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Alignment

- Managing Brand Identity in Online Communities

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II Abstract

Title: Alignment- *Managing Brand Identity in Online Brand Communities*

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Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore how brand managers align their brand identity within online brand communities where the communication is shared in order to create a reinforcing point of contact instead of a source of mixed messages.

Problem: With the increasing usage of the internet, brand managers are today forced and challenged to align and re-enforce a brand's identity online within its brand community, while also promoting user generated content and customer engagement.

Theoretical Perspective: This thesis builds upon brand management theory literature related to online and offline brand communities covering brand identity, alignment, integrated marketing communication and the Net Promoter Score. Furthermore the research is build upon Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2007) together with Hanlon's 7 keys to a successful brand community (Hanlon, 2006).

Methodology: An exploratory research approach with a triangulative mixed methods case study design is to be applied for this study. The information were gathered from three main sources: primary data were collected from interviews with the marketing managers from Life is good, Peak Performance and Timberland, quantitative online questionnaires were distributed to the members of the respective brands' online communities and observations were to be carried out from each brand's online community for 50 days. Secondary data were mainly collected from relevant journal articles, websites and textbooks.

Empirical Data: Quantitative and qualitative data was collected over 50 days using semi-structured interviews with brand managers; online questionnaires distributed to the members of the online brand communities in focus and non-participant observations of the selected Facebook fan-sites.

Conclusion: This study sought to create brand identity prisms from marketing managers and compare them with the corresponding brand identity prisms of the community members to evaluate the brand alignment. The results showed that there were gaps in the brand identity and the brand image based on the prism comparisons. The identified gaps did not show that any of the brands had an identity crisis, but there were areas of the prisms that could be improved for all three companies in focus. Based on the prism comparison, Hanlon's 7 foundations and the Net Promoter Score, respectively Life is good seemed to have the strongest brand alignment, sense of community and loyalty. Timberland was in-between in all factors, while Peak Performance had strong alignment but the weakest brand community and Net Promoter Score of the three. From our findings in the exploratory study, we created a model called the *Brand Community Prism* combining Hanlon's 7 foundations of a brand community and Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism. This prism is to be used to assess the strength of the sense of community based on evaluations of each foundation and hereby create better-aligned communication of the brand while strengthening brand loyalty and brand relationship.

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Master of Science International Marketing & Brand Management

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1.0 Introduction

The first chapter aims to present the problem background, motivation for the study, problem statement, purpose and significance of the study. The knowledge gap will also be explained in order to provide the reader an understanding of the modern marketing issues being faced by brand managers today and to give greater understanding of the study's purpose.

1.1 Problem Background and Motivation

As we enter into a more experiential commerce due to increased competition and less functional differentiations within the products that are being sold, companies have turned their focus on the development of their brand and customer's experience. A brand is a "promise from a company to its customers that the product or service will deliver an expected value and a specific set of functional, emotional and social benefits" (Lindsay, 2002). Although the functional benefits may effect ones purchase decisions, it does not bring much substance to the conversation of building loyalty and stronger customer relationships as competitors can easily imitate or offer the same functional benefits (Lindsay, 2002). It is therefore important to ensure one is differentiating oneself by delivering a clear and complete brand experience that matches the social and emotional expectations of the consumer. Companies must therefore make sure that they have what is called brand alignment.

Brand alignment "means creating an environment where your customers experience the brand with the right knowledge and attitude from the sales and service staff before, during and after the sale" (Lindsay, 2002). Companies therefore build a strong brand through a clear brand image through a strong brand identity that is consistent in all its communication. With the advent of online social media though, the communication about the company is not only controlled by the brand. One of the most influential forms of online social media is online brand communities. An online brand community is defined as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (Muniz, 1995). These communities are not just used to share admiration about a brand though. Muniz and Schau (2006) argued that members of the community act as "marketing consultants, brand managers, salespeople, copywriters, product engineers, service technicians, and pricing specialists" (Woisetschläger, Hartleb & Blut, 2008). This means that the point of contact and communication that would normally be directed towards a company's customer service or a member of a sales staff is instead being held within online brand communities. The community members have, in many ways, become active representatives of the brand.

Through our study we aim to learn how companies are aligning their brand in forums where the communication is shared by both the company and the consumers. The brand identity will be assessed based on the employee's perspective, the members' perspective and the researcher's perspective based on a 6-week observation of the online brand communities. The study will be performed on three well-established apparel brands that are currently managing their own online brand communities within the most popular online social media platform today, Facebook.

1.2 Significance

With the recent advances in information technology, a new media for information sharing and self-expression has developed the online brand community. The online communities provide a forum for communication, enabling members who share common interests and values to receive and share useful information via the Internet (Jang, Ko, & Koh, 2007).

According to research, 75% of Internet users were actively involved in "Social Media" in the second quarter of 2008, which represents a rise from 56% in 2007. This included reading blogs, joining social networks and contributing with reviews on shopping websites. An interesting finding indicates that the growth of 'social media' users is not only represented by teenagers; instead many of the users are now from Generation X (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009).

This new trend to actively participate as a customer online is now of great interest to many companies who are currently operating online. Recently many companies have started to realize how powerful and influential the C2C generated brand communities are among their consumers within online social media's such as Facebook, MySpace and Twitter. As a response many companies have started to develop their own communities online to create relevant platforms where their brand evangelists and promoters can meet and share their experience with the brand.

As a result, B2C virtual communities in the form of online brand communities and fan-pages are being created by companies in order to reach their customers. A virtual community is defined as '*a social-cultural grouping that occurs when a number of people are taking part in public discussions and sharing emotions which creates human relationships online*' (Arnone, Colot, Croquet, Geerts & Pozniak, 2010).

According to Reichheld (2003), managers and employees should have a focused goal of growing and fostering a group of consumers that would recommend your product. The assumption with this is that a large promoter group will lead to greater growth and profitability. Members of online brand communities are usually represented by some of the most loyal consumers - so how does one grow

these communities and use it to strengthen one's brand? This question brings us to the core of this study- how to align your brand in online brand communities.

1.3 Problem Statement

Contemporary brand managers are being challenged by the ever-evolving Internet, its online marketing trends, and plethora of modern possibilities and issues. Brand managers are now being confronted with the issue of aligning and re-enforcing their brand identity within their online brand communities while also promoting user-generated content, customer engagement and opening up the conversation about their brand. Based on existing branding, marketing and identity theory this thesis seeks to explore:

“How is a brand identity aligned when influenced by an online brand community?”

1.4 Purpose

The purpose of this study is to explore how brand managers can develop and sustain a strong brand identity within their online brand communities where the communication is shared. The study aims to understand how companies can achieve brand alignment within online brand communities in order strengthen brand identity, loyalty, and equity. The goal of this study is to provide valuable insight on the development and management of online brand communities for them to become an effective marketing tool instead of a source of mixed brand messages.

1.5 Knowledge Gap

Online brand communities have only existed for a little over a decade, but there is a fair amount of literature and research covering the topic. Past literature discuss how successful online brand communities are formed and maintained, however there is no research on the brand alignment strategy of online communities where the communication of the brand is shared with the consumer. This has been recognized as a contemporary issue of brand management and a knowledge gap and will therefore be the focus of our study.

1.6 Assumptions

This study assumes that previous findings on brand communities are applicable to online, non-geographically bound, brand communities.

1.7 Delimitations

The brand identity of each company was assessed based on 20 members of their brand community and from their online marketing director. Due to time restraints, observation of the communities was limited to 50 days. There was also a focus on 3 brands, all of them being within the apparel industry so that they could be used for comparative analysis.

The study does not cover any comparison between the selected companies offline and online brand communities; furthermore the three selected Facebook communities is the only medium to be compared with each other. Any other brand communities' online, such as different company and customer-generated fan-sites will not be included in this research, nor any other social media forums.

1.8 Disposition

This study is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter will introduce the reader to the selected area of study including background, problem statement, scope and limitations. The second chapter presents the theoretical framework for the study including brand alignment as a point of departure. To explain brand alignment, the theory section will therefore cover brand identity, the brand identity prism, integrated marketing communication, online brand communities and finally Reicheld's net promoter score.

The third chapter will introduce the three selected companies for the research and introduce the reader to their background, current operation and marketing activities. The fourth chapter will introduce the methodology used for selecting and gathering the data needed for the research, covering the research strategy, limitations and validity. The fifth chapter will present the findings from the research study including the results from interviews, online questionnaire and observations of each selected company. The sixth chapter will give an overall analysis of the findings from previous chapter, where the results from each company will be compared. Chapter seven will discuss and analyse the results from the findings, and present the reader with a theoretical contribution by answering the research question as well as provide the reader with a practical contribution in form of a model. Lastly, in chapter eight a

reflection of the study will be presented together with recommendations for further research of the topic.

1.9 Definition of Terms

Brand Alignment – The practice of bringing together what you believe with what your actions show – across your WHOLE organization. This is not just an exercise in consistent communications. It is a deep philosophy of delivering your promise and doing what you say you are going to do. It is not just a consideration for your customers or market place. It is something that can impact everything and everyone from the mailroom to the office of the CEO (Brandalignment, 2010).

Brand management – Brand management is the process of managing an organisation's brand or portfolio of brands in order to maintain and increase long-term brand equity and financial value. **Brand management is applied by the person or group responsible for designing brand identities, aligning them for maximum effectiveness**, ensuring that they are not compromised by tactical actions, evaluating effectiveness of brand communication programs, valuing financial brand value, and designing appropriate brand crisis management plans among many other strategic and tactical tasks. (Venturerepublic, 2010)

Brand – *“A brand is a perceptual entity that is rooted in reality but reflects the perceptions and perhaps even the idiosyncrasies of consumers”* (Kotler & Keller p. 275, 2006).

Brand Identity - *“Identity expresses the brand’s tangible and intangible characteristics – everything that makes the brand what it is, and without which it would be something different. Identity draws upon the brand’s roots and heritage – everything that gives it its unique authority and legitimacy within a realm of precise values and benefits”* (Kapferer, p. 102, 2004).

Brand Image - *“The perceptions and beliefs held by consumers, as reflected in the associations held in consumer memory”* (Kotler & Keller p. 757, 2006).

Brand Loyalty - The degree to which a consumer consistently purchases the same brand within a product class. (American Marketing Association, 2010)

Brand Values - *“...the organisation’s essential and enduring tenets – a small set of timeless guiding principles that require no external justification; they have intrinsic value and importance to those inside the organization.”* (Collins & Porras, 1998 in Urde, 2001)

Integrated Marketing Communication – *“A process for managing the customer relationships that drive brand value. More specifically, it is a cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them”* (Pickton et al., p. 25, 2005).

Online Brand Community - *"a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand"* - Muniz & O'Guinn (p. 421, 2001)

Social Media – *“a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of user-generated content.”* (A. Kaplan & M. Haenlein, 2009)

User Generated Content - *can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of Social Media.* (A. Kaplan & M. Haenlein, 2010). *UGC needs to fulfill three basic requirements in order to be considered as such: first, it needs to be published either on a publicly accessible website or on a social networking site accessible to a selected group of people; second, it needs to show a certain amount of creative effort; and finally, it needs to have been created outside of professional routines and practices* (OECD, 2007).

2.0 Theoretical Framework

This chapter provides the theoretical background for the key concepts of brand alignment; brand identity, brand management, integrated marketing communication, online brand communities, Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism and Reicheld's Net Promoter Score. The theoretical framework is intended to provide the reader greater understanding of the modern marketing concepts used in the study and how they relate to brand alignment.

The following figure serves as an overview of this theoretical framework to illustrate how all the discussed marketing concepts essentially relate to brand alignment.

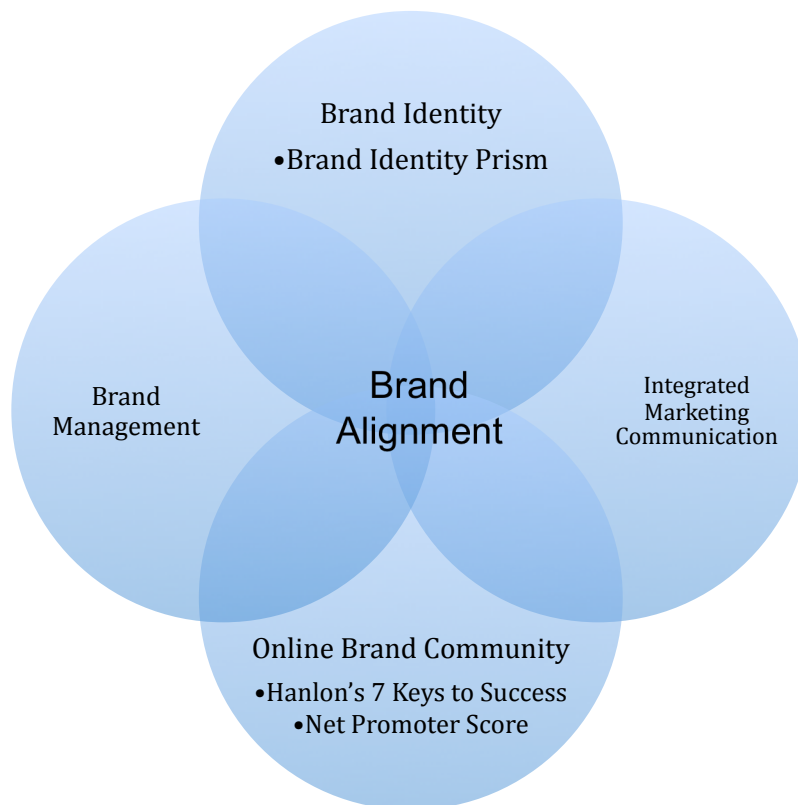


Figure 1, Theory Overview (created by thesis group)

There exist numerous definitions for a brand with most relating to identifying and differentiating a product or service. One example, given by the American Marketing Association (2010): “A name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's good or service as distinct from those of other sellers”. When a customer buys a product with a brand there is more to the choice than merely the functional value of the brand identified and differentiated from the competitors: “A brand is a perceptual entity that is rooted in

reality but reflects the perceptions and perhaps even the idiosyncrasies of consumers” (Kotler & Keller p. 275, 2006). Furthermore, a brand is a promise to consumers and is the sum of their perceptions about the product and its performance (Thomas & Murray, 2004).

A key contemporary market characteristic is maturity entailing that brands now must change focus from needs and desires to fulfil consumers’ emotional aspirations, develop loyalty and create relationships (Kapferer p. 75, 2004). The Internet is a facilitator of this change and strengthened by people spending increasing amounts of time on the Web. When companies compete online to win hearts, minds and hereby revenues, there is a need for a strong brand and a satisfying user experience. As the Internet develops and takes new forms, companies try to stay up-to-date and relevant by being present in as many significant modern online medias as possible, such as online brand communities, where the brand is the medium between the members of its community (Kapferer p 76, 2004). As a consequence, companies create more communication channels, services, and platforms to address their different audiences, who can also be quite segmented. Companies must therefore ensure that the brand they are communicating is consistent and clear. As more communication and points of contact are created, there is a high risk of brand dilution, mixed messages, and inconsistent user experiences (Aaker p. 30, 2002). This can lead to perceptions of the brand and the company that could both be positive and negative (Phillips, 2003). As a consequence, brand managers are urged to constantly update their skills, thinking, concepts, methods and strategies in order to keep their brands competitive in the contemporary markets (Kapferer p. 75, 2004).

2.1 Brand Identity

Brand management is a term that is well rooted in the theoretical world. Up until recent years, brand management has been mainly concerned about how the brand is perceived through its brand image (Kapferer p. 82, 2004). The contemporary world is flooded with *brand contact* points that deliver an impression strengthening or weakening a customers’ view of the company (Kotler & Keller p. 537, 2006). This could potentially create numerous and diverse brand images, which in turn makes them more difficult to coordinate and strengthen the brand (Aaker p. 31, 2002). Because of this, *brand identity* has won more ground and this is why prior to knowing how a company is perceived; it needs to know who it is (Kapferer p. 82, 2004; Urde, 1999). . Kapferer’s (p. 102, 2004) explains brand identity as:

Identity expresses the brand’s tangible and intangible characteristics – everything that makes the brand what it is, and without which it would be something different. Identity draws upon the

brand's roots and heritage – everything that gives it its unique authority and legitimacy within a realm of precise values and benefits.

Brand identity can provide brand consistency and continuity and now is considered the core concept of brand management (Kapferer p. 82, 2004).

The reason companies must focus on their brand identity and, in turn, its communication, is threefold; brands need to be durable, to send out coherent signs, and to be realistic (Kapferer p. 106, 2004). These three points reveal how identity is rooted in core values and what the brand stands for creating a brand image that is both idealized and resilient. This notion is particularly relevant when speaking about new mediums for brand communities such as the ones emerging online such as Facebook. Consequently, a strong brand identity must be formed before an intended image can be created by the public. (Kapferer p. 99, 2004). The concept of identity is central to a brand-oriented organization and provides an understanding of the lasting inner values (Urde, 1999).

Christensen, Torp & Firat (2005), connects the consumption communication with identity: “*consumption, rather than being a passive act of unpacking and discovering the meaning intended by the producer, is an active and creative process through which consumers continuously produce and reproduce their own identity*”. Connecting communication with identity creation is important in this context while brands speak about the product in a manner where brands are perceived as sources of products, services and satisfactions (Kapferer p. 106, 2004). The following figure shows the relation between traditional communication models and identity and image. Where the sender is directly linked to brand identity and the receiver is directly linked to brand image, since this is how one views the brand. When companies communicate their offering to customers, a transaction is made as they send a message and it is received.

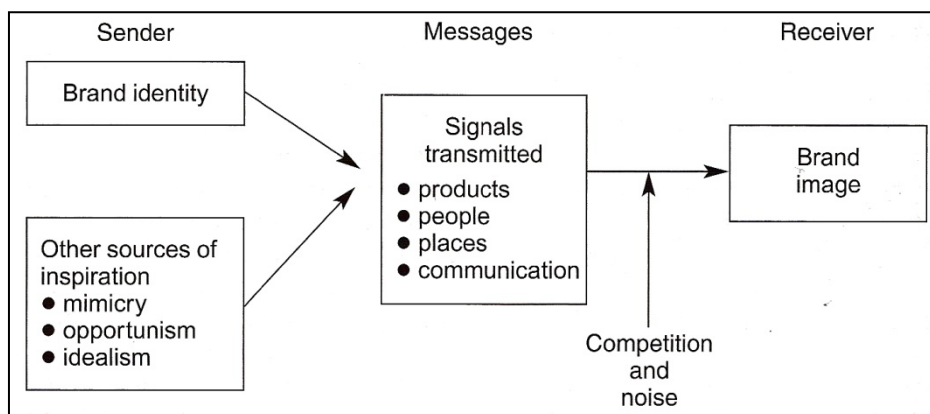


Figure 2, Identity & Image, Kapferer (p. 98, 2004)

2.2 Brand Management

In order to understand brand alignment as the main thesis concept we needed to define its basic elements; brand, brand identity, and then brand management, which we will be discussed in this section.

Recognized brand management authors have recognised that contemporary brands should become ‘mediactive’, e.g. through the Internet, helping customers get in touch with each other. Therefore building *brand communities*¹ are now a part of the scope of brand management (Kapferer p. 88, 2004). However, Kapferer (p. 82, 2004) also claims:

Today there are too many people, both internally and externally, taking part in the management of each brand. The more participants there are, the more distortions, personal interpretations and variations in style... [brands] should be managed by an enlightened despot, not by a democrat.

Hereby the author implies that a top-level manager should have the overall power and control of the brand making sure that the core values of the company are kept intact. Kapferer (p. 82, 2004) elaborates that it makes sense to make use of market data and consumers’ opinions. However, he also claims that the consumers have no feelings for the long-term interests of the brand. This could conversely be argued not to be the case for highly loyal consumers such as the ones in brand communities.

