have you always had a positive attitude towards IKEA? (If yes, please develop your answer.)

How often do you visit IKEA's website?

What is your opinion about the website?

For how long have you been fan of IKEA?

Do you know of any other IKEA fan clubs?

Do you know other IKEA fans outside this fan club?

Do you go on any journeys or events with other fans?

What do you personally want to get out of a fan club?

Are you a fan of any other brand?

What do you know about IKEA FAMILY (IKEA's customer club)?

In what way do you advocate IKEA?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS REGARDING IKEA FAMILY

Are you a member of IKEA FAMILY?

If yes, why are you a member?

What is your opinion about IKEA FAMILY?

If you could decide what would you like to receive from IKEA FAMILY?

Do you know that IKEA FAMILY (apart from being a customer club) is a fan club?



ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR FANS OF IKEA IN THE USA

What is your general attitude towards customer clubs?
Do you think there is a need for IKEA FAMILY in the USA?
If yes, in what way?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR MEMBERS OF IKEAFANS

How did you get in contact with IKEAFans?
Have you ever bought any IKEA fan-club products (t-shirts, mugs, scarves etcetera)?
If yes, why do you buy these products?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR MEMBERS OF FACEBOOK

How did you get in contact with Facebook?
How did you get in contact with this IKEA group?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE FOUNDERS OF IKEAFANS AND OHIKEA

What is the aim of your fan club, tell us a bit about it.
How much do people interact on your website?
How much fan-club products (t-shirts, mugs, scarfs etcetera) do you sell?
What do you believe is the most important feature/s in your fan club?

INTERVIEW GUIDE: MARIA

(Telephone interview)

Berätta om din bakgrund (ålder, yrke, civilstånd etc)

Hur stort är ditt heminredningsintresse?

När kom du för första gången i kontakt med IKEA?

Berätta om ditt intresse för IKEA?

Vad är det som du tycker om med IKEA?

Vad är det med IKEA som du älskar?

Hur uppfattar du IKEA jämfört med andra möbelvaruhus?)

Hur ofta besöker du ett IKEA varuhus?

Hur känner du när du inte varit på IKEA på ett tag?

Hur ofta besöker du IKEAs hemsida?

Har du handlat via deras hemsida?

Vad kommer det att innebära för dig att IKEA öppnar ett varuhus i Karlstad?

Hur stor andel av ditt hem består av IKEA produkter?

Är det något som du saknar på IKEA?

Ditt hem var med i ett reportage i magasinet Live, hur kom detta sig?

Hur länge har du varit IKEA FAMILY medlem?

Vad är anledningen till att du är IKEA FAMILY medlem?

Vad vet du om IKEAFAMILY?

Vad tycker du om IKEA FAMILY?

Hur ofta besöker du IKEA FAMILY shoppen?

Har du någonsin köpt IKEA FAMILY produkter?

Brukar du surfa på IKEA FAMILY hemsidan?

På vilket sätt skulle IKEA FAMILY konceptet kunna förbättras?

Vet du att IKEA FAMILY kallar sig en fanclub?

Vad önskar du för fanclub aktiviteter på IKEA FAMILY hemsidan?

Anser du att du är ett IKEA fan?

På vilket sätt är du ett IKEA fan?

Anser människor i den omgivning att du är ett IKEA fan?

Känner du till några av de IKEA fanclubs som drivs av privatpersoner på Internet?

Skulle du kunna tänka dig att bli medlem i en sådan här klubb?

På vilket sätt förespråkar du IKEA i sammanhang där de nämns?

Känner du några andra IKEA fans?

INTERVIEW GUIDE: ANNE

(Face-to-face interview)

Berätta om din bakgrund

Har du ett stort heminredningsintresse?

När kom du för första gången i kontakt med IKEA?

Berätta om ditt intresse för IKEA?

Vad är det som du tycker om med IKEA?

Vad är det med IKEA som du älskar?