There seems to be different opinions between authors on the level of bringing consumers into the conversation and letting go of control and management of the brand. Hatch & Schultz (2001) argue that well designed visions will fail if they are not aligned with what customers want from the company, therefore the conflict between outsider images and managements strategic visions is an obstacle when creating an effective corporate brand. Urde, (1999) questions taking a market-oriented approach to brand management. He argues that, on one hand, it could be a risk to the organizations identity and competitive advantage to respond unconditionally to customers’ wants and needs by adapting the brand identity to purely satisfying customers. The question is thus whether the changeable preferences of

¹ The term will be discussed in a later section.

customers will provide long-term stable grounds for brand development, while constantly adopting popular positions does not hold credibility and integrity for long (Urde, 1999). Day (1994) and Hunt and Morgan (1995) in Urde (1999) argues for a market-oriented approach while they see it as an organizational competency and thereby a competitive advantage. This approach is taken through continually sense, interpret, foresee, and react to changes in the market while developing relationships with the customers (Day, 1994 in Urde, 1999).

2.3 Brand Alignment

In the previous sections, we have now touched upon and discussed the terms brand, *brand identity*, *brand management* and how branding authors argues for and against a market-oriented approach to brand management. The issue boils down to what level of control the brand manager should assert in order to create a strong brand identity and thereby a strong corporate brand.

According to the dictionary, the noun alignment means: “*arrangement in a straight line, or in correct or appropriate relative positions*”. Research throughout 100 companies by Hatch & Schultz (2001), revealed that a company must align three essential, interdependent elements to create a strong corporate brand; vision, culture and image. The way these elements are argued to be managed, is through top management (vision), the organisations values, behaviours and attitudes (culture) and the outside world’s overall impression of the company (image).

The term *brand alignment* was introduced by brand practitioners to the business world almost a decade ago (brandalignment, 2010). At that point the term seemed to lack understanding and substance; today, however, a Google search on the term results in over 4 million hits and has become recognized and very relevant marketing and branding orientation. An elaborate explanation of the term *brand alignment* is:

The practice of bringing together what you believe with what your actions show – across your WHOLE organization. This is not just an exercise in consistent communications. It is a deep philosophy of delivering your promise and doing what you say you are going to do. It is not just a consideration for your customers or market place. It is something that can impact everything and everyone from the mailroom to the office of the CEO (Brandalignment, 2010).

It could be argued that a type of brand alignment has always been around; it has been mentioned in other terms such as brand control and brand management. What makes the term brand alignment more relevant for the contemporary playing field is the fact that instead of communicating one way from an ‘enlightened company brand manager despot’ to the receiver, the Internet has opened the conversation to anybody who has something to share. Corporate brands are now regarded as built through an ongoing interaction and negotiation of meaning (McCracken in Urde, 2009) and values between three identities; organisational identity, corporate identity and the customer identity (Urde, 2009). The value foundation of an organisation holds the core values that are basics in the management of a corporate brand. According to the above definition of brand alignment, what the companies’ need in the contemporary playing field is brand alignment with a democratic approach to brand building. The question is how to align the brand when the Internet has facilitated a basic human need of sharing ideas and knowledge through communication.

2.4 Integrated Marketing Communication

This section discusses what Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) is and what the pro’s and con’s could be of implementing IMC to an organisation. IMC has been identified to be more relevant than ever in the contemporary marketing world as the Internet has created an increased demand for integration in all areas of the company. Similar to brand alignment, Don E. Schultz explains that IMC is organisational integration and management of brand contacts in: *“every place and every way in which the organisation touches its customers, employees, shareholders and stakeholders”* (Pickton & Broderick, 2005, p. 22). Hence, IMC is not merely a method of co-ordinating and aligning external messages, but a communication backbone of the company and not just the marketing department.

The latest definitions of IMC follow Mr. Schultz’s viewpoint of utilizing a holistic view on marketing communications. Duncan (in Pickton et al., 2005) defines IMC as:

A process for managing the customer relationships that drive brand value. More specifically, it is a cross-functional process for creating and nourishing profitable relationships with customers and stakeholders by strategically controlling or influencing all messages sent to these groups and encouraging data-driven, purposeful dialogue with them (p. 25).

There exists several other definitions of IMC, whereas the one by Duncan is the most relevant for this thesis as it is focused on managing customer relationships to create data-driven dialogue such as the

communication between a company and a consumer on Facebook brand communities. On the other hand, the definition mentions building brand value and profitable relationships through controlling or influencing communication. The definition is split between control and dialogue, just as the discussion continues to be when talking about corporate communications, hence the discussion on pro's and con's of IMC.

The principal benefit of implementing IMC throughout the organisation is *synergy*. Synergy is the result of bringing together all parts of communications so that the messages support and enhance each other resulting in a larger combined stronger effect than if the messages were functioning on their own (Pickton et al, 2005). The authors continue the listing of benefits of IMC through 10 benefits, the 4E's and the 4C's of IMC, which mainly includes benefits such as: efficiency, coherence, effectiveness, complimentary communications, continuity and economical benefits.

On the other hand, Pickton et. al. (2005) do not acknowledge negative effects of IMC, however they distinguish the effects of not implementing integration. This would lead to what they call *negative synergy*. This implies that the promotional tools have to perform individually, potentially resulting in harmful consequences such as: confusion, lack of effectiveness, efficiency and understanding. It is a common misunderstanding that IMC is boiling the company voice down to one standard message/image throughout. IMC targeted at many different audiences with multiple objectives naturally implies the use of multiple messages. These messages however, should be coherent, consistent and complementary. Although the messages are different, they should not be contradictory nor compromise the brand's proposition (Pickton et al., 2005).

A critical view on IMC is presented by Christensen, Thorp & Firat, 2003. They argue that implementing IMC and thereby reinstate order and predictability in an increasingly disordered and fragmented world is understandable but merely misguided due to the complexity of the postmodern market. They view IMC as:

A marketing-inspired vision on inspection, regulation, and control. In fact, it may be argued, along with Cornelissen (in Christensen et al., 2003), that the reason why the IMC discourse appeals to managers is because it legitimizes the organization and control of all communication functions. (p. 160)

The main reason behind the critical view on IMC is to be found in the argument that postmodern communication cannot follow the principles of IMC like intended. Openness toward flexibility and a

certain degree of uncertainty must be nurtured in order to follow the fast paced postmodern reality of the contemporary world where meanings are negotiated together with consumer communities, such as brand communities (Christensen et al., 2003). Christensen et al. (2003) hereby suggests that companies should move away from control and open the conversation with their consumers. The trend for organizations, as we write, is to facilitate this conversation through online brand communities, such as the one that exist on Facebook, the most popular social media platform today.

Ogilvy (1990, p.15. in Christensen et al. 2005) describes the postmodern consumer market as: “*a semiotic field of mixed messages, conflicting meanings and inconsistent impulses*”. Christensen et. al. therefore argue, when modern marketing is founded on the principles of analysis, planning, implementation and control (Kotler, 2003) then contemporary marketers are acting in a playing field where they are no longer masters of meaning. In fact, their products and messages live their own life with active and creative receivers who function as creative partners in the construction of experiences and identities (Christensen et al. 2005). If ‘over-controlling and simplistic’ IMC is applied on this sort of co-production of meaning or equivocal inputs, only a minor part of the input will be registered, attended to and understood (Weick, 1979 in Christensen et al. 2005). The author furthermore argues that organizations that apply simplistic models on complex behavior, prevents themselves from knowing reality, their environment and leaning new adaptive capabilities. Christiansen et. al. (2005) conclude that companies should, rather than trying to control the meanings and communication linked to the organizations products or brands, engage with the consumers and hereby construct and navigate experiences and meanings through co-production. Finally, Christensen et al (2005) link the co-production of meanings to consumer communities and how this will in the very end, lead to enhanced control:

...Organizations need to develop a tolerance for meanings negotiated together with consumer communities, such as brand communities, in the market. That is, consumers must not be perceived simply as targets, but as collaborators or partners in generation of meanings for the organization’s offerings. This requires not so much processes of integration and control, as in IMC, as it does processes of playful engagement, networking, and negotiation. ...This will, some may think paradoxically, give them the ability to have as great a control as is possible and, maybe more importantly, the only possibility to maintain livelihood in the complex, fluid, and highly dynamic postmodern markets.

2.5 The Brand Identity Prism

When investigating brand alignment in online brand communities such as Facebook, there is a good reason to use Kapferer’s *brand identity prism* as a comparison framework. The brand identity prism is based on the reality that when communicating, one is always saying lot more than intended (Kapferer p. 121, 2004). Implicitly all types of communication says something about the sender, the source and the receiver being addressed. Communication creates a relationship between the two participants, the sender and receiver, and the medium source, e.g. Facebook, enables the relationship. By realizing the essence of one’s brand identity using the brand identity prism, i.e. the brands specific and unique attributes, one can understand what the brand means overall (Kapferer p. 114, 2004).

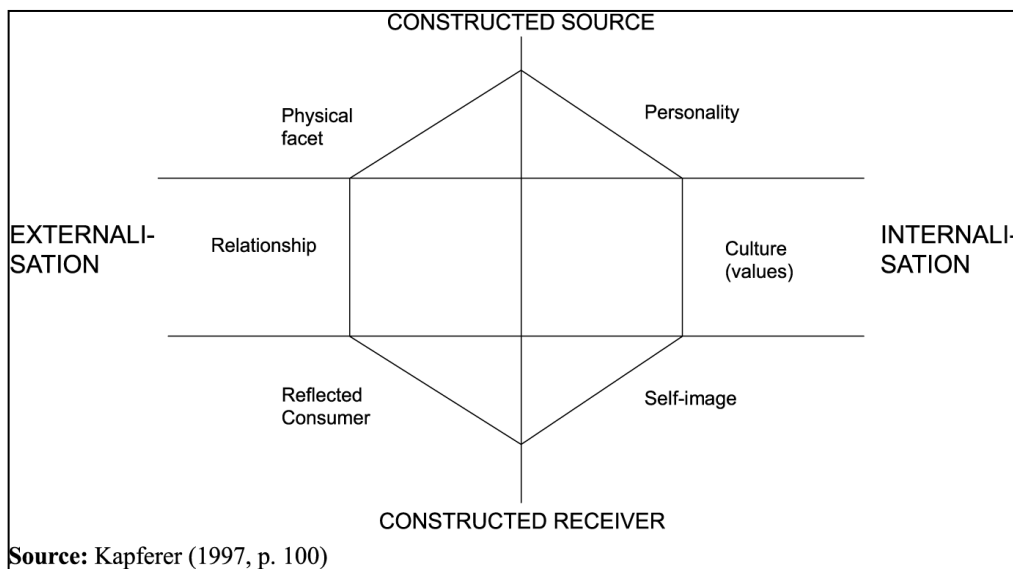


Figure 3, Brand Identity Prism in Kapferer (p. 100, 1997)

This brand identity prism is represented by a hexagonal shape with six different variables that can be analysed in order to establish what brand identity is being communicated. The six facets should be read from top to bottom – from sender to receiver where three facets are internal and three are external aspects. The *physique* of a brand is made of noticeable and important salient parts such as the immediate objective features that come to mind when a brand is mentioned. (Kapferer p. 107, 2004). Physique is what comprises the brand prototype: What is it concretely? What does it do? What does it look like? The brand *personality* in the prism model is the manner the brand speaks of its products or services revealing what kind of person it would be if it were human (Kapferer, 2004). This is often practically done by communicating in a specific style of writing, design features and colour schemes. Also

endorsements are used to give flesh to a brand's character (EURIB, 2009). Next natural step of the brand prism is assessment of *Culture*. This part describes the basic values and principles on which a brand is basing its products and communication. Culture could be seen as the direct link between brand and organisation. Often cultural associations are linked to the country of origin of the brand. Relevant for the discussion of the importance of alignment of brand communities EURIB (2009) advises that brand managers should have the brand's culture resonate in as many customer contacts as possible. The external opponent to culture is *Relationship*, which connotes a brands symbolic relationship between actors. Service brands compared to product brands have the most obvious use of relationship while a service is, by definition, a relationship. This facet reveals the way the brand acts, delivers services and relates to its customers, defining the management behavior identified with the brand (Kapferer, 2004).

Moving on to the next aspect of the prism we take a look at the brand identity that is created from the consumer perspective. *Reflection* is a reference to the stereotypical user of the brand as a source for identification. This does not however imply that the reflection is the target group of the brand. Kapferer (2004) elaborates that brand managers do not need to make a realistic reflection of the actual target group in image campaigns, but present a reflection of a person or group who are appealing to the members of their target group. The final side of the brand identity prism is the internal *Self-image*, which is the image the consumer sees when look at himself or herself in the mirror with the brand. A user of a brand might think that others will think a certain way about the person because of the use of this particular brand. The self-image insights are important when creating a brand identity and the knowledge of the underlying intrinsic drivers of consumers can help improve the brand and give advertising points to draw from (EURIB, 2009)

The above explained six aspects of the Brand Identity Prism enables the brand manager to assess strengths and weaknesses of their brand as well as the boundaries. It serves to demonstrate that all of the mentioned aspects are interrelated and communicate a collaborated identity. The prism therefore allows for semiotic analysis of the communication process by trying to realize the original plan behind the brands objectives, products and symbols. The underlying plan is often implicit and is not written down or clearly communicated internally, hence managers unconsciously enact a plan in their daily decisions (Kapferer, 2004). This confirms why the brand prism is theoretically useful for this study.

2.6 Online Brand Communities

A brand community is a “specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (Muniz, 2001). During the development of modern society, urban trends promoted a more individualistic and rational approach to life. In the last few decades though, people have begun to come back to their more natural roots in the form of communities (Muniz, 2001). In history, local communities were a natural formation of communication and exchange and now the Internet is slowly mimicking this formation of communities as it is being humanized and it facilitates the ability for people to share, network, argue, collaborate, and even search for greater freedom. With mass media advertising, non-geographically bound communities are formed through our natural inclination to socialize and belong to a group. It is through brands and common consumption habits that people are now finding another way to meet people with whom they can communicate and share while also finding groups that will help identify who they are.

Brand communities have been said to have three markers. These three are consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility (Muniz, 2001). Consciousness of kind is an intrinsic connection that members feel toward each other and the collective sense of difference from others not in the community. It is a shared knowing of belonging (Muniz, 2001). Rituals and traditions help perpetuate the community’s shared history, culture, and consciousness. They provide legitimacy to community membership by helping to exclude those who are not “in the know” and not brand enthusiasts (Muniz, 2001). A sense of moral responsibility is a sense of duty or obligation to the community as a whole and to its individual members (Muniz, 2001). This sense of moral responsibility is what produces collective action in times of threat to the community.

A brand community is a group of people that truly brings a brand alive. Through the adoption of a brand and the creation of strong social connections within a brand community, members can become the brand’s strongest promoters and its strongest defenders. Today, with the Internet becoming the most used media channel in the world (Social Brand Value, 2010), marketers are shifting their budgets accordingly. In fact, Social media usage grew by 82% in 2009 (Nielsen Wire, 2010) and 70% of all businesses intend to use social media in 2010 with the expected budgets ranging from 5-20% (Smart Company, 2010). The number of online brand communities has also increased as social networking sites have facilitated the creation and the management of brand communities. With common consumers and corporations both able to create forms of mass media as well as brand communities, the

Internet has become a channel of communication where the content and message is finally being shared.

2.6.1 Forms of Online Brand Communities

Online brand communities can take three forms. These three forms are pools, webs, and hubs. In pools, people have loose associations with each other but have strong associations with a shared goal or activity. In webs, people have strong one-to-one relationships with others who have similar or complementary needs. A good example of a brand community in a web form would be the fan page on the social networking site Facebook. In the third form, hubs, people have weaker connections with one another but have strong connection to a central figure (Fournier, 2009).

Online brand communities can be company managed or user managed. Consumer generated or user managed brand communities are not only created by the consumers, but also managed by the consumers. This form of online brand communities is holistically more open in the communication about the brand as all content is either created by or managed by its members. Company managed online brand communities are often created as an additional service or forum linked from a company's own website. This format is considered to be less authentic because it is generated commercially. Companies can also purchase or take over the management of online brand communities that have been generated by consumers. This is very popular as companies can quite easily distinguish which communities are the largest and the most relevant.

2.6.2 Online Brand Communities and Neo-Tribalism

As the Internet connected people from across the world, theorists believed that it would slowly homogenize consumers. Instead, it has allowed silos of interest (Godin, 2009). What this means is that consumers can now easily find others that share the same interests and connect with them. This desire to connect and share has been attributed to a trend called Neo-Tribalism. Neo-tribalism is an ideology that human beings have evolved to live in tribal society, as opposed to mass society, and thus will form social networks constituting "tribes". The postmodern consumer is therefore searching for tribes whom he or she can identify with avoiding the association with large-scale and impersonal social institutions. This is why part of neo-tribalism is the challenging of the status quo (Godin, 2009).

People purchase brands far less today for their functional value but instead for their linking value (Cova, 1992). This is one of the main reasons companies try to build brands that not only create positive associations of quality and service, but also have a more personal appeal along with distinct and relatable values. The postmodern consumer is quite self-aware and self-reflexive about issues of authenticity and identity (Muniz, 2001), this is why they often use brands to help communicate who they are and which social groups they belong.

2.6.3 Marketing Implications of Online Brand Communities

Relationship marketing has re-emerged as a marketing paradigm (Grönroos, 2007) and one of the greatest shifts in recent market trends has been the re-focus on relationship marketing over transactional marketing. Relationship marketing focuses on attracting, maintaining, and enhancing long-term relationships as they provide a competitive advantage and a strategic resource for a firm (Muniz, 2001). Companies want to build a loyal following of consumers where there is a strong perceived relationship with the brand, this is why developing strong brand communities could be a critical step in actualizing the relationship marketing concept (Muniz, 2001). Research has shown that strong brand communities can lead to socially embedded and entrenched loyalty brand commitment, and even hyper-loyalty (Muniz, 2001). Knowing this, it is a wonder why more companies do not have a greater focus on the development of their online brand communities.

Online brand communities have also expanded the realm of relationship marketing as it brings other consumers into the relationship a consumer has with the brand. As brand communities grow and participation increases, the virtual community develops into an authoritative and influential source of knowledge about the products and services (Hye-Shin & Byoungho, 2006). Members and even common consumers therefore use the community as an important information resource. Through the “collective knowledge” of the community (Hye-Shin, 2006), consumers are able to find answers to product issues, get technical support, and even find additional uses for the product. In many ways, the role of a company’s customer service and sales staff is being taken over by the community. The information shared within online brand communities is also seen as more useful as it is considered less commercial and it is also from a more relatable source.

The collective nature of online brand communities also provides consumers with a greater say in the brand as they are no longer isolated voices (Muniz, 2001). Just as consumers can find members that have had similar problems or issues with their product, they can also find members who share the

similar opinions of a product or even the direction of the brand. Because of this strong brand community can be also be seen as a threat by a marketer should the community collectively reject its marketing efforts or product change (Muniz, 2001).

Instead of seeing online brand communities as a threat and try to silence the voice, companies should try to promote discussion within. In fact, active participation in virtual communities may favour higher levels of loyalty to the brand because a key aspect of membership and participation in the community is the ongoing purchase and use of the brand's products (Casaló, 2008). Another reason managers should promote participation and communication is the valuable information one can gain from its members in the form of market research. By following the topics of conversation and the discussions within brand communities, marketers are able to discover new needs and even define segments based on profile information within their market. Online brand communities also increase a firm's capacity for advertising and selling in well-defined segments (Maria, 2008). Companies can also use web analytics within their online communities to discover what draws the interest of members so their communication strategy is consistent with their preferences and wishes (Maria, 2008). Information gained from online brand communities is therefore extremely valuable for marketers as they identify the needs of their consumers and design their communication strategy.

Brand communities have also been found to have a positive effect on brand equity as all four components of brand equity, perceived quality, brand loyalty, brand awareness, and brand associations (Muniz, 2001) are directly affected by brand communities. An online brand community is therefore a very powerful marketing tool for the brands as it can be used to strengthen the relationship with consumers, to perform market research, and can even be used as an influential communication channel.

2.6.4 Keys to a Strong Online Brand Community

We have already argued for the importance of online brand communities and their benefits, but what are the keys to fostering one that can grow large while also strengthening the relationship with the brand? Because brand communities are formulated as much by its members as the brand, there must be a good understanding of how the members understand the brand and what they expect from the community this is why a Use and Gratification approach has been recommended (Maria, 2008). The Use and Gratification approach has a consumer focus and assumes the members of the community play an active role interpreting and integrating media into their own lives. Based on this approach, one would first need to determine the use value(s) of the online brand community and then ensure that the

community is properly served. The use value can be determined based on web analytics and observation and can then be categorized as Functional Value (e.g. *advice, information, and expertise*), Social Value (e.g. *friendship, emotional support, self-esteem, social status, social enhancement*), and Entertainment Value (*fun or relaxation through play*). Knowing what members interests are or why they come to the virtual community is an important part of knowing how to add value to the community and also how to communicate with them (Maria, 2008).

Two other important aspects of creating a strong brand community are engagement and participation. Engagement and participation have been shown to be measurements of member commitment (Jang, 2007). Commitment to a brand community has been found to translate into increased brand loyalty and purchase intent (Jang, 1999). What should be stressed about engagement and participation is that it is in the control of the user. In order to get users to participate and engage with the brand, the activities and uses for the community again must be relevant to the members. Impressions created by participation of users in online forums are referred to as earned media. Earned media is essentially any form of impression that is generated through PR or word-of-mouth. It is considered to be the most effective form of impression in social media because of the social context and lack of commercial influence (Gibs, Bruich, 2010). Increased engagement and participation also creates greater content created by the members that can be extremely valuable in the form of market research.

2.6.5 Hanlon's 7 Foundations for a Strong Brand Community

Strong brand communities have been said to have a certain make-up that promotes word-of-mouth and in-turn organic growth. The common make-up, which was also identified as *The Code* by Patrick Hanlon, of a strong brand community normally has seven parts (Hanlon, 2006):

The Creation Story – the creation story is the beginning to the brand narrative. It answers the question: *Where do you come from?* Strong brand communities have been found to have a good story to tell that promotes word of mouth.

The Creed – the creed of the brand answers the question *Why are we here?* It is the shared vision, values and reason for being and they act as the spine of a vibrant community.

The Icon(s) – the icon, or icons, is the symbol or logo which helps identify the brand or community. Members of strong brand communities use icons to help identify what kind of person they are but also as a form of identifying each other as a part of the community.

The Sacred Words - the sacred words is the vocabulary or language that the brand uses that also helps distinguish who belongs. How well you know the language establishes where you fit in the group hierarchy.

The Non-Believers – the non-believers are the counter to the community, they are those who are vilified in ways that strengthen the sense of responsibility and the bond within the community. Non-believers also identify what the brand is not.

The Rituals – rituals are the repeated positive interactions that strengthen the communal bond. Rituals help show how things are done within the community and also within the brand.

The Leader – the leader is the person who against all odds stands up against the status quo to re-create the world their own point of view (Hanlon, 2006).

2.7 Net Promoter Score

In order to make customer loyalty a strategic goal, Reichheld suggests that managers should work with a scale that divides customers into practical groups deserving different attention and organizational responses (Reichheld, 2003). Customers who give a score of nine or ten on a scaled question about the recommendation to a third party are categorized as “promoters”. The “passively satisfied” log a seven or an eight, and “detractors” score from zero to six.

Reichheld contends that intensely loyal customers who promote the brand via word-of-mouth should be the singular focus of a firm’s growth strategy. His argument is framed by the perceived benefits of relationship marketing and customer satisfaction where loyalty is an outcome of a co-created process where the consumer assumes significant ownership. The most loyal consumers, those that are willing and able to recommend the brand to others, are the ones a company should focus on because loyalty is seen as a significant driver of growth. They are, according to Reichheld, willing to risk their own credibility in essentially acting as the firm’s marketing department.

If utilized properly, the Net-Promoter Score can be valuable in differentiating between those who identify emotionally with the brand and those groups that may be on the fringe of loyalty whose needs you can incorporate into the service process and develop satisfaction (Blasberg, 2008).

3.0 Introduction of Companies

The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the reader to the three selected companies, their history, current operations, and marketing activities.

3.1 Life is good

Life is good (officially, The Life is good Company) is a US-based apparel and accessories wholesaler, retailer and lifestyle brand founded in 1994. The company is best known for its optimistic T-shirts and hats, but carries a wide assortment of other products including tire covers and dog bowls. The mission of the brand is to spread the power of optimism and positivism (Siewert, 2010). Today, Life is good is one of the largest lifestyle brands in the United States with 5,000 distributors operating in more than 25 countries. The company has been profitable every year since 1997 and offers more than 900 items in 14 categories (Buchanan, 2006). Its products have been adopted by virtually every demographic including “toddlers, surfer dudes, college girls, grandmothers, and the occasional brute on a Harley” (Buchanan, 2006).

The company was founded and is still managed by two brothers, Bert and John Jacobs. They started the company with only \$78, selling their t-shirts out of the back of their van (Life is good, 2010). They now boast sales of nearly \$100 million. The company is unique in that it has never spent a dollar on traditional advertising and marketing of their product. Instead, the company thrives entirely on the various forms of word-of mouth (Siewert, 2010). Awareness of their brand is spread through their loyal fans and also through the PR generated from their family oriented festivals and their charity work with their Life is good Kids Foundation.

The Life is good Kids Foundation has contributed over \$3 million to children’s charities, with Project Joy being its greatest beneficiary. Life is good’s Kids Foundation and Project Joy’s mission is to help children that face life-threatening challenges such as extreme poverty, violence, illness, and natural disasters. All revenues generated from the festivals and through the sale of their charity products are donated to their foundations (Life is good, 2010).

3.2 Peak performance

Peak Performance is the biggest clothing label in Scandinavia within the functional sportswear sector. The brand offers a broad variety of premium products developed for skiing, mountaineering, training, golf and also produces casual garments for use in the ski resorts or in an urban setting. Today, the company is multinational with over 200 employees, 60 general brand stores and distributes in 26 countries (Peak Performance, 2010a).

According to Peak Performance, the brand name is based on their value statement, which serves as a basis for all activities involving the company. Their values are described as: *Every single activity – whether on a grand scale or as part of our day to day work – must be able to live up to these values; For real, Long lasting, We believe in and trust people, Team Peak Performance, Building for the future, Renewal.* (Peak Performance, 2010b). Just like the company values, the mission and vision statements of the company are circulating around the brand name and based on the company values: *“To create a world class brand name...”* and *“...products that are world class...under the Peak Performance brand name”* (Peak Performance, 2010a).

The Peak Performance homepage claims that the brand is rooted in the company’s origins being a ‘Mountain Resort Brand’. The employees live and breathe the brand name and the products produced and sold along with everything they do adheres to the philosophy of the Peak Performance founder back when the brand was established in 1986: *“Doing things and making products the way we want them to be”* (Peak Performance, 2010c).

3.3 Timberland

Timberland’s mission is *‘to equip people to make a difference in their world’* (Timberland, 2010).

The Timberland brand name was developed in 1973 and their first products were introduced on the market the same year. Timberland’s main products are men’s, women’s and kid’s footwear, however the company also offers apparel such as outerwear, shirts, pants and socks and accessories such as sunglasses, belts and watches. The company distribute its products through about 215 company-owned stores and through department shops in the US, Canada, Europe, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East (Hoovers, 2010).

The company was early to discover broadcast media and was the first boot manufacturer to advertise on national TV in 1987, and the same year Timberland went public on the American Stock Exchange. The company has continued to use a lot of broadcast media as part of their marketing strategy.

Timberland has taken a social corporate responsibility and has supported several youth organisations and racism awareness campaigns, and later the company signed the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES). The company has also been voted as one of ‘the 100 best companies to work for’ by Fortune Magazine. In 2003, Timberland launched an interactive website created to highlight the company’s community commitment through communicate its CSR activities and in 2008 the company was awarded ‘2008 Media Plan of the Year’ (Timberland, 2010).

Timberland started to introduce social media early, and in 2008 the company launched a website called the Earthkeepers Movement in an effort to engage 1 million consumers across the globe to support environmental causes. The Earthkeepers Heroes offers blogs, photo galleries, videos, podcasts and other social media tools while presenting stories about environmental heroes. Timberland is urging the public to follow the stories of these people online and to interact with the ‘heroes’ to support their causes and to become their ‘backers’ (Timberland, 2010).

4.0 Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to outline, discuss and justify the selected research methodology of the study. This chapter will discuss the research approach including research design, data needed and data collection methods will be presented. Lastly, the limitations will be presented, followed by the reliability and validity of the research methods.

4.1 Research Strategy

The purpose of this research design was to gain a deeper understanding of the three selected existing brand communities, their existence, management and formation online. The research aim was concerned with the socio-cultural aspect of the online brand communities and the purpose was to examine the behaviours and expressions of the human actors, the members, in a social context, the Facebook fan-site, as well as the current brand alignment of the selected brands. Throughout the research, the Brand Identity Prism was used in an attempt to later develop an understandable prism of each company that would serve as a tool that could be of assistance in the future to the respective brand managers (Kapferer p.187, 2008).

For this study it was important to select three companies who all had different levels of loyalty among their members, which was reflected on their online brand communities at the point of time when the research was conducted. All three companies were apparel brands since it was imperative to conduct the study on brands operating within the same industry. Furthermore the study aimed to look at companies with different level of size in online presence, Life is good was regarded as the largest company, followed by Timberland and lastly Peak Performance.

It was also considered to be useful to select both global and domestic brands in order to identify if there were any differences considering the size and current global presence.

Timberland was the most global brand of the three with presence in the U.S (home market), South America, Europe, Asia and Middle -East, while Life is good operated 25 countries. Peak Performance had a relatively smaller presence on the world map, operating in Scandinavia, most of Europe and Canada.

The selected online brand communities for this research were the companies' Facebook fan-sites. Facebook was rated the number one global social networking destination with 206.9 million unique visitors in December 2009, making Facebook the most relevant platform for the study. Furthermore, statistics showed that 67% of all global social media users are visiting the site and spending nearly six hours per month on Facebook (Nielsen Wire, 2010). Facebook was selected to represent the different companies online brand communities since the company is becoming one of the greatest Internet phenomena of our time. In 2009, the online social networking application registered over 175 million active users, which is over twice the population of Germany with its 80 million (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2009) this makes Facebook the largest social media network in the world. The core asset of the company on which all of its service are built upon is the social aspect, however today Facebook fan-sites can be used by companies as a tool for tracking changes and opportunities among their customers and is now regarded by many as an extremely useful marketing tool.

Facebook was chosen as our focus for three main reasons: (1) it is the most visited social network online is a platform, (2) most brands are currently present on the platform, and (3), when comparing the different companies and their online brand communities it was superlative to compare their activity within a uniform platform. What is mean by this is that within Facebook, all companies share the same prerequisites when developing their 'page' because of the ready-made template the companies are provided.

The data was gathered from the members as well as from the managers of the brands and followed a mixed methods case study approach. The starting point of the study was to identify the meanings of the online brand communities to the members, followed by sense making of the data collected. Finally the outcome and results of the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the online brand communities (Easterby-Smith p. 63, 2008).

4.1.1 Research Design-*Exploratory Triangulation Research*

According to Kotler, Armstrong, Wong & Saunders (2008) *exploratory research* is best suited when gathering information that will help to better define a problem. In order to better understand the increasing potential problem for brand managers aligning their brand online, it was necessary to adapt an exploratory research approach. The research aimed to investigate and evaluate the selected brands' identity online from the brand community members as well as from the brand managers' perspective. Ghauri & Grønhaug (2002) suggests, that the exploratory research needs to be flexible. This is evident

for this research since it has been essential to utilize both qualitative as well as quantitative research methods, resulting in mixed methods case study including collection of information from observations, interviews and questionnaires.

The *triangulation approach* involves using more than one method or source of data when studying social phenomena, including the use of theoretical perspectives, multiple observers, methodologies and sources of data. Triangulation can operate across several research strategies and it is seen as necessary to apply this method as the study is researching social phenomena and is using more than one method, including both a qualitative and a quantitative approach in the form of interviews, questionnaires and observations. Triangulation was also used to crosscheck the findings from both the quantitative and qualitative data collections. The results from the interviews, online questionnaires and observations were all compared and checked against each other for greater validity (Bryman & Bell p. 413, 2007).

4.1.2 Ontological Position-Social Constructivism

The Ontological position for this research design was social constructivism, meaning that the reality is socially constructed and given meaning by people who are sharing their experiences to make sense of the world (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, Jackson p.58, 2008). Online brand communities are not concrete and one with universal rules as they constantly change with the social interaction and the make-up within. It was therefore more important for the researchers to understand the social factors that can continuously alter the meaning and perception of the brand community rather than finding an explanation or law that can be applied to all brand communities. Furthermore, Easterby-Smith et. al. (2008) suggest that the focus should be on peoples' feelings and thoughts and how they are communicating with each other. This was seen as highly relevant for this study given that communication is the foundation of the online brand communities.

4.1.3 Epistemological Position-Interpretivism

An interpretivistic perspective was selected for this study. In the interpretations of the brand communities, a construct of scientific observation and interpretation was utilised, where the interpretations of the members and tactical managers formed the researchers' own interpretive theory (Bryman & Bell p.19, 2007).

4.2 Data Needed

In order to understand how the online brand communities are shaped and to capture the thoughts and feelings of its members as well as the managers of the brands, a collection of *primary data* was needed. The research design followed a mixed methods case study approach where both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed within the case study in forms of observations, semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The interviews and questionnaires were based mainly on Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism, which represented the framework for assessing the brand identity and brand alignment.

As Figure 1 illustrates, the first step was to conduct three case studies based on each of the selected companies, which were later separately analysed and compared against each other. The second step was to carry out observations of each of the companies' fan-sites; in order to gain a deeper understanding of the online brand communities and their members. The third step was to develop interview questions for the brand managers of the three companies. These questions were based on the findings from the case study analysis and the observations as well as the model used for this research, The Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer, 2007). The last step included the development of the online questionnaires, which was based secondary research, the brand prism and from the interviews with the brand managers.

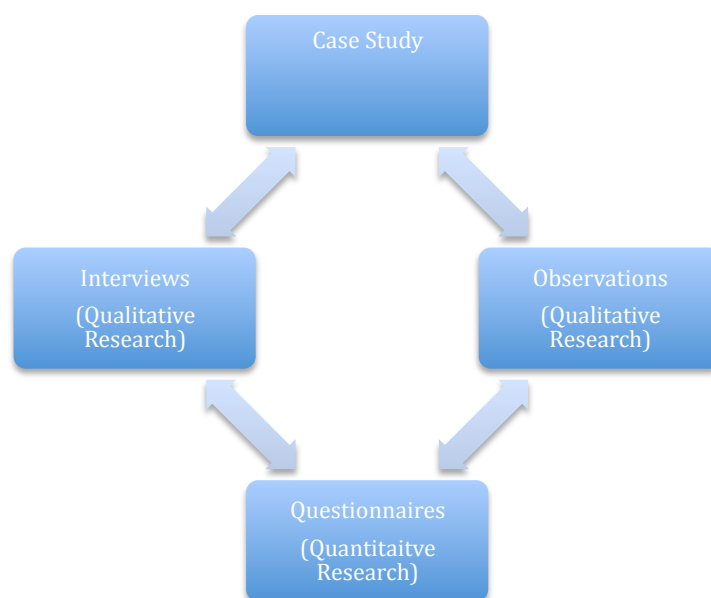


Figure 4, Illustration of Research Design - Mixed Methods Case Study

Secondary data was collected from various sources such as journal articles, the Internet and relevant literature. Source material was mainly collected from textbooks and journal articles.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

An exploratory triangulated approach was used to crosscheck the findings from the quantitative and qualitative findings in order to increase the validity and reliability of the research (Bryman & Bell, 2007 p. 413). The study followed a *mixed case study method* where qualitative data was separately collected from interviews and observations and quantitative data separately collected from online questionnaires. Later the results from the qualitative and quantitative study were all combined for the final analysis.

4.3.1 Qualitative Research Method

A qualitative research method was regarded as a favorable choice since the focus of the study was on how individuals interpret their social world and their view of social reality (Bryman & Bell p.28, 2007).

4.3.2 Case Study Method

The aim of the study was to gain a deep understanding of online brand communities and its members in order to attempt to answer the question: *How can companies align their brands online when sharing the communication of the brand is being share with the consumer?*

The three companies selected for the study, Life is good, Peak Performance and Timberland, were independently analysed as separate *representative case* studies since they were seeking to explore the everyday situation within the online brand communities (Bryman & Bell p. 64, 2007). Each company's online brand community was studied and later analysed through a *comparative case analysis* in order to find the common characteristics across the cases, and to identify possible unique characteristics. By using a comparative case analysis it was also possible to better understand the social phenomena from each fan-site by comparing them, this was mainly helpful when comparing the online communication between the members (Bryman & Bell p. 66, 2007).

Each case was representative and anticipated to serve as a representation for other possible online brand communities. Through commonalities within the communities the researchers were hoping to find rule actions that managers can use with all brand communities whilst also recognizing the unique characteristics of each case. This could assist in discovering relative factors that managers should consider when formulating their strategy that will determine how the brand will be managed.

4.3.3 Observations

In order to better understand the activities, management and the member participations on the Facebook fan-sites, observations were carried out on a daily basis over fifty days (18th of March 2010 to 6th of May 2010). The observations involved systematically observing the behavior of the individuals on the fan-sites in terms of a *schedule of categories*, which meant that rules for the observation were set out in advance. The observations aimed to record the number of visitors on the fan-sites and the postings made on the walls, and were therefore following a structured observation approach. This gave the researchers an opportunity to directly observe the behavior of the fan-site members as well as the fan-site administrators (Bryman & Bell p. 281, 2007).

The observation included the number of members displayed on the fan-sites each day to see if specific activity caused spikes in growth rates. Furthermore postings, made by members as well as by the fan-site administrator, were recorded to so the content could be analyzed and to see if there were any correlations between the content, activity, and the growth. These content observations enabled the researchers to gain a better understanding of the Facebook fan-sites' current 'personality', 'feel' and 'culture'. It was also noted when the fan-site administrator removed any postings from the walls, in order to assess the brand management's current alignment strategy.

4.3.4 Semi-Structured Interviews

Part of the research was to gather detailed and rich information from the marketing managers representing Life is good, Peak Performance and Timberland. This was done through interviews enabling managers to share their own points of view and express themselves from their own perspective (Bryman & Bell p. 474, 2007). The interview questions were based on Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism referring to physique, personality, relationship, culture, self-reflection and image (see Fig. 5).

The structure of the interviews were *semi-structured* which facilitated flexibility and at the same time gave the researchers a possibility to ask a set of questions that had already been prepared based on the Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (Bryan & Bell p. 474, 2007).

Furthermore this interview approach permitted the participants to move away from the main topic of discussion and allowed them to share ideas and thoughts from other areas they regarded as important and relevant. It also allowed the researcher conducting the interview to come up with new questions in response to the participants' answers, and/or change the order of the questions (Bryman& Bell p. 474,

2007). This assisted the researchers to structure the interview ‘as they were going’ and whilst being off the subject, new insights were revealed when giving the participants an opportunity to freely express their thoughts and feelings relevant to the study.

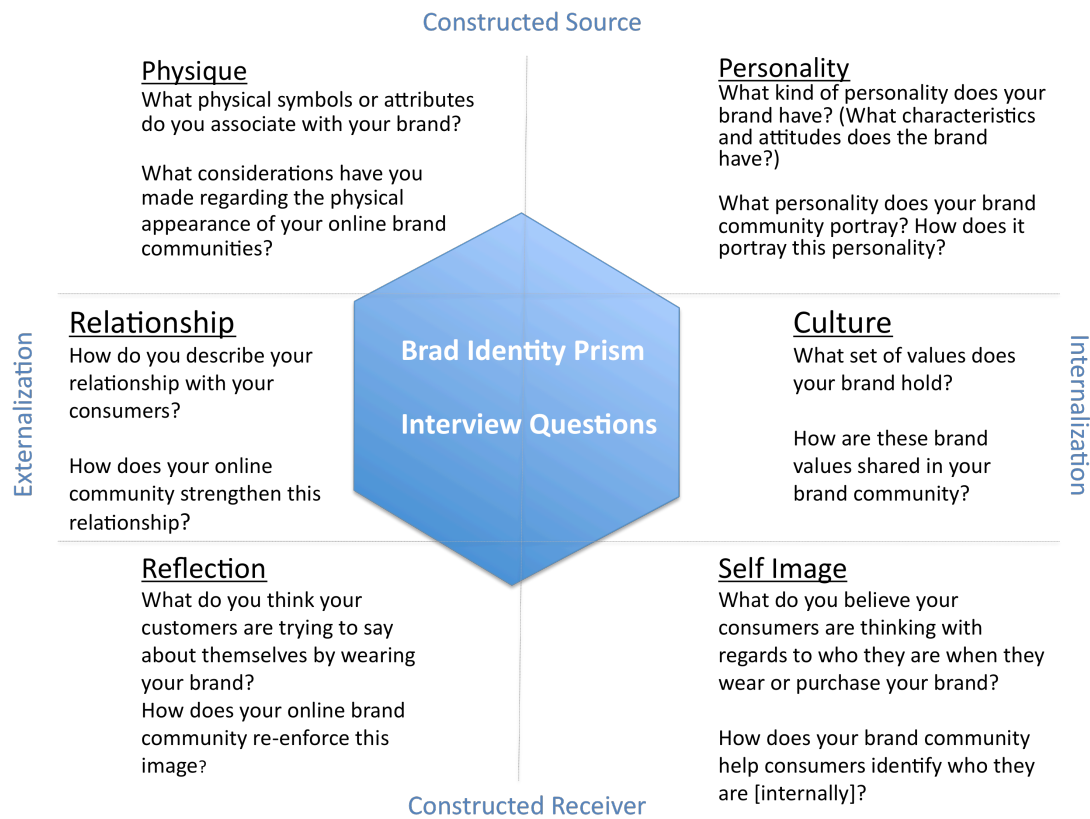


Figure 5, Interview questions based around Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism

Source: Brand Identity Prism, (Kapferer, 2007 p. 183)

The last questions of the interviews were related to the current management of the fan-sites. These questions were asked in order to identify the present level of online control and management strategy. The questions included were: ‘How do you choose the content that you post?’ ‘How have you managed or reacted to posts that do not match your brand’s identity?’ ‘What is your vision for your online brand community?’ ‘What have you learned from your online brand communities?’ ‘Is there anything else you have found interesting about online brand communities you would like to share?’ The purpose of these additional questions was to identify the level of current control of the brands online, and also to get insights to how the managers were viewing the fan-sites in present and in the future.

4.3.5 Quantitative Research Method

It was necessary to utilize a quantitative research method as well, to establish a stronger argument for the study. The aim, of the questionnaires, was to identify the members of the online brand communities' attitude, knowledge and connection towards the selected brands by using Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism (Kapferer p. 183, 2007).

4.3.6 Online Questionnaires

The web was utilised for online social questionnaires since exploitation of online questionnaires was regarded as the most effective method to reach a larger sample portion of the online brand community members. (Bryman & Bell p. 192, 2007). The social questionnaires were also seen as a cost effective and an efficient method that would assist in reaching out to a wide geographical breadth of online members.²

The questionnaires followed a communication-based method where Facebook e-mails represented the data collection instrument. Furthermore an *asynchronous method* was used, which means that the questionnaires were not distributed in real time. If they had been distributed in real time it would have been through a chatroom where the respondents would have answered the questions instantly (Bryman & Bell p.665, 2007). Instead there were no immediate responses from participants, some filled out the questionnaire within the first hour it was sent out, others who might have been offline when the questionnaire were distributed, or purposely decided to fill it out later, replied after a few days.

The online questionnaires were self-completion questionnaires with a limited number of questions to reduce response deterrents, including mainly close-ended questions with check boxes, which were all, marked as 'required questions'. However each question gave the respondents an opportunity to select 'other' and fill out their own answer. The last question was an optional open-ended question, with the aim to gather additional interesting information from the members. The respondents answered the questions by completing the questionnaires individually (Bryman & Bell p. 240, 2007). The questions were based on the interview results and the brand prism in order to identify a potential gap between the managers view of the brands in contrast to the online brand community members interpretation of the brands. The online questionnaires were voluntary and the respondents were guaranteed complete anonymity.

² See Appendix, C, G and K

Firstly the initial questions included, gender, age group, country and city of origin and how often the members were visiting the fan-site. These questions were asked to identify the demographics and loyalty among the members.

Secondly, six questions were directly linked to the brand prism. Identical questions were asked to all three online brand community members, however the answer options were customized according to the interviews and previous observations and case studies of the brands.

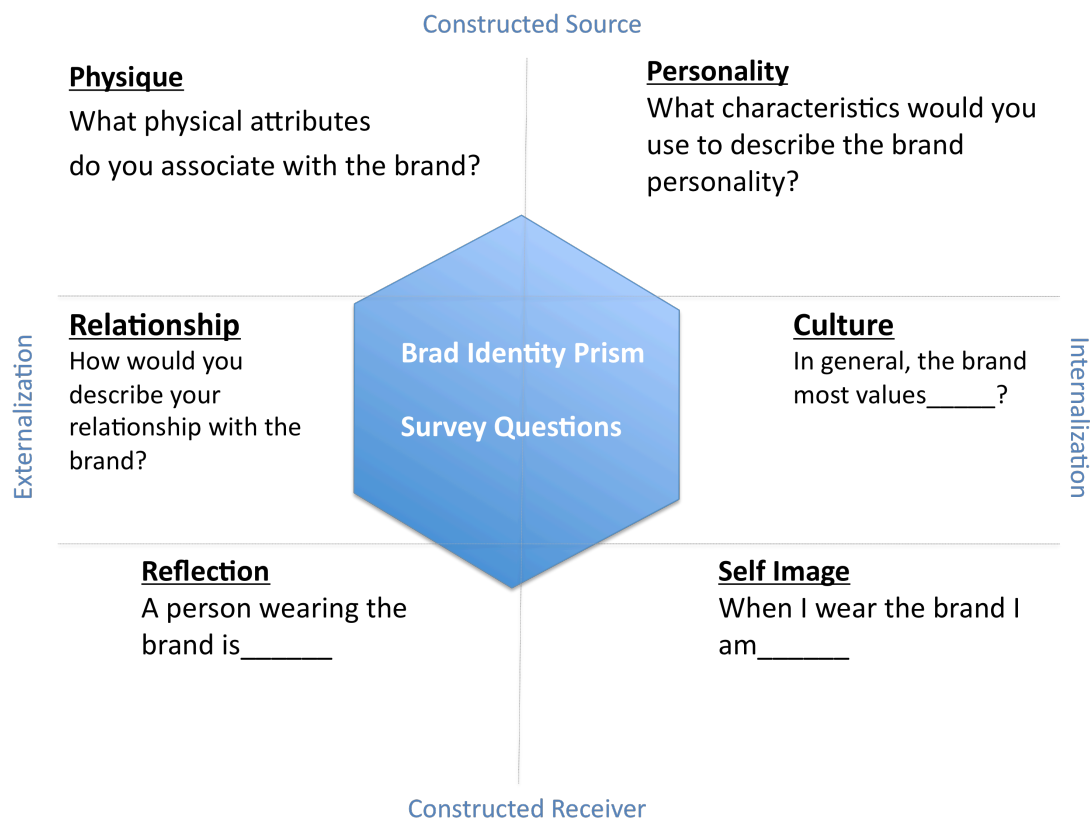


Figure 6, Outline Questionnaire Questions based on the Brand Identity Prism

Source: Brand Identity Prism, (Kapferer, 2007 p. 183)

Two additional questions were added to the questionnaire. The (1) first question asked how likely the member was to recommend the Facebook fan-site. According to Reichheld (2003) it is possible to measure a company’s customer loyalty by only asking one question. The question had to follow a scale design ranging from zero to ten where zero meant ‘not likely at all’ and ten were standing for ‘extremely likely’, in order to calculate the Net Promoter Score, where 9 and 10 are regarded as ‘promoters’ and 0-6 ‘ detractors’. The Net Promoter Score was later calculated by subtracting the detractors from the promoters. The Net Promoter Score has been recognized as simple method of assesses [consumer]

satisfaction, loyalty, and growth potential, the Net Promoter Score will therefore be compared with the observation results to see if there were any correlations with all three companies. The (2) second question was an optional open-ended question giving the members and opportunity to freely express why they were members of the fan-sites. The reason for this question was to gain additional information that potentially could result in new insights.

4.5 Sampling & Respondent Selection

The data was taken from twenty randomly selected respondents from each community through questionnaires distributed using the Facebook's email service. Once a member had been randomly selected an email with the questionnaire was sent out to that persons Facebook Inbox.

A random sampling enabled the researchers to reach members with different attitudes, opinions and level of awareness and knowledge of the brands. This allowed the researches to gain insight from members with different motives and intentions of being part of the online brand communities and their different behaviours online. The probability sampling enabled the researches to generalise the findings derived from the sample to the population, which means that the sample group of the online brand members could act as a representative of the greater community (Bryman & Bell p. 665, 2007).

In order to receive twenty respondents from each community, just over a hundred questionnaires needed to be sent out within each community, as the respondent rate turned for all the communities was around 20%. The first twenty responses received from each community were later selected and used for the research. According to Bryman & Bell (p. 194, 2007) it is the *absolute size* of a sample that is important, which means that the same sample size regardless of the population size has the same validity. For this study, all three selected fan-sites had different number of members, varying from around 4,000 to over 300,000, however the sample size twenty had the same validity for each fan-site.

4.6 Research Limitations

According to Bryman & Bell (p. 643, 2007) there are arguments against mixed methods research. One can argue that the research will not follow the epistemological commitment since quantitative and qualitative research methods should be regarded as separate paradigms, which means that combining observations with a questionnaire is not the same as combining quantitative and qualitative research

since paradigms are incompatible (Bryman & Bell p. 644, 2007). This exploratory research was regarded as necessary to conduct a mixed methods research in order to fulfil the purpose of the study in the best possible way. Therefore it was necessary to accept that there are no perfect correspondence between the research strategy and the epistemology and ontology paradigms.

Twenty respondents were used from each fan-site. The respond rate was at little over 20%, however the population of the fan-sites were between 4,000-300,000. The sample size can therefore be regarded as small, but they still provided the same validity for each population. A larger sample size would most likely increase the precision of the sample and decreased the potential sampling errors (Bryman & Bell p. 195, 2007). Since the questionnaires contained open-ended questions that were developed based on a qualitative approach, twenty respondents were regarded as a suitable number for the analysis. The in-depth analysis of the open-ended answers could be weakened should the sample have been larger.

The use of random sampling does not guarantee a representative sample, and the sample can only be representative of the population from which it was selected, it was therefore impossible to generalise beyond that population (Bryman& Bell p. 169, 2007). The result from this study is therefore only reflecting the online brand members' responses from the point in time that the data was collected. Observations show there are several hundreds of new members joining the fan-sites on a daily basis; these new members were not part of the population and therefore they are not representing the fan-sites, as they were not part of the community when the research was conducted.

There is also a disadvantage collecting social questionnaires online, as there is a loss of personal touch between the researcher and the selected respondents. This might result in a low respondents rate since the participants might view the invitation to participate in the research as just another impersonal spam e-mail (Bryman & Bell p. 665, 2007).

4.7 Ethics

The selected respondents were asked to follow an external link in order to fill out the questionnaire. The results were later stored; however it was not possible for the researchers to match email addresses with responses. This resulted in anonymous answers from the participating members.

The researchers acknowledge that the Facebook fan-sites were public and open to anyone; it was therefore assumed that postings made by community members were not private since they were shared

with the entire online community. Only messages exchanged in the public space were used as part of the observations. However, according to Bryman & Bell (2007) some discussion groups state that researchers must notify them if any research is being undertaken. Therefore it would have been a good idea to contact the members in advance to ask for their permission to observe them. This was not done in this research and some can regard this as unethical to carry out ethnographical studies online without notifying the members. However, authors were not credited in this research since it was their content and not the identification of content provider that was of most interest.

4.8 Reliability

According to Bryman & Bell (2007), reliability is seen as an assessment of whether the measure is stable over time and if the results would be similar if the research were repeated or if someone else would conduct the same research in the future.

One can argue that the reliability is difficult in management research given that the study is conducted in a social context involving peoples' thoughts. It is therefore not possible to make an identical replication of the research. Also given that the nature of the Facebook fan-sites are very vibrant and constantly changing with new members and postings on a daily basis, makes it difficult to predict identical responses if the study would be conducted again.

However, since the questionnaires were randomly distributed within the fan-sites, one can argue that the research results can be applied to a wider group than those who took part in the study.

4.9 Validity

Bryman & Bell (2007) argues that validity is referred to if a measure of a concept really measures that concept. With other words, validity stands for if the research is really measuring what it claims to be measuring.

Kapferer's Brand Identity Prism was used as a model throughout this study, including the observations, case study, questionnaires and interviews. This enabled the researchers to structure the study around one single model, which assisted in answering the question, 'if the research was measuring what it was supposed to measure'. By using the model the interviews and questionnaires followed the same structure, which facilitated a correlation between the two. Moreover the model was used for the case

study and observations, which assisted the study to hone in and focus on the relevant areas of the study. Hence, it was possible to obtain valid knowledge with respect to the questions later asked. The usage of the model for each phase of the research was seen as separate components of the study, which were later, compared to assess the alignment of the online community, the management and its members.

Additionally, the observations and findings are based on appropriate steps in the mixed methods case study design. However it is important to stress that it is difficult to generalize the findings based on a small sample size. The twenty randomly selected participating members might not reflect the entire population of the fan-sites. It was however the researchers attempt to conduct a combined quantitative and qualitative research in order to enrich the study's validity.

5.0 Results & Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to separately outline the findings from the research from each company and do an individual analysis of each case. On behalf of our exploratory triangulate approach to the research question, the results from the observations, interviews and online questionnaires will hereby be presented together with Hanlon's 7 keys.

5.1 Life is good

Life is good's fan-site was started by the common consumer and was later taken over by the company around February of 2009. Since the company took over the page, the fan-site has added over 300,000 fans and is growing steadily at around 900 fans a day. Their fan-site is quite simplistic with no videos or large welcome spreads, which is similar to most sites that are managed by common consumers or brand fans. Nearly everyday a new message is posted to the community by Life is good with short and uplifting proverbs, lyrics, or a link to a story shared by one their costumers of the power of the brand and optimism. The fan-site has a very open format where the member's participation is encouraged and members can freely post messages, images, and links.

5.1.1 Observations

From the 18th of March 2010 through the 6th of May 2010, the number of fan-site members increased from 264,428 members to 306,013, adding 41,585 new members, nearly a 16% increase³. As a member of the site, new message posts from the company would pop up nearly every day on the Facebook 'newsfeed', which is the opening page for Facebook users when they sign into their account. With these posts, one can easily 'Like' or comment for all the community to see. Because of the high like response rate, ranging from 30 to 2800 likes and 50 to 2000 comments for a message, Life is good's messages can be shared with other non-members in the form of 'Like' or comment notifications in the news feed field. The highest comment rates were present when the company encouraged participation in the form of posts such as "Fill in the blank: This weekend I _____" (LIG observation, March 30, 2010), which received 1,908 comments, or "Nothing makes me happier than when _____" (LIG observation, May 5, 2010), which received 2,242 comments. Comments on posts ranged from words of

³ See Appendix A

agreement to personal stories of why the proverb holds true. Posts that included personal stories also seemed to encourage participation as other members commented in respect to the stories.

Overall, the language of its members is quite similar with all of the posts having an uplifting and optimistic theme and a casual tone. The language of the posts added by the company are short and simplistic, always have an optimistic theme. The language of the company and its members is quite consistent with the company's own sayings that are printed on their products. Just as the posts are simplistic, the overall site is as well. There are no commercial nuances with direct links to their online store or other promotional activity. The site does not link directly to its other online social medias or even their online store. The site seems to be a simple forum where common customers can openly engage with the company or other consumers while also getting a daily post encouraging optimism.

The most technical or commercial piece of the site is likely the Facebook application that allows members to share popular graphics from their products with other members on Facebook. These graphics all have the optimistic theme are intended to “*spread good vibes*”. Something worth noting about the application is that in order to use it, the member must agree to allow the application access to one's profile information and even images. This may be part of the common terms of use with all Facebook applications, but could be seen as a form of member tracking and may be interpreted as a violation of privacy.

5.1.2 Interview findings

Throughout our interview with James Macdonald, the ‘Director of Good Vibes’, there was a sense that the company had a very clear brand identity and message. The three terms that James said Life is good used as guiding points were *Simplicity*, *Humility*, and a *Sense of Humour*⁴. Although James said not all products or actions of the company reflect all three points, simplicity is always a strongly present.

When Life is good was asked about the physique of their brand, there was not much to be said about the materials or physical uses of the product, instead the interviewee referred again to the three pillars of the company. All products distributed by Life is good are simple, have an aura of humility, and show a sense of humour. Although these characteristic do not seem like physical attributes, it may be more difficult to describe physical attributes for a product that is less recognized for its use; “you don't buy a

⁴ The interview with James Macdonald's transcript can be found in appendix B.

Life is good t-shirt because you need a t-shirt, you buy because you are an optimist and the glass is half full...it's about telling people what you believe in and that you are an optimist" (James M., LIG).

When asked about the personality of the brand, the interviewee described the optimistic and happy spirit of the brand, but also highlighted the casual tone of the company. The casual tone was emphasized as it is important to Life is good that they seem "human and approachable" (James M., LIG). This is used because the relationship with their customers is intended to be friendly and personal. This casual brand voice is considered whenever the company engages with its fan-site members and posts are also intended to be casual and simplistic. Life is good's mascot, Jake, does not personify the brand, as he does not have a voice. His personality and what he represents is instead left up to the customer, allowing them to create a more personal interpretation of his character. This open approach to Jake's meaning is also a part of their culture. The culture of the company is to be open and inclusive. There is also a great emphasis on the balance of work and play and the importance of family. The company tries to show this on their fan-site through image posts and links to letters they receive from their consumers.

An important part of Life is good is also its Kids Foundation, of which Project Joy is the greatest beneficiary. Life is good's Kids Foundation and Project Joy's mission is to help children that face life-threatening challenges such as extreme poverty, violence, illness, and natural disasters. Project Joy teaches children and those working with children how to use play and the therapeutic effects of joy to combat the effects of trauma.

The vision for Life is good's brand community is to be a relevant form of media where their customers can find positivism, optimism, and something that can make them smile; a break from traditional media.

5.1.2.1 Brand Prism according to Interview

The illustration below applies the fore mentioned interview findings to the brand identity prism by Kapferer (p. 100, 2007). This will later be used to compare the results from a second prism created based on the questionnaire results in order to assess the brand’s alignment.

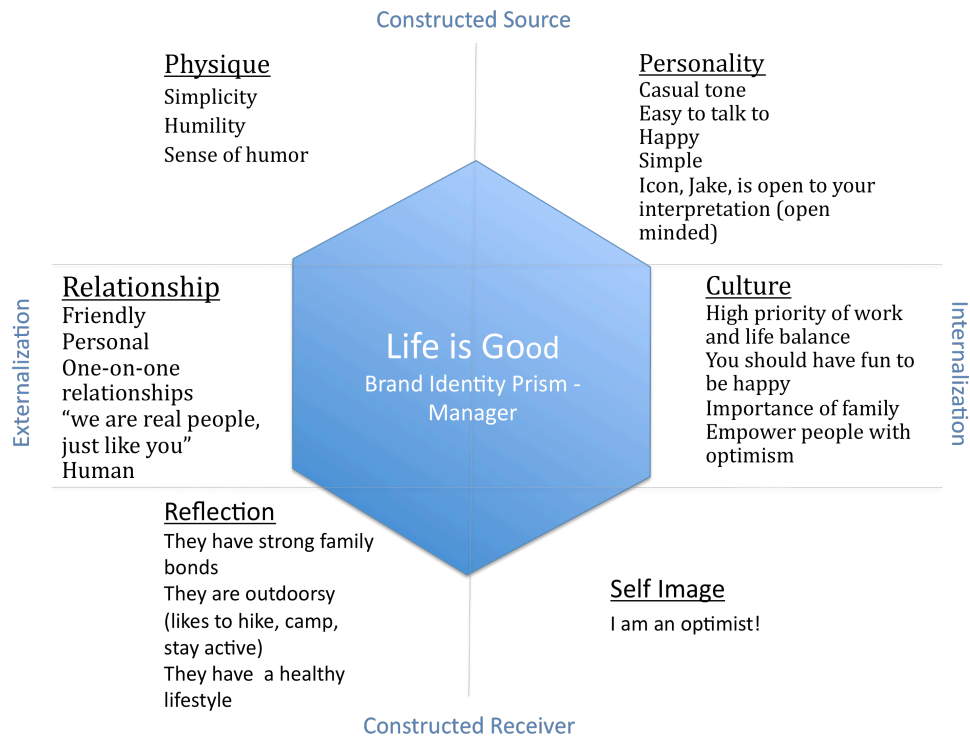


Figure 7, Life is good Brand Identity Prism Based on Interview
Source: Adapted from Brand Identity Prism, Kapferer (p. 100, 2007)

5.1.3 Online Questionnaire Findings

With the questionnaires provided to the community members, ideally one would have liked to have different answers for each question regarding the prism, but in Life is good’s case this was not entirely possible. Considering Life is good has three pillars by which they assess all their products and work, it is not surprising that they reference simplicity, humility, and a sense of humour in more than just one answer.

The age demographics revealed that the most prominent age group within the community is 45-55 at 40%, followed by 25-34 at 25%, 35-44 at 20%, 15-24 at 10%, and 55+ at 5%. Of the 20 respondents, 15 were female and 5 male, suggesting that 75% of the members are women. The geographical index

showed that 90% of the respondents were currently living in the United States, with one member living in Essen, Germany, where the brand is currently present, and the other in New Delhi, India, where they currently do not distribute their product.

As seen in Figure 8, when asked about the physique portion of the brand, the majority (80%) answered that comfortable was the physical attribute they most associated with the product. The second most popular answer bode well for Life is good as the members clearly agreed that simplicity was a hallmark of their product with 60% of respondent agreeing with this answer. For the personality portion of the prism, customers again felt that simplicity was a very recognizable characteristic as 70% selected this position. It was the term happy though that had the greatest selection rate at 85%. When looking at the members' reasons for being a part of the community, many referred to the positive attitude and optimistic nature of the brand. Although happy was only used twice during people's explanation of why they are a member, based on people's responses, one can conclude that positivity and optimism is generally considered the key to happiness according to the members. Also, several members exuded to Life is good's fan-site as an escape from common negativity of daily life.⁵

⁵ Questionnaire results for Life is good can be found in appendix E.

5.1.3.1 Brand Prism according to Online Questionnaire

The illustration below applies the fore mentioned questionnaire findings to the brand identity prism by Kapferer (p. 100, 2007). This will later be used to compare the results from a first prism created based on the interview results in order to assess the brand’s alignment.

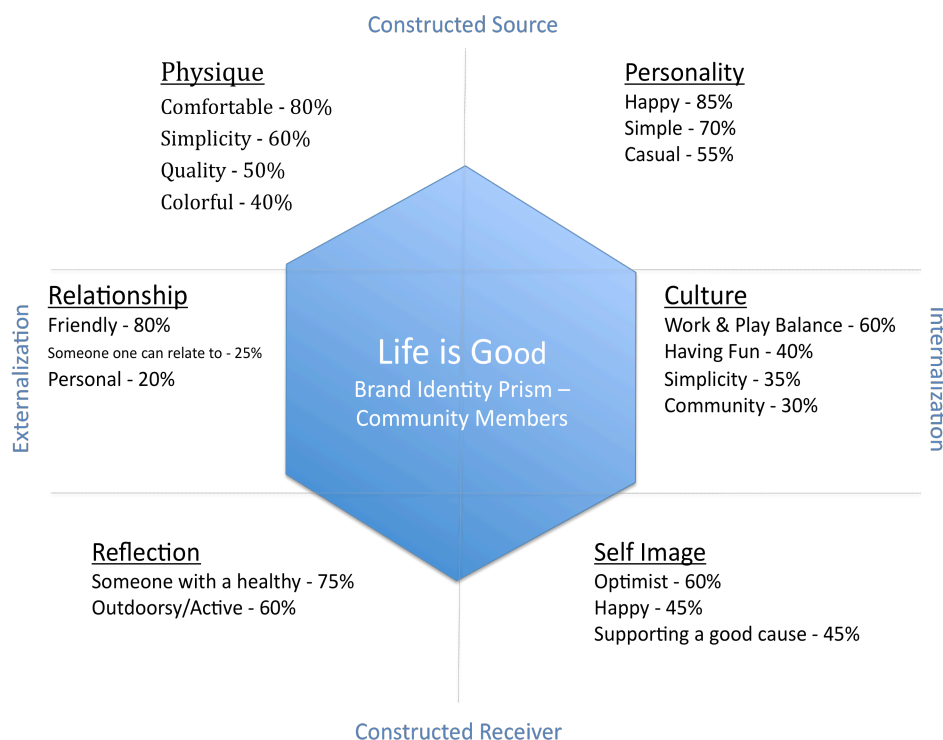


Figure 8, Life is Good Brand Identity Prism Based on Online Questionnaire
Source: Adapted from Brand Identity Prism, Kapferer (p. 100, 2007)

5.1.4 Analysis

Their external communication strategy online seems to be consistent with the branding, but their sites are not all interconnected, which suggests a lack of control in the message. With Life is good present on Twitter, Flickr, and YouTube, along with Facebook; one may suggest that the social medias could be intertwined with one another to create a stronger message from the company. This kind of control of communication may not fit with Life is good’s identity though as they claim their customers are the ones who determine the meaning of the brand in their lives. Exerting greater control of the brand may make the brand seem more exclusionary rather than inclusionary, which would not go along with the company’s philosophy of being ‘open’.

Life is good fan-site according to Hanlon’s 7 foundations of strong brand communities:

In order to better understand Life is good’s fan-site, Hanlon’s 7 foundations of a strong brand community were applied to distinguish if the brand had the dynamics of a strong online brand community (See Table 1).

Table 1, Hanlon's 7 keys to a successful brand - Life is good

<i>Creation Story</i>	The company overview, also known as the company description, is a short but quite extraordinary story about how the company was started. This ‘creation story’ is very important to the brand as explains how the founders, who are brothers, were able to build a \$100 million company with just \$78, a van and the very contagious smile of Jake, their official mascot and logo. This story reveals not only the extraordinary power of optimism, but also the “ordinary” people behind it.
<i>Creed</i>	The creed , or shared vision, of the brand is made quite clear through LIG’s posts as well as the comments, pictures, and other content provided by members. The creed is to embrace the power of optimism and to appreciate the simple pleasures that everyday holds; <i>Life is good and it’s as simple as that.</i>
<i>Icon</i>	The shared icon takes the form of Jake, the eternal optimistic stick figure they use with their graphics, and their own logo, Life is good. These icons are common on many of their products and are easily recognizable by other Life is good supporters.
<i>Language</i>	The sacred words or language , no matter what the members’ demographic is very consistent with its optimistic tone and similar choice of words.
<i>Non-believers</i>	The non-believers of Life is good’s brand community are the pessimists (there is in fact a parody brand by the name of Life is crap) and in many ways, modern media. One of the reasons Life is good has had such great success and why it has been embraced by so many is the growing disdain people have for what is referred to in America as the ‘6’ or ‘11 o’clock news’. The news normally broadcasted at these times report the latest local and national news with a very observable focus on the bad things going on in the day. This daily dose of negativity seems to be encouraging the counter force that is optimism, the disposition that Life is good supports.
<i>Rituals</i>	The rituals of Life is good’s brand community take the form online as daily posts or shared stories and offline, Life is good holds ‘backyard’ festivals where the community can come listen to live music and have fun playing simple backyard games. All revenues generated through the festivals go to the Life is good Kids Foundation.
<i>Leader</i>	Their fearless leader could be considered Jake, the eternally optimistic stick figure, but the leader(s) are the brothers. The Jacob brothers were the ones to stand up and say enough with the negativity and lead the optimistic minded people.

5.1.5 Conclusion from Brand Prism Comparison:

When comparing the prism from the interview, i.e. the corporate perspective, and the questionnaire, i.e. the member perspective, we found that Life is good's brand identity is aligned with their brand community. In each part of the prism, the most popular answer provided was actually one mentioned by the interviewee. Of the 14 interview answers that were provided as an option on the questionnaire, 9 of them had 50% or more of the respondents selecting that answer. Four of those answers had a selection rate of 70% or more. These four were Friendly (relationship), Someone with a healthy lifestyle (reflection), Happy (personality) and Simple (personality). Although these numbers suggest that the brand identity is quite aligned, one of the more interesting things we discovered based on the questionnaire was the language. Where the respondents could explain their reason for being a part of the community they often used the same, if not similar terms, to describe the community and the company. The most common terms [other than Life is good] in this area of the questionnaire were 'positive' (mentioned 5 times), 'simple' (4), 'smile' (3), 'good vibes' (2) and 'happy' (2). All of these terms were used by James at one point in the interview and nearly all of the respondents open-ended answers seem to share a common voice. Below are three responses that show the similarities in their attitude and language.

"Life is short...I really like the "reminder" to stay positive and enjoy life!"

- 45-54 yr old Male from Indiana, USA

"I love the positive vibe I get from the page. The comments, quotes and fellow fan comments are always a wonderful, simple and progressive read."

- 35-44 yr old Female from South Carolina, USA

"... If we keep the attitude positive then the chances of life being good become better if it isn't already. It is all about a positive attitude."

- 45-54 yr old Female from South Carolina, USA⁶

Based on the brand prisms generated from the interview with the manager and the data collected from the members of the brand community; the culture, language, and overall message seems to have successfully permeated through to their consumers. But, based on the interview and secondary research

⁶ Refers to the questionnaire results from Life is good in appendix E.

on the company, one cannot say the internal communication of the brand is entirely responsible for the external communication. Since its creation, Life is good has always had a relationship management and personal selling perspective. Originally without a marketing budget to push product, the company was founded on successfully delivering what their customers have asked for. Although the climb to a \$100 million company may have been faster had they used traditional forms of marketing, the company and brand seem to be in a stronger position due to their loyal consumer base created from grass-roots growth, their open approach to the meaning of their products, and their ability to listen to their customers. As Bert Jacob admits in one of his guest speeches, “Consumers built the company and retail costumers gave us all the answers” (Jacobs, B., 2009). This suggests that the company aligned its brand identity and organization around the customers rather than building the brand from inside out.

5.2 Peak Performance Findings & Analysis

The Peak Performance fan-site on Facebook is a brand community with 6000 members. It had its first posting on the 26th of October 2009 making it a relatively young Facebook community. Prior to the establishment of this community, there were smaller communities initiated by employees and fans who were encouraged to join this particular official fan-site when it was established by the Peak Performance online marketers. The community site distinguishes itself being very company oriented rather than focussed on the members of the community, in the sense that the brand manager applies existing marketing material intended for other purposes than for this community directly through wall postings, photos and videos e.g. inspirational videos, new collections, job listings, new store openings, information about sales events and new product promotions.

The community is functioning similarly to a normal company main website, however here members are allowed to upload personal pictures and comment on postings freely and there is often a reply from the brand manager answering a question or other inquiries. Also the Team Peak Performance is often in focus for updating the members on what new accomplishments they have reached. The members of the fan-site represent diverse demographics from all over the world while the countries where the brand is present is overrepresented as well as the members seem to be mainly active people from what many of their profile pictures reveal. The language is kept mainly in English due to the international nature of the community

5.2.1 Observations

The beginning of observations on this particular community began on the 18th of March 2009 when the community had 4573 members. 50 days later on the 7th of May when our observations ended, the community had 6120 members resulting in an increase of 1547 members. Percentagewise this equals to an increase of 33,83% averaging 30,94 new members every day. During the 50-day observation period, the Peak Performance online brand managers added content 1-2 times a week, weighing toward once a week⁷.

Responses to these posts varied between none and 45 people liking the post, meaning a link to the posting will appear on their own walls saying that they like the particular post. 45 ‘likes’ amounts the 0.94% of the current members who take action and responds this way. The most comments seen during the 50-day observation period was 13 amounting to 0,28% of current members responding with an actual comment on the community. The most responded posts are of the promotional type whereas the community informational posts are less responded to. Each of the two most successful posts during the lifespan of the community are displayed below in figure 9 and 10.

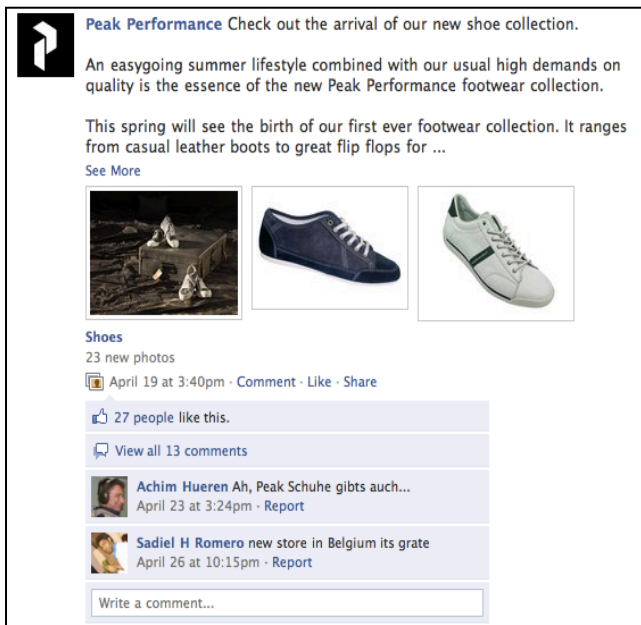


Figure 9, Popular Promotional Post



Figure 10, Popular Community Interest Post

⁷ See appendix A.

The language on the Peak Performance Facebook website, is mostly formal as if it was a corporate website, although examples of looser language is found in the member comments mainly responding to postings that are non promotional, but rather informational or entertaining for the community members interest in the brand. A few comments and posts were removed from the community site during the observational period. A couple of examples are displayed below: Undesired Member Posting, Manager Posting Error



Figure 11, Undesired Member Posting

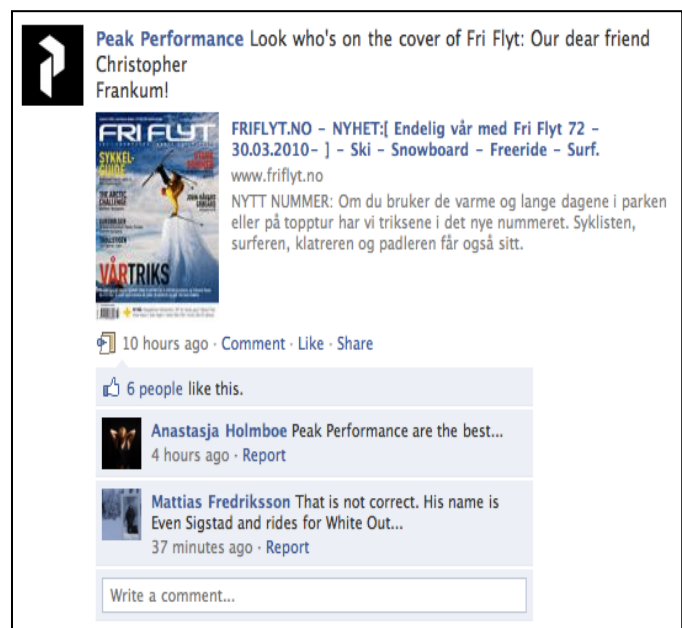


Figure 12, Brand Manager Posting Error

Figure 11, displays an undesired post by a member referring to a seemingly religious poem, that has nothing to do with Peak Performance or the brand community, making it understandable to remove as a manager. Below this post, a member has written in bold, that he wants the old classic logotype back, here there is an opportunity for the brand manager to engage with the dissatisfied member and explain to other viewers, why Peak Performance has chosen a new logotype and what the story is behind this choice. However, this post has been removed from the community.

Figure 12, displays a post by the Peak Performance brand manager describing that the person on the magazine front-page to be one of their team members. One of the most famous ski photographers in the world, Mattias Fridriksson, has evidently taken the photo and comments that it is another skier wearing another brand name than claimed by Peak Performance. Since it was an unintentional error to describe the skier as being Peak Performance sponsored, it is an obvious solution to correct the error

by removing the post. A final observation (figure 13), which yet has not been deleted, was a Danish dissatisfied community member commenting to a job posting from Peak Performance: “Where sits the promotional filter button in this system?” This community member provides valuable informational insight, that not all of the brands community members like the promotional style of the Facebook site, while members of Facebook often visit the site for networking and entertainment purposes.



BUTIKSSALJARE
Monday, January 18, 2010 at 9:31am

Till vår butik i Linköping söker vi dig som har kompetens och självförtroende inom försäljning samt delar vår passion att göra saker på riktigt, långsiktigt och trovärdigt. Självklart delar du även vårt intresse för skidåkning, golf och sportmode.

Vi kan erbjuda dig

- Ett spännande jobb med möjligheter till yrkesmässig och personlig utveckling.
- En informell och positiv arbetsmiljö i ett ungt och sportigt företag.

ARBETET INNEBÄR

- Att finnas till för kunden. Lyssna, uppfylla behov och inspirera till köp. Du ska skapa goda relationer med kunden.
- I tjänsten ingår butiksförsäljning, kassaavslut, lagerarbete och eget ansvar för att kunden är nöjd.

DIN PROFIL

- Erfarenhet av branschen och en god känsla för mode.
- En duktig och initiativrik säljare.
- Du ska vara självständigt och ta ansvar för egen och företagets utveckling men med distans och humor.
- Utåtriktad, prestigelös och dela våra värderingar om ödmjukhet, ärlighet och nytänkande. 80% vikariat med stor möjlighet till förlängning.

SÅ ANSÖKER DU

Sänd din ansökan inkl CV och foto till jobs@peakperformance.se snarast möjligt. Tillträde omgående.
För mer information kontakta Fredrik Malmberg på 013-103 750

Updated about 4 months ago · Comment · Like

👍 3 people like this.

 **Michael Cotta-Schönberg** Hvor sidder annoncefilterknappen i det her system?
January 18 at 12:20pm · Report

 Write a comment...

Figure 13, Dissatisfied Community Member

5.2.2 Interview findings

The interview with Fredrik Kjellberg, Online Marketing Manager at Peak Performance Production AB, was a slightly different than the two later interviews conducted due to the fact that he was provided the questions in advance of the interview⁸. While the research is exploratory, this was a way to test whether if this was an optimal way of conducting the interview. The outcome of the interview was rather broad and but did give a rather interesting perspective. Following the interview, Fredrik Kjellberg felt like he could elaborate on the questions and make them more specific by writing the answers and sending via email. The difference between the unprepared and prepared answers was the corporate communicational material depending on interview method. Both methods asked exactly the same questions, but gave quite unpolished and polished answers. Another aspect one should consider is the fact that the interview conducted verbally was in English, which was the interviewee's first language that is Swedish. Consider all of this, many factors could have played a role in the interview results.

The initial interview, gave us straight forward answers to questions like “What physical symbols or attributes do you associate with your brand?” stating that it is the rough/tough look using no fashion models but rather a lumberjack type of person. The written answers were more similar to the corporate web-page saying mountains, wilderness, skiing, action sports/active people. The brand manager supported our observations stating that Peak Performance has focus on integrated marketing communication in the sense that they seek to use the same material in both web and offline and in retail merchandising. Another interesting finding was that Peak Performance's philosophy is: “Don't ask what the customer wants. Produce the product that your employees would want and wear.” When asked about the brand's personality the interviewee gave us: Lumberjack, rough attitude, rough look, masculine and outdoorsy. Also a sporty person who loves the nature while still living in the city. The written answer said what the corporate homepage communicates: “An active person with high demands on function and quality. A traveller”

The interview findings on the question: “What set of values does your brand hold?” were also taken directly from the homepage in written form and quite a bit more straightforward in the verbal version. The webpage reads: For real, Long lasting, We believe in and trust people, Team Peak Performance, Building for the future and Renewal. The telephone interview revealed that the company communicates

⁸ See Appendix F.

their culture via images and let them speak for themselves, revealing their relationship with skiers. The corporate values speak in more broad terms and not about skiers, but people. When asked about the relationship Peak Performance holds with their consumers, it was revealed, both in verbal and written form, that the company has extremely loyal fans due to the philosophy of designing apparel they themselves would wear and strong focus on quality.

Moving to more specific management questions on the Facebook community webpage, it was claimed that Peak Performance has very little editing of posts and that they rather would engage the conversation instead of deleting posts that are not in compliance with the brand identity. It is specifically mentioned that Peak Performance never have had to delete a post by a consumer this way learning from the bad content instead of deleting they, just as in the value statement online:

We believe and trust people: we don't censure people's comments or posts even if possible. If someone blames us or accuses us of something we try to start a dialog with that person rather than deleting the post (Peak Performance 2010).

The specific observations above however, reveal that this viewpoint has not been followed since the beginning of the community. The intention must then be to follow this standpoint in the future.

5.2.2.1 Brand Prism according to Interview

The illustration below applies the fore mentioned interview findings to the brand identity prism by Kapferer (p. 100, 2007). This will later be used to compare the results from a second prism created based on the questionnaire results in order to assess the brand’s alignment.

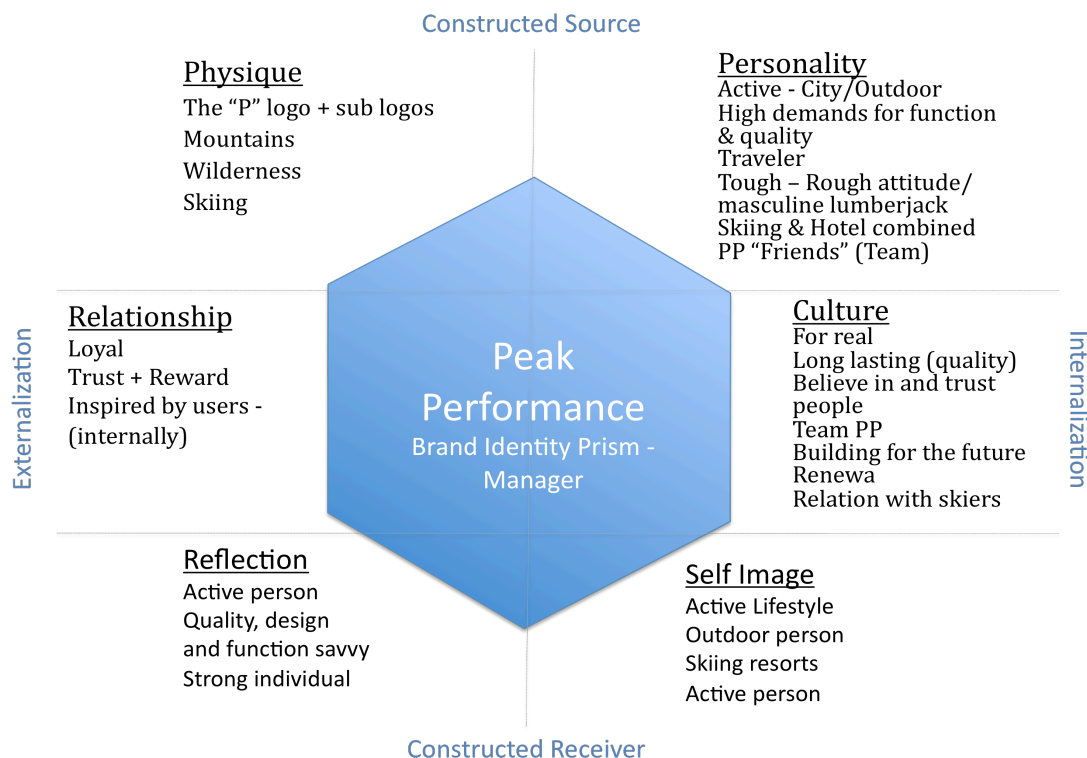


Figure 14, Peak Performance Brand Identity Prism Based on Interview

Source: Adapted from Brand Identity Prism, Kapferer (p. 100, 2007)

5.2.3 Online Questionnaire findings

Members of the Peak Performance Facebook brand community were given the possibility to answer 12 questions regarding the six aspects of the Kapferer Brand Prism⁹. The respondents were almost evenly divided between women and men and they answered to be predominantly belonging to the 25-44 year age group. The largest percentage of respondents (41%) visits the fan page 1-3 times a month. When testing how the six aspects of the brand manager brand identity prism reflected upon the community

⁹ See Appendix H & I.

members, we got the following 6 clear top answers: Quality (Physique), Sporty (Personality), Loyal (Relationship), Quality (Culture), Concerned with quality (Reflection) and Active (Self Image). Quality was the top scorer in 3 out of six aspects of the prism and must be regarded as the predominant attribute of the brand identity. Sporty, loyal and active scores high when looking at the remaining 3 aspects of the prism.

When looking at members' reasons for being a part of the community, 8 out of 20 answered that they would like to receive news about the next collection and new products. The next most often thing mentioned was a tie between loving a product purchased, working for Peak Performance, and liking the style, quality and functionality of the products. These formulations overall, reveal a close link to the promotional function of the online brand community. When it comes to formulations on more entertainment and information on the brand itself, people formulated things such as: They are skiers and like the Scandinavian lifestyle, they want to see Peak Performance videos or information on Team Peak Performance. Common for these formulations, are that only one or two respondents have written this. When categorising the answers in two groups, there were 25,5 reasoning votes total and 14 (55%) of these were related to product and collection news. 8 (31,4%) were community information and entertainment related reasons for being part of the brand community. The remaining 3,5 reasons were because these people works for Peak Performance, where one works for a sports store that sells Peak Performance and therefore only counts 0.5. From this way of looking at the answers, we find that 55% of the respondents are members because they want product information, which is abnormal compared to the nature of Facebook and why people are on this networking platform, generally for social and entertainment purposes.

5.2.3.1 Brand Prism according to Online Questionnaire

The illustration below applies the fore mentioned questionnaire findings to the brand identity prism by Kapferer (p. 100, 2007). This will later be used to compare the results from a first prism created based on the interview results in order to assess the brand’s alignment.

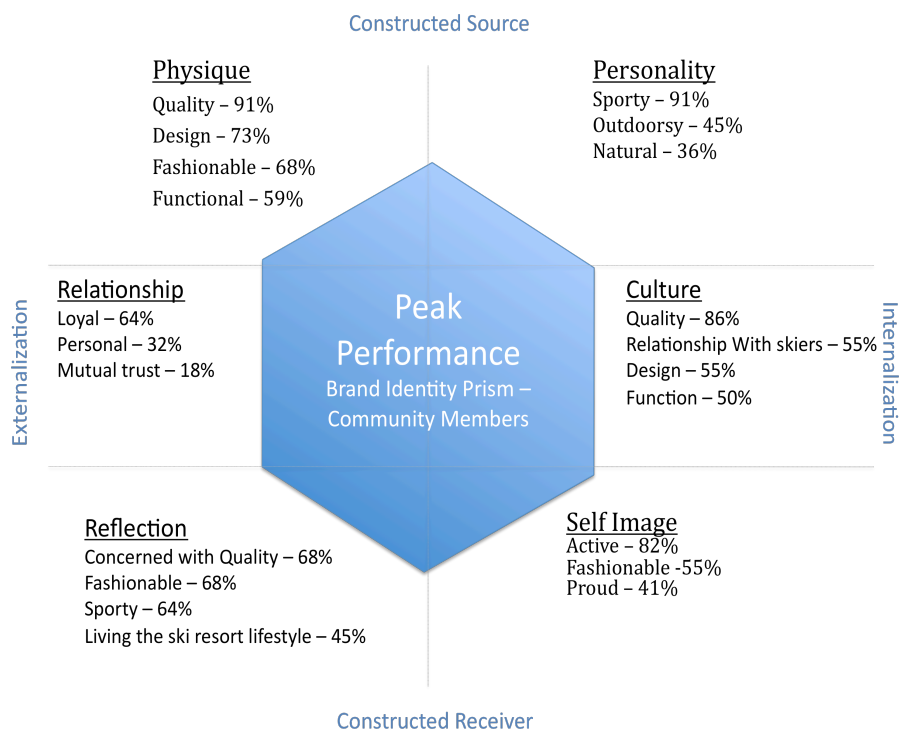


Figure 15, Peak Performance Brand Identity Prism Based on Online Questionnaire
Source: Adapted from Brand Identity Prism, Kapferer (p. 100, 2007)

5.2.4 Analysis

Peak Performance fan-site according to Hanlon’s 7 foundations of strong brand communities:

In order to better understand Peak Performance’s fan-site, Hanlon’s (2006) 7 foundations of a strong brand community were applied to distinguish if the brand had the dynamics of a strong online brand community. The foundations seems to fit Peak Performance to some extend, but there also seems to be potential in optimization of some foundations (See Table 2, next page).

Table 2, Hanlon's 7 keys to a successful brand - Peak Performance

<i>Creation Story</i>	The creation story of Peak Performance has been important for the brand ever since it's beginning, while it reveals its passion for skiing. This passion however, is not that evident anymore while the product ranges keep expanding to more casual wear and less focus on skiing. Even the Values & Mission description on the corporate website, has left out skiing and replaced it with Team Peak Performance. 55% of the brand community members find 'relationship with skiers' as a cultural attribute of the brand prism and only 45% want other people to see them as 'living the ski resort lifestyle' by wearing Peak Performance products. Skiing is not chosen in any of the other aspects indicating that Peak Performance's brand identity might be drifting away from its creation story and heritage.
<i>Creed</i>	Peak Performance's brand identity might be drifting away from its creation story and heritage. The creed/shared vision brand community foundation, should be: <i>"Doing things and making products the way we want them to be"</i> according to the corporate homepage and the interview with the brand manager. This foundation is revealed through a very few postings of videos, pictures and text showing that the workers of Peak Performance are actually wearing the garments themselves. There could be more material revealing this creed in the brand community.
<i>Icon</i>	The shared icon, there is a clear structure of revealing the "P" logo type and other symbols, such as "R&D" in mostly everything Peak Performance does and therefore also on their brand community
<i>Language</i>	The language used in the community. There are no sacred words like Hanlon suggests, but rather a relatively formal tone such as on a corporate website representing the brand in its best manner, while on the contrary, taking the community into perspective, this could lead to distance between the actors in the communication. More interpersonal and relaxed language is used in comments on postings, but the majority is kept relatively formal.
<i>Non-believers</i>	A true brand community also has 'enemies' e.g. people who front against the community. Peak Performance does not seem to have any such enemies, not even competitors intruding on the community.
<i>Rituals</i>	Brand community Rituals, could be that the brand manager usually make sure to post news and information about 1-2 times a week and annually returning events such as the King of Style in Stockholm. A stronger ritual bringing members to the online brand community is the seasonal 'VIP' sales for members of the community only.
<i>Leader</i>	The brand community leader, used to be communicated explicitly when both of the founders were with the company. Now, when the company is sold to Danish I.C. Companys (Peak Performance Milestones, 2010d) the initial leaders/founders have left to other competitive brands. The Peak Performance Team could be argued to function as role models or leaders in a sense and they are well communicated through information on the brand community, although there could potentially be much more information on these.

5.2.5 Conclusion from Brand Prism Comparison

Overall, the brand prism of the brand manager and the community members align, but the study also reveals room for improvement. When comparing the results from both sides of the two constructed identity prisms, there seems to be many similarities in the results from the community members, but on the contrary there are also many manager view that were not chosen by the members.

When comparing the two sides of the prism then only **personality** and **reflection** fitted each other to an extent where most of the answers were the same from both the brand manager and the member respondents. The prism comparison then shows that three of the remaining aspects have a medium fit, meaning that about half of the member answers fit the manager answers. For **personality**, both sides answered active/sporty, but the members answered outdoorsy and natural as the second and third most answered. The manager's perception of the brand personality, during the interview, was also a masculine, rough and lumberjack type of person – getting only 10% answers combined, of all answers to this question. The 'other' possibility gave us answers such as: diverse, fashion in sports and R&D. Where only R&D relates to the manager perception, through 'high demand for function and quality. For culture, both sides answered: long lasting (quality) and team Peak Performance (relationship with skiers). What is interesting is that none of the members chose to respond, the values also written on the corporate homepage: for real, believe in & trust and renewal. The community members therefore choose not to answer 3 of the corporate values as a cultural perception of Peak Performance. Whether this means that the values are not communicated well or the members simply don't understand them, is speculation, but fact is that they do not think that these are part of Peak Performance's culture. **Self-image** is the last aspect where there is an almost fit. Both parts answer active as a self-image, but instead of answering outdoor and skiing, the members think that they are fashionable and proud to be wearing the Peak Performance brand. The last prism aspect and the one complete mismatch was **physique**. The manager understood the physical aspect of the brand prism to be the logo and intangibles such as mountains, wilderness and skiing. All things that is not physical and touchable. The members answered in descending weigh: quality, design, fashionable and functional. The misunderstanding in the interview made this aspect less useful, but surprisingly only 41% answered mountaineering as a physical aspect. None wrote wilderness but one chose to write skiing as a physical attribute in the 'other' possibility.

Overall, it is found that the highest percentage answers from the members in 5 out of 6 prism aspects were also answered by the brand manager. Only Physique, had a mismatch in this comparison, while there was a misunderstanding of the aspect during the interview. Member answers that got more than 70% response rate, were quality, design (physique), sporty (personality), active (self-image) and quality again (culture). An interesting finding is that quality has gotten top response in three prism aspects leaving this as the top member perception about Peak Performance's brand identity. This correlates with the answers about why the respondents are a part of the brand community, where 55% said because of their interest in the products, hereunder quality. This again correlates with the popularity of posts that were product related and the focus of the brand manager of providing information that is more product related than community information for active people (skiers) and entertainment.

As shown in the observation section, there are relatively few responses to posts made by the brand manager and the brand community has relatively few members. On the other hand 64% of the members answered that their relationship with Peak Performance is loyal. The potential to be a "perfect" brand community was revealed in the application of Hanlon's 7 community foundations. Peak Performance has some of the 7 foundations such as a clear creation story/history proving that there is potential to create a schoolbook community. On the other hand, the 1998 owner change from private Swedish owners to IC Companys, a Danish fashion conglomerate (Peak Performance Milestones, 2010d) and the loss of leader to other competitive companies works against the perfect community. However, a window of opportunity to expand the brand community, through changes of postings and management, is seemingly open. The brand community could utilise the sub community nature of skiers in a better way and let the community be a place for active people and skiers to interact with each other, but it is mostly commercial with one-way communication from the brand to the viewers. The viewers have the opportunity to respond and engage; hereby sharing the word about the brand on Facebook, but few chose to do this. Furthermore, as described in the interview, the brand manager makes sure to align the Peak Performance brand identity by using the same marketing material used offline, on the brand community. This is a sort of integrated marketing communication method controlling the information on the community, while trying to engage with little luck. As outlined in the theory section about IMC, Christensen et al (2005) claims that consumers must not simply be perceived as targets but as collaborators in order to achieve control and competitiveness in postmodern markets. This is achieved through playful engagement networking and negotiation instead of integration and control such as with IMC.

5.3 Timberland

The Timberland fan-site on Facebook is a brand community with over 120 000 members. The site facilitates online wall postings by the community members as well as by the fan-site's administrator. As a member you are exposed to news regarding the Timberland's collection, Timberland events and product information through wall postings, photos and videos. The members of the fan-site represent diverse demographics and are spread over mainly the U.S, Europe and Asia. The fan-site is very international with wall postings in several different languages, and a link to 'Earthkeepers', which is a large part of the Timberland brand and represents a community shared by environmentally concerned members who all believe that by doing small things, a movement can be created and the world can become a better place.

5.3.1 Observations

From the 18th of March 2010 to the 5th of May 2010, the number of fan-site members increased from 110 399 to 122 219 resulting in over 12 000 new members over less than two months, resulting in 243.8 as the average growth number per day¹⁰. The posting that received most comments, 29, was published 10th of March displaying photos from a Boot Camp in Portsmouth, U.S where Timberland store managers were clearing debris from a recent storm (Timberland Observations, 10th March, 2010).

The fan-site can to some extent be regarded as commercial because of its many product ads and displays of the Timberland collections. But in contrast the site has a link to Earthkeepers, which is Timberland's, own community for eco-conscious, outdoor people who all want to contribute to make the world a more sustainable and liveable place (Earthkeeper, 2010). Earthkeepers fit well with the description of brand communities where the use of a movement brings people together. In this case Earthkeepers is urging its members to do small and big things for the environment, and by supporting each other the members are inspired to take collective action and make a movement.

¹⁰ See Appendix A.

5.3.2 Interview findings

The physical symbols or attributes the brand manager associate with the Timberland brand are the Timberland tree and the yellow iconic boot. As a result the Timberland tree is the ‘face’ of the Facebook fan-site. The tree is also a symbol representing outdoor, nature, family and friends, and can according to Timberland’s brand manager also be associated with openness and honesty. These attributes are all in line with the brands personality, which was described as active, outdoorsy and family oriented. Additional personality traits were modest, environmentally and quality concerned, hard working and independent. These traits were directly linked to the management’s view of the culture of the brand, which was described as, again hard working and intelligent. The culture was also described as fostering a competitive atmosphere, however the members are not encouraged to compete as individuals, instead they are inspired to compete in teams. The brand manager believed that the Timberland customer regarded her/himself as a proud, hardworking, honest and independent person, not letting fashion dictating them, when wearing Timberland¹¹.

To help the consumers to identify themselves on the fan-site the management is trying to instil a high level of customer involvement and engagement. An important aspect of the Timberland brand is the globally spread target markets, and there are different aspects of the brand that appeals to the customers depending on where in the world they live. For example the brand is regarded as highly fashionable in Italy whilst in the U.S it can be seen as both urban by young people and as traditional work clothes by others, depending on where in the country they are from. At the moment the global Facebook fan-site is targeting the younger population, however it has been discussed to create a separate fan-site for each country in order to better communicate with each market, enabling the customers to find stores in each country, and expand the focus from the U.S. The intended communication on the website is open, friendly and honest and not many postings are being removed by the administrator. The only times postings are deleted are if they are highly inappropriate, irrelevant or hurtful to anyone. The fan-site wants to encourage the members to express themselves and have fun. The vision for the fan-site is to continue to grow, offer break through experiences and simply add something special to the member’s day.

¹¹ See Appendix J.

5.3.2.1 Brand Prism According to Interview

The illustration below (See Fig. 16) applies the fore mentioned interview findings to the brand identity prism by Kapferer (p. 100, 2007). This will later be used to compare the results from a second prism created based on the questionnaire results in order to assess the brand’s alignment.

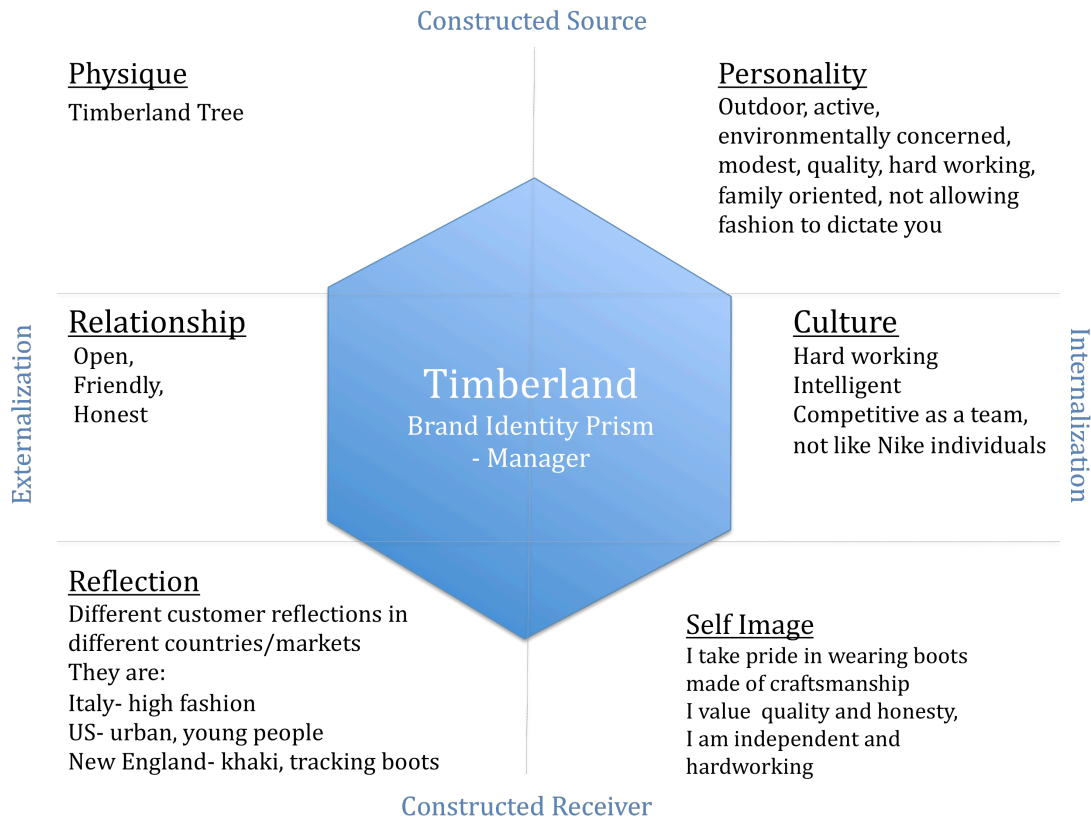


Figure 16, Timberland Brand Identity Prism Based on Interview
Source: Adapted from Brand Identity Prism, Kapferer (p. 100, 2007)

5.3.3 Online Questionnaire findings

From the twenty respondents from the Timberland Facebook fan-site 75% were male and 25% female. The most common age brackets were 15-24 and 25-34 with 30% each followed by 25% between 35-44, 15% between 45-54, no participants were over 55 years of age. The respondents came from different cities in the U.S, Ireland, Italy, Malaysia, Albania, Germany, New Zealand and Greece. Most of the respondents said they were visiting the Fan-site 1-3 times per months or only during promotional activities¹².

¹² See Appendix L & M.

The most interesting finding from the questionnaire was how the members were viewing themselves when wearing the Timberland brand. Eleven members claimed they felt fashionable and nine members said they felt outdoorsy and comfortable. This was directly correlated to how the members viewed someone else wearing the brand, where twelve members said that person was fashionable and eleven members said that person was outdoorsy. Fashionable and Outdoorsy might be regarded as two direct opposites and it was therefore interesting to identify that the two characteristics were representing the respondents' view of the brand.

There seem to be an inconsistency in regards to how the members considered their relationship with the brand. 40% claimed their relationship was personal and 30% stated that the relationship was impersonal; once again the top two responses were the direct opposites.

Two members revealed that the reason they were part of the fan-site was because they were working for the brand. One person claimed it was because the person was active and outdoorsy and three people wanted to keep up with fashion and receive product and collection updates, while two members just loved the brand.

Considering that the Timberland fan-site is quite commercial it seems to be in line with the members' reason for being part of the community, to receive new collection updates and special promotions.

Based on the second last question from the online questionnaire, Timberland had 35% promoters and 15% detractors, resulting in an Net Promoter Score of 20%. Which can be regarded as an average score, however Timberland scored better than Peak Performance and lower than Life is Good.

5.3.3.1 Brand Prism according to Online Questionnaire

The illustration below (See Fig. 17) applies the fore mentioned questionnaire findings to the brand identity prism by Kapferer (p. 100, 2007). This will later be used to compare the results from the first prism created based on the interview results in order to assess the brand’s alignment.

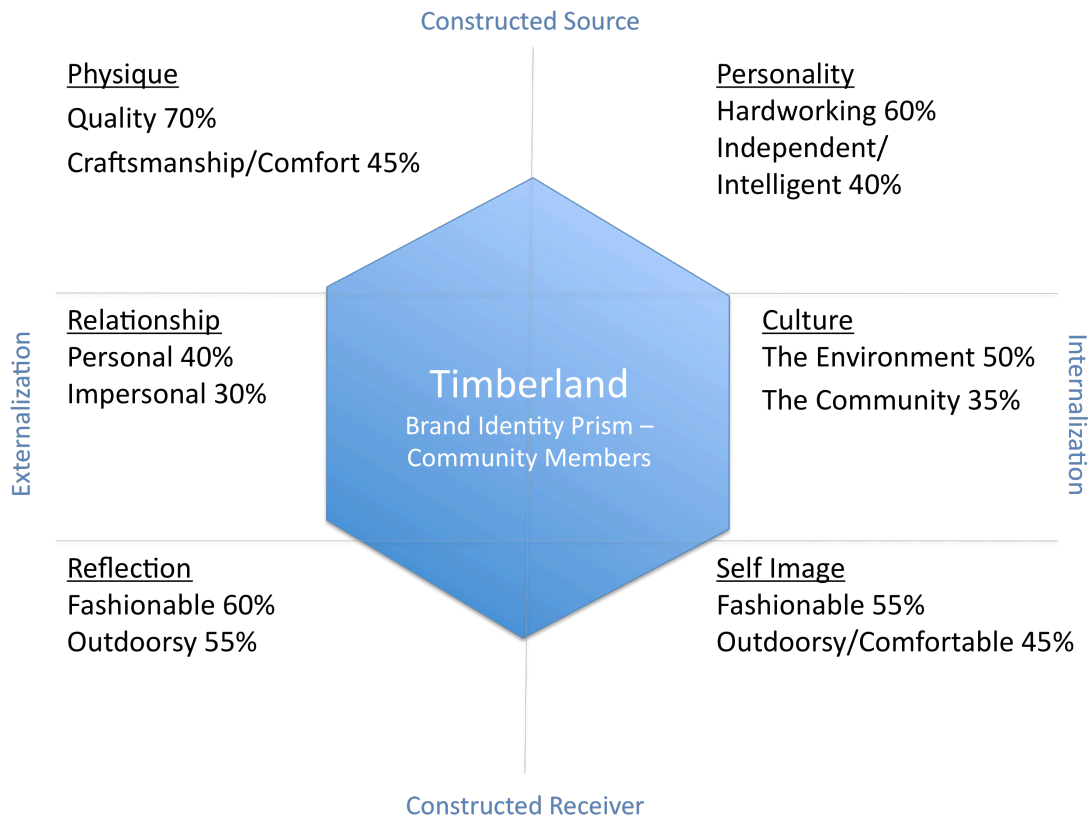


Figure 17, Timberland Brand Identity Prism Based on Online Questionnaire
Source: Adapted from Brand Identity Prism, Kapferer (p. 100, 2007)

5.3.4 Analysis

As Muniz & Guinn (2001) suggests, the members of a community feel like they have responsibility and obligations to the community as a whole and to individuals as well. This can be seen with the Earthkeepers, where there is a common theme of serving the community. The members are being rewarded with prizes for the work they have done in their communities and on ‘Earth Day’ (occurring in several different countries spread out over different dates) members are urged to give a helping hand. One can suggest that these activities are linked to the members’ sense of duty to their communities. Therefore, the feeling of strong community commitment is very visible on the website and 50% of the respondents from the questionnaire said that the Timberland culture is associated with the environment. Surprisingly, overall there seem to be a *functional value* for most members joining the brand community, which is more referred to product updates, store locations and special promotions (Sicilia & Palazon, 2007).

Timberland’s fan-site according to Hanlon’s 7 foundations of strong brand communities:

In order to better understand Timberland’s fan-site, Hanlon’s 7 foundations of a strong brand community were applied to distinguish if the brand had the dynamics of a strong online brand community (See Table 3, next page).

Table 3, Hanlon's 7 keys to a successful brand – Timberland

<i>Creation Story</i>	The <i>creation story</i> t is described on the fan-site
<i>Creed</i>	<p>What seem to be most interesting with the Timberland brand community is the ‘<i>second piece is the creed</i>’, the reason why members have joined the brand community and the following reasons were identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To gain new products/collection updates and promotions • Being an employee, working for Timberland • Being active and involved in Earthkeepers (or at least support the cause in some way) <p>When asking the question to the members, some answered that it was mainly to receive special promotions and collection updates, others because they loved the brand and some because they worked for the brand. It does not seem to be ONE main reason why people are joining the website, rather several reasons.</p>
<i>Icon</i>	Another key to a successful brand community according to Hanlon is the <i>icon</i> ; this seems to fit well with the Timberland’s fan-site where the famous tree is used as the ‘profile photo’.
<i>Language</i>	A striking observation was the community <i>language</i> on the fan-site. Hanlon (2006) suggests that one of the seven keys to a successful brand community are the sacred words, the own community language that identifies the members and create a sense of belonging by using a specialized vocabulary. This does not seem to be the case with the language on the Timberland fan-site. The members communicated in many different languages, not only international languages, but also different variations of the same language, where urban slang was mixed with a proper and polished language. It was evident that the Timberland fan-site is lacking a common shared language. Example of postings, ‘ <i>Need 2 find timberland shoe dat is size 12 and above..can any1 help me?</i> and ‘ <i>I buy a new pair of work timberlands every 6 to 7 month for work most comfortable boot there</i>
<i>Non-believers</i>	In regards to Earthkeepers one can suggest that there are <i>non-believers</i> out there, which could make up the crowd of people who are not very environmentally concerned and who does not engaging themselves in their communities.
<i>Rituals</i>	The company has several <i>rituals</i> and the most striking ‘ritual’ is the honour of the Earth Day when Timberland employees all around the world are doing service projects to give back to their communities.
<i>Leader</i>	However the brand community seem to lack a <i>leader</i> , it is not evident from the fan-site who the founder of the company is; there is no image of a face to the brand. As a member you are informed about the company’s history, however there is no trace of a leader such as for example Richard Branson for Virgin.

5.3.5 Conclusion from Brand Prism Comparison

Part of Timberland's communication efforts is to have a personal relationship with the members and 40 % of the respondents claimed that they regarded their relationship with the brand as personal. It was however interesting that 30% rated the relationship as impersonal which is the direct opposite.

It was evident that the brand has different target groups in the world. The Timberland brand does not stand for high fashion in the U.S where it is communicated to be an outdoorsy and comfortable brand worn by people who do not let fashion dictate them. However, 'fashionable' scored highest in both self-image and reflection and this can probably be explained by the target markets from some of the European countries that regard the Timberland brand as high- fashion.

In conclusion, quality seems to be the word that best describes the Timberland brand based on observations of blog postings, the interview and from the member questionnaire (rated 70%). Regardless of the target market and if the brand is seen as high fashion or outdoorsy the common association of the brand seem to be quality which also seems to be in line with the management's brand description, even if Timberland's community members seem to consist of members with different reasons for using the brand and different reasons to join the brand community.

6.0 Comparative Analysis

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and compare the findings from Life is good, Peak Performance and Timberland through a brand prism comparison followed by assessing their success according to Hanlons 7 keys, comparing their values and measure the result from the net promoter score.

6.1 Brand Prism Comparison

In the cases we reviewed, we found that the most successful brand community was the one with the most interactions, the highest number of members, and greatest clarity of their meaning. The number of interactions and members is quite easily measured, but is the clarity of the brand meaning? When Kapferer speaks of the keys to a strong brand identity prism, he explains that there should only be a few words to each facet and that all the words should have strength, they are not lukewarm (Kapferer p. 187, 2004). Because branding is very much about differentiating, these strong word associations should be unique and ones which consumers can also identify with. With Timberland and Peak Performance, the words identified were not as unique and did not exactly reinforce the meaning of the brand. For example, when looking at Timberland's three highest rated answers created based on the questionnaire, the terms used were *quality* (physique), *hardworking* (personality), and *fashionable* (self-image and reflection). Although these word associations have seemed to translate well to the consumer, they are not very unique. The same goes for Peak in that there were highly rated word associations such as *quality* (physique and culture), *sporty* (personality), and *active* (self image). These terms lacked uniqueness and did not directly align with the results from the interview. In Timberland's case, the second highest rated answers in the same categories rated only a few percentage points lower and did not bring greater clarity to the brand meaning. For the self-image and reflection portions for Timberland, after *fashionable*, came *outdoorsy*. These two terms do not directly conflict, but certainly do not clarify what the brand represents. These mutually exclusive terms can be related to the international diversity that exists in Timberlands community and the different branding strategies that exist in the different international market. In order to have brand strengthening online brand communities, the community may need to be segmented. With Life is good, there seemed to be a more narrow focus of key terms. When explaining about their brand, there were clearly communicated pillars that company stood on. These were *humility*, *simplicity*, and a *sense of humour*. Although these terms often appeared in multiple sections of the prism, which is not part of an ideal brand identity prism, they still provide a

form of focus for the brand identity prism and seem to have translated into environmental brand alignment.

6.2 Hanlon's 7 keys to strong Brand Community

Based on the findings from the previous section, it is evident that the three companies do not all have Hanlon's 7 keys for a strong brand community (Hanlon, 2006). The company that seems to successfully communicating their keys is Life is good, which has a quite successful online brand community. Timberland displayed the second strongest use of Hanlon's foundations and also had the second strongest community where members had a good platform for interaction and information sharing. From the previous analysis one can suggest that Peak Performance seem to be less successful in direct comparison with the other two companies.

A striking key to Life is good's success is the company's creation story that is extraordinary in itself, but it acts as a justification of the company's optimistic attitude while also legitimizing the company's trustworthiness and authenticity. Furthermore, Life is good's brand image is clearly communicated with a simple message of positivism which is clearly evident when looking at the reasons why members are joining the fan-site; they all believe in the power of optimism. With Life is good, there is one shared reason to become a member, in contrast to Timberland and Peak Performance's fan-sites where there seem to be several different reasons for people joining the brand communities.

The shared icon of the company also portrays the same message. Jake the stick figure has a large smile on his face and can be easily associated with optimism. In contrast to Peak Performance's icon/logo, it is unclear what the 'P' represents and does not give any clue to the company's brand values. Life is good also seem to have a uniform language on their fan-site regardless of the demographics of the members, while Timberland seems to lack 'one voice' among their members.

Both Life is good and Timberland seem to have managed to create a great 'community spirit' on their fan-sites that is closely related to their ongoing community projects such as the 'Backyard Concerts' and the 'Earthkeeper's Earth Day'. By regularly posting updates from these activities it is evident that both brands have a commitment to the communities they serve. The bonds and commitment of the community members seem to be strengthen by the pessimists and close-minded individuals of the

world for Life is good. This can also be said for Timberland as the Earthkeepers are constantly trying to fix that which is being destroyed by the environmentally unconcerned.

6.3 Value Comparison

Of the three mentioned values that online brand communities can deliver, social, functional, and entertainment, the only company to satisfy all three was Life is good. Peak Performance delivered both entertainment value in the form of videos showing sponsored skiers and functional value in the form of product and promotional updates. Timberland was found to deliver mainly functional values. Although there were forms of social activity found on the Timberland fan-site, the social value was not strong. Timberland also provided videos, but they were more informative than entertainment and therefore also served as a form of functional value.

Overall, the social and the entertainment value delivered by Life is good seem to bring the greatest gratification of all the communities. According to the uses and gratification paradigm, participation in the community is dependent on the benefits or values that members perceive (Maria S., 2008). Because Life is good seemed to deliver the greatest value in the form of emotional support (social), a source for a smile and inspiration (entertainment), and a place to learn more about the brand (functional), it is rationale that they had the greatest participation. High member participation legitimizes online brand communities as less commercial and also strengthens the social bonds within the brand community. Through better serving the identified values, there in turn seems to be a greater social value created as a result of participation.

6.4 Net Promoter Score Comparison

In this thesis, the Net Promoter Score is used to discover possible correlations between: findings, observations and the Net Promoter Score. Therefore, the Net Promoter Score could be a possible evaluation tool if member values were being satisfied. The community members of all three cases were asked in the online questionnaires, on a scale from 1-10 their likeliness to recommend, the online brand community in focus, to a friend. The ones answering 1-6 were regarded as ‘Detractors’ – a group that is assumed as not promoting the brand community or even detracting other people to join the community. The people answering from 6-8 are regarded as possible future promoters such as the ones answering 9-10. By subtracting the Detractors with the Promoters we found the Net Promoter Score.

Table 4, shows the results of all three cases of online brand communities for a comparison to be conducted.

Table 4, Net Promoter Score Calculation

Company	Detractors %	Promoters %	NPS %
Life is good	15	65	50
Peak Performance	23	32	9
Timberland	15	35	20

What the table immediately shows, is that Life is good has a 2.5 times higher Net Promoter Score with 50% Net Promoter Score as Timberland who has 20%. Peak Performance ranks lowest in this comparison with a score of 9% Net Promoter Score. The table furthermore shows that Peak Performance has the highest number of detractors. The following table shows a summary of the statistical results derived from the researchers' observations.

The most obvious correlation with the observations of the community cases is the size. Here Life is good had 306,229 members at the end of our observations while Timberland had 122,468 members, which means that Life is good has a 2.5 times larger community than Timberland. Peak Performance only had 6120 members and therefore also 50 times smaller than the community of Life is good. The Net Promoter Score was 5.5 times lower for Peak Performance. Therefore, the Net Promoter Score appears to be directly correlated to size of the community. The greater the Net Promoter Score, the greater the size of the community.

When it comes to a correlation with the gratification and satisfactory values delivered by the brand communities in focus, there also seems to be a correlation with the Net Promoter Score. Overall, the social and the entertainment value delivered by Life is good, seems to bring the greatest gratification of all the communities. The high Net Promoter Score of Life is good (50%) appears to be a reflection of the members gratification and satisfaction. Although Timberland, in principle, only delivered one value, this value seems to be greater served as both members and the company provide content on product and company activity. The fact that these values are greater served, may also be a reflection of their consumer-focused culture. Peak Performance was found to deliver two values, but was not serving the values as effectively as both Timberland and Life is good. Considering all of this, the Net Promoter Score is found to act as an indication of how well the community's values are being served.

The final correlation with Net Promoter Score is found in the sense of community based on Hanlon's 7 keys to a strong brand community (2006). Here again the community scoring the highest Net Promoter Score was also the community with all the 7 keys to a strong brand community. Life is good with 50% Net Promoter Score, had all 7 keys. Timberland with an Net Promoter Score of 20%, had 3 out of 7 keys, leaving room for improvement and showing correlating lower Net Promoter Score. Peak Performance, as the smallest community, scored 9% in Net Promoter Score and only had one strong key out of the 7 keys, with two being partly present.

The correlation of the online brand communities' success and the Net Promoter Score in this comparative study is clear:

- The greater size, the greater Net Promoter Score.
- The greater gratification and satisfaction values delivered, the greater Net Promoter Score.
- The more of Hanlon's 7 keys fulfilled, the greater the Net Promoter Score.

7.0 Conclusion & Contribution

This chapter serves to summarize the main points in the alignment discussion and summarize main results of the exploratory and triangulated findings throughout the journey of the study. Hereafter, the theoretical and practical contribution of the study will be presented and end revealing a new model called the 'Brand Community Prism' constructed by the authors of this study.

With the Internet, consumers are able connect and communicate with their favourite brands greater than ever before. But with this connectivity, consumers have also been able to connect and communicate with each other. This connectivity and increase in communication has lead to several new trends and even shifts in the market place. Companies today have to consider that common consumers can create mass media and collectively form to make change. This is how the Internet has empowered consumers and will continue doing so, shifting the power from the manufacturers to the consumers. The significance of this in marketing is the change in the control of communication.

Even today, marketing managers still speak of integrated marketing communication. But, the truth is that the IMC concept is reliant on control (Christensen, Thorp & Firat p. 160, 2003). With common consumers now creating a significant percentage of the content we view online, companies need to accept that the control of the message is no longer completely in the hands of the brand manager. For the reason that the communication is now shared, the focus should be on brand alignment. In order to test the brand alignment of companies today, this study sought to create a brand identity prism based on marketing managers and compare it with the prism illustrated by the members of a brand community where the communication is shared. Through this, one could evaluate and assess the brand alignment of the two sides of the content providers in brand communities, the company and the consumer while holding these results up against 50 days of observations.. Through the interviews the authors also learned how those managing the communities were trying to influence or maintain its intended identity.

The results showed that there were gaps in the brand identity and the brand image based on Kapferer's brand prism. The identified gaps did not show that any of the brands had an identity crisis, but there certainly were areas of the prism that could show improvement. Based on the highest rated answers for each prism area, Life is good had all six mentioned by the manager, Peak Performance had 5 of 6, and Timberland had 2 of 6. Because this is a form of evaluating brand alignment, there should be a strategy

to create alignment within the prisms. Based on observations of the company and interviews, there was found to be two different management strategies amongst the companies. With Peak Performance, the relationship with the consumers was described as the company being the leader and the consumers its followers (Fredrik Kjellberg, Peak Performance)¹³. With this management perspective, it was surprising that the IMC process is being used as the communication strategy. Both Life is good and Timberland seemed to recognize their consumers' importance to the brand and make a conscious effort to align their product and brand with their consumers. Based on the recognized trends occurring in the market place, the latter communication and service strategy seems more appropriate. The Net Promoter Score for Peak Performance's online brand community was also the lowest of all three companies and it can be seen as an indication that the members' interests have not been recognized and are not being well served.

Based on this study, Life is good seemed to have the strongest brand alignment. Because Life is good has a very distinguishable and uniform language, it has been able to utilize this to reinforce the brand identity. As the majority of the content provided by members in the online communities we observed came in the form of text, language seems to be one of the most influential factors effecting brand identity in the Facebook platform. Life is good's pillars of humility, simplicity, and sense of humour, seem to give clarity in the language that should be used and also provides a clear guideline for any other forms of communication.

Brand clarity and consistency have been recognized as keys to the alignment of a brand. The surrounding environmental factors that are used in the brand identity prism are all influencing factors on the brand identity, this is why they must be given clarity through short descriptions and communicated throughout the organization. Because Life is good seemed to have the strongest sense of community based on Hanlon's foundations and was also found to have the best brand alignment, there seems to be a unifying or aligning effect of strong brand communities. Considering this and the fore mentioned benefits of brand communities, it seems particularly beneficial to create a sense of community as a part of the brand identity.

Because of this, this thesis would like to introduce a model that contributes to help form a clearer and stronger brand identity with a sense of brand community. Kapferer's (2004) once said that brands "*should be managed by an enlightened despot, not by a democrat*" (Kapferer p. 24, 2004). This was in reference to brand management and this belief has quickly become out-of-date as consumers can no longer be

¹³ See Appendix F

dictated to and they too have a say in the brand. Current trends reveal that brands are more a democracy than a dictatorship. It will therefore be the companies that communicate a brand identity with a sense of community that will create a brand cherished not only by those that profit from it, but those who have embraced and adopted it.

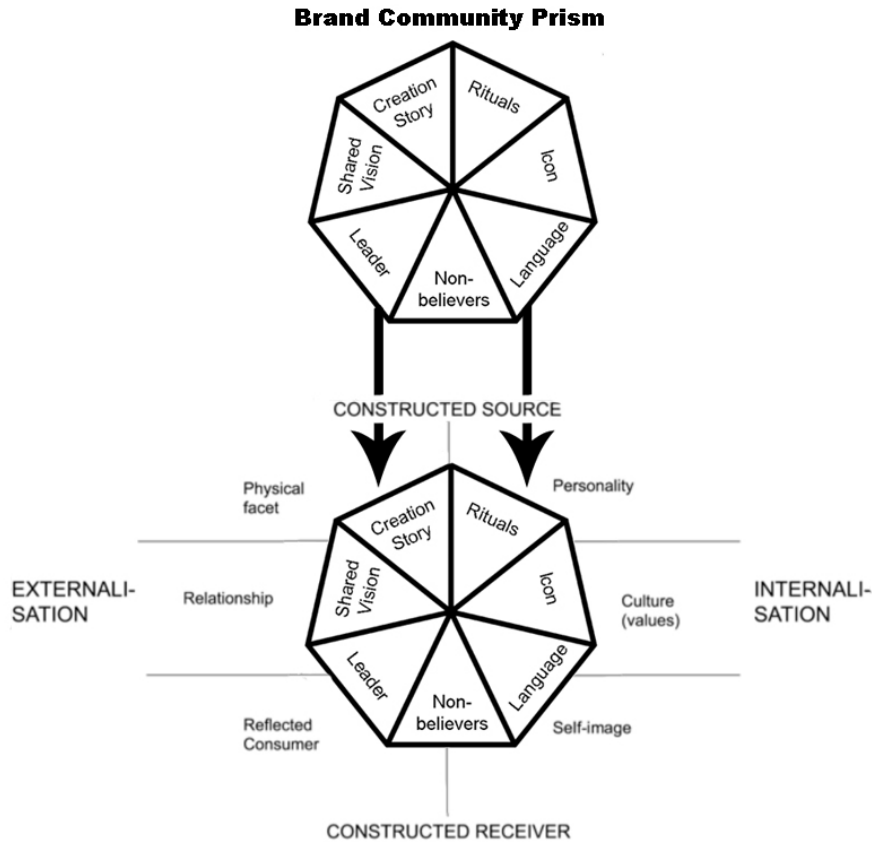


Figure 18, Brand Identity Prism with a sense of Brand Community (developed & adapted from Kapferer, 2007 & Hanlon, 2006)

The model is provided in figure 18. In this model, we have taken the 7 foundations of a strong brand community and encapsulated them within a prism forming a *brand community prism*. Using this prism, one can assess the strength of the sense of community based on evaluations of each foundation, which can be ‘strong’, ‘neutral’, and ‘weak’. The three companies studied were evaluated and the diagrams were formed in figure 19 below. Based on this visualization, a company can see where the foundations are weak and where they need strengthening. After formulating a strong brand community prism, one can then integrate it into the brand identity prism and use it as a point of reference when creating the word associations for each section of the brand identity prism. By doing this, a brand identity can be formed that has a sense of brand community. The assumption is that with the strong sense of brand community being a part of the brand identity, members of the community will help create a better-aligned communication of the brand and the loyalty and relationship with brand can also be

strengthened. These specified benefits for working on brand alignment in brand communities, work on top of the already recognized benefits of working with the Brand Identity Prism. These were recognised by Kapferer (p. 112, 2004) to help people working with the brand understand how the brand is special, stimulate creative ideas for brand activation and finally help brand managers decide when an action falls within the acceptable territory of a brand and when it does not. The Brand Community Prism should be viewed as an updated version of the Brand Identity Prism, contributing to both the contemporary theoretical and practical world of aligning brands in online communities.

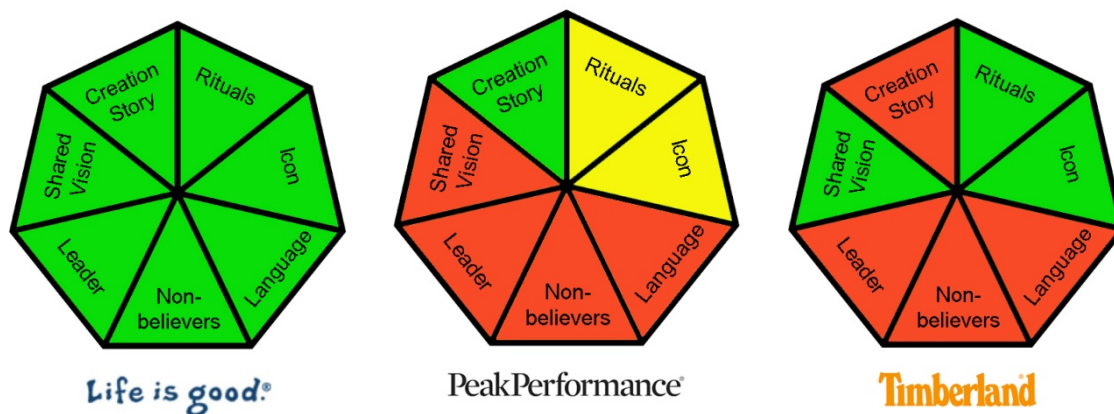


Figure 19, Brand Community Prism based on findings (Developed by group)

The colours represent; Green is 'strong, Yellow is 'neutral' and Red is 'weak'.

8.0 Recommendations & Reflections

This chapter will introduce the final reflections; furthermore it will present the final recommendations from the study including directions for future research in the area and potential future research gaps to fill.

This study sought out to find a method of controlling and aligning a brand identity when the communication of a brand is shared. What was found instead, was that it is no longer a matter of control, but a matter of managing the brand identity through the relationship with one's consumers. With managers needing to open up the conversation of the brand with consumers, they need to open up the conversation of the brand.

This study utilized an exploratory research method. The aim was to gain a deeper understanding of online brand communities and the alignment of brands online. There seemed to be a gap in current research in regards to the alignment of brands when the communication is shared with the consumer online, this was identified together with modern trends challenging many companies today to release their traditional controlled communication strategies and to accept forms of co-creation. With this aim the quantitative and statistical analysis of this study was not the main focus, however it is now evident that the data collection and research design can be improved for future studies.

Firstly, one can suggest that the sample size could be increased; 20 respondents were sufficient for this study considering the time and financial restraints and held justifiable validity as any larger sample size. However, for future research one can suggest that the size could be heavily increased as increasing the size of a sample increases the precision of the sample (Bryman & Bell p. 195, 2007).

Secondly, when interviewing the brand managers it is suggested that the method be improved in the form of a hierarchical prism comparison, with each of the managers be asked to rank their top 2-3 answers for each prism section. For example if one of the brand's personality descriptions is described with six different terms, one could simply ask the manager to rank those that are most valued or take the greatest precedence. This may allow the company to further focus their list terms to match with Kapferer's (2007) suggestion that the brand identity prism should only contain a few words for each section.

There are also avenues for improving the ‘The Brand Community Identity’ model based on Kapferer’s prism and Hanlon’s 7 keys to a successful brand community. Further research could be performed on the Net Promoter Score correlations that were found in order to realize a tested evaluation tool for online communities. This further research could then be used to bring greater validity the NPS correlations found within our study. Further research of related topics could be included for future studies such as eWOM and the effects of graphic/visual design of web-pages. This could be applied to studies covering companies’ own websites and brand communities where the room for personalization is larger compared to Facebook’s fan-sites where the design is pre-determined.

From our study, it was evident that it is now more important than ever to be listening to your customers online and brand communities are an excellent medium to do just that. Engaging and reacting with the customer seems to be the key today rather than directing and controlling.

As the Internet usage increases and it continues to humanize, the companies that are open, listening to their consumers will be the ones that build the strongest relationship with their customers. Through this research study we have realized that the Internet and social media will continue to open the gateways for people to share, debate, connect and strive for a better existence together, all of which are natural instincts. The companies that serve these needs with the drive to improve the customers’ lives, online and off, will realize the power of word-of-mouth and the brand re-enforcement that online communities can create. Brand communities, if managed properly, can be a brand aligning tool and the strongest connected army of brand enthusiasts promoting ones product; companies must realize their power, nurturing and serving them intently. Empowering the consumer is the key and those that are willing to let go of control will gain a most loyal and powerful marketing force.

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Appendices

A. Observation Graphs

Chart 1 - Comparison

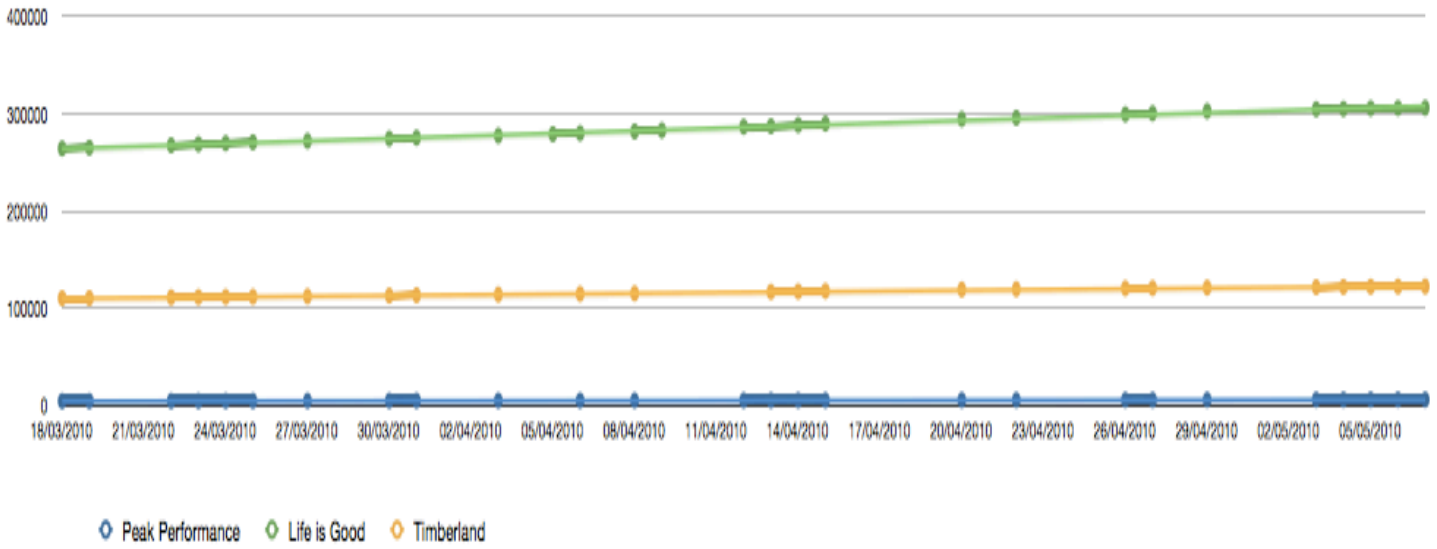


Chart 2 - Peak Performance

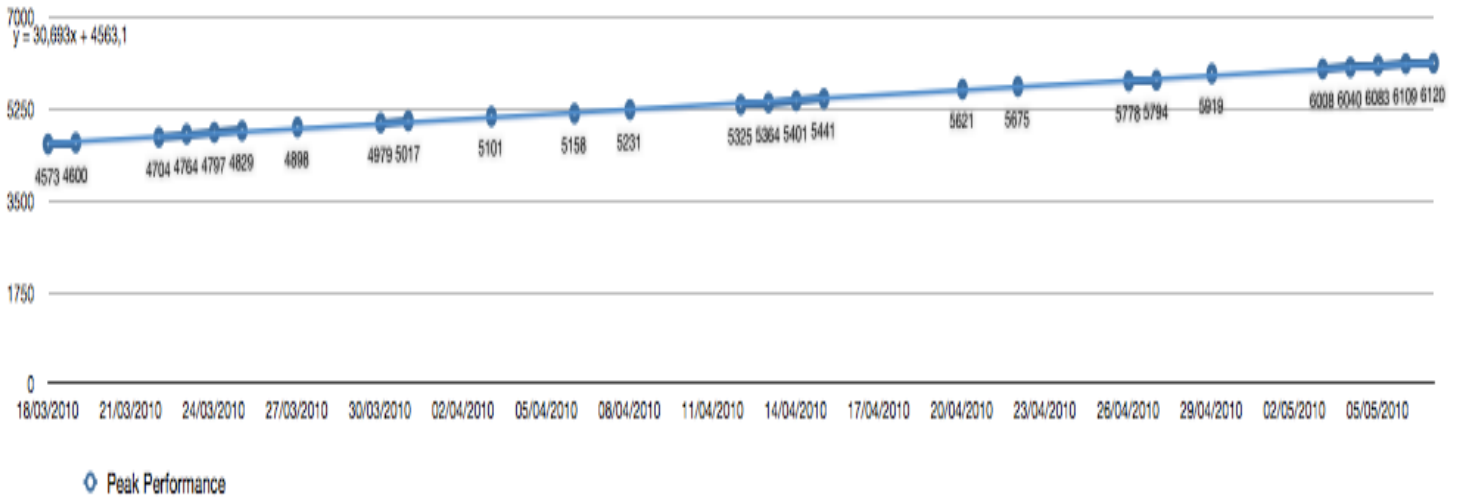


Chart 4 - Timberland

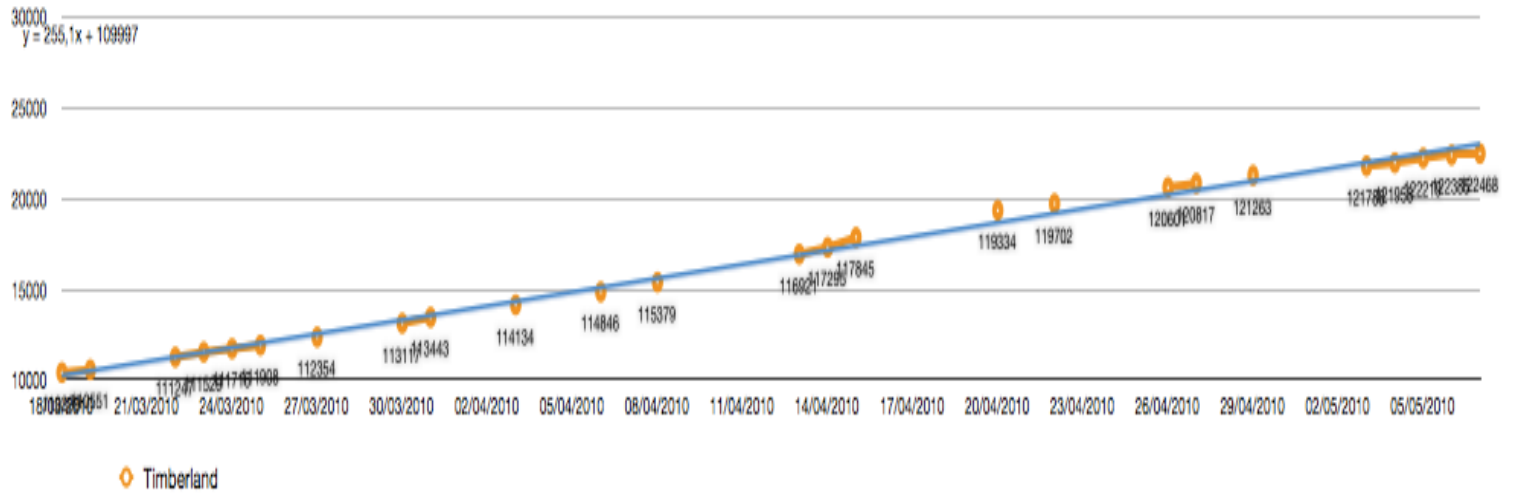
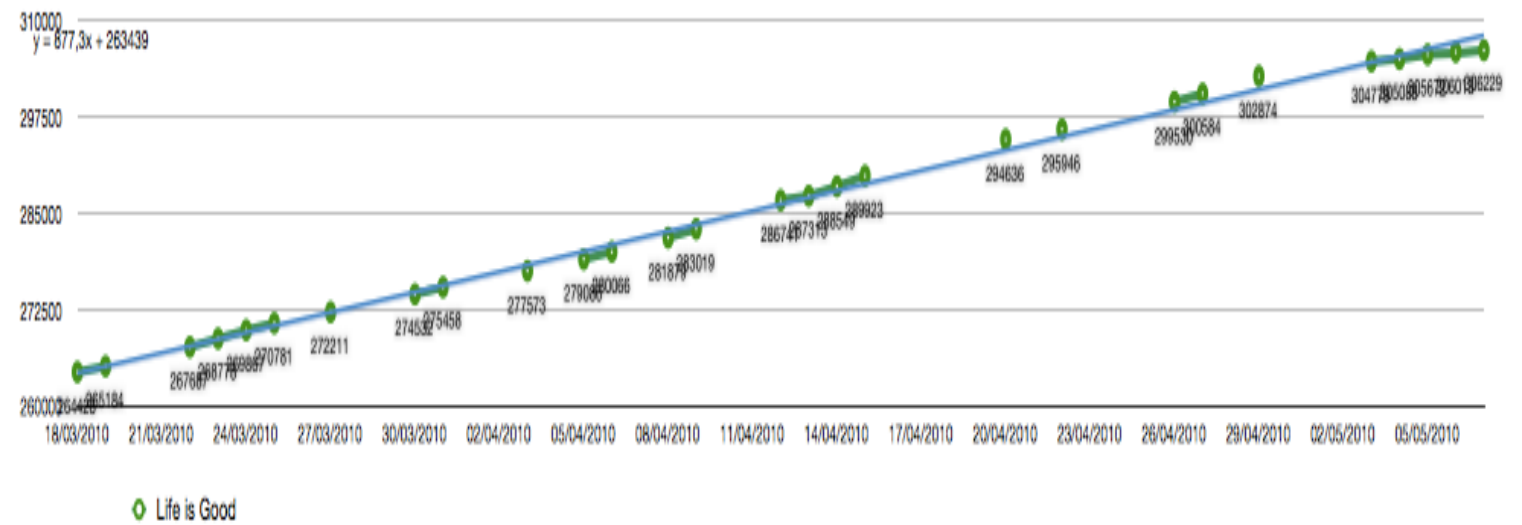


Chart 3 - Life is Good



Life is good

B. Life is Good Online Brand Manager Interview Transcript