Hur uppfattar du IKEA jämfört med andra möbelvaruhus?

Hur ofta besöker du ett IKEA varuhus?

Hur känner du när du inte varit på IKEA på ett tag?

Hur ofta besöker du IKEAs hemsida?

Har du handlat via deras hemsida?

Hur stor andel av ditt hem består av IKEA produkter?

Är det något som du saknar på IKEA?

Ditt hem var med i ett reportage i magasinet Live, hur kom detta sig?

Hur länge har du varit IKEA FAMILY medlem?

Vad är anledningen till att du är IKEA FAMILY medlem?

Vad vet du om IKEAFAMILY?

Vad tycker du om IKEA FAMILY?

Hur ofta besöker du IKEA FAMILY shoppen?

Har du någonsin köpt IKEA FAMILY produkter?

Brukar du surfa på IKEA FAMILY hemsidan?

På vilket sätt skulle IKEA FAMILY konceptet kunna förbättras?

Vet du att IKEA FAMILY kallar sig en fanclub?

Vad önskar du för fanclub aktiviteter på IKEA FAMILY hemsidan?

Anser du att du är ett IKEA fan? (utveckla ditt svar)

Anser människor i den omgivning att du är ett IKEA fan?

Känner du till några av de IKEA fanclubs som drivs av privatpersoner på Internet?

Skulle du kunna tänka dig att bli medlem i en sådan här klubb?

På vilket sätt förespråkar du IKEA i sammanhang där de nämns?

Känner du några andra IKEA fans?

APPENDIX III

Theory	Questions from interview guides
Customer club	
Communication	What do you know about IKEA FAMILY (IKEA's customer club)?
Soft benefits	If you could decide what would you like to receive from IKEA FAMILY?
Benefits	What do you personally want to get out of a fan club?
Loyalty	
Four phases of loyalty	What do you know about IKEA's history and its founder?
Four phases of loyalty	How often do you visit IKEA?
Four phases of loyalty	How often do you visit IKEA's website?
Loyalty ladder	How much IKEA products do you have at home? (You can give an approximate answer in percent)
Loyalty ladder	Have you always had a positive attitude towards IKEA? (If yes, please develop you answer.)
Loyalty ladder	For how long have you been fan of IKEA?
Fournier's key constructs	
Love and passion	Why do you like IKEA?
Love and passion	What do you love about IKEA?
Love and passion	How do you feel when you haven't been to IKEA for a while?
Self connection	In what way can you identify yourself with IKEA?
Interdependence	How often do you visit IKEA?
Interdependence	How offer do you visit IKEA's website?
Commitment	How much IKEA products do you have at home? (You can give an approximate answer in percent)
Commitment	How do you perceive IKEA compared to other home decorating companies?
Three core commonalities	
Consciousness of kind	Have you ever bought any IKEA fan club products (t-shirts, mugs, scarves etcetera)?
Consciousness of kind	How much fan club products (t-shirts, mugs, scarfs etcetera) do you sell?
Rituals and traditions/ The tribal clover	Do you go on any journeys or events with other fans?

APPENDIX IV

NAME	AGE	GENDER	NATIONALITY/ COUNTRY	OCCUPATION
Anne	24	F	Swedish/Sweden	Student
Carolyn	52	F	American/USA	Municipal employee
Dave	35	M	American/USA	Network administrator
Eva	45	F	American/USA	Home maker
Hanna	23	F	Swedish/USA	Student
Jen	36	F	American/USA	Web designer
Kyle	19	M	American/USA	Student
Lewis	24	M	American/USA	Programmer
Maria	32	F	Swedish/Sweden	Youth advisor
Marianne	23	F	Norwegian/USA	Student
Nicole	37	F	American/USA	PhD
Ryan	17	M	Canadian/Ireland	Student
Susan	38	F	American/USA	Home worker
Sunil	19	M	English/England	Student
Thomas	42	M	American/USA	Software/Financial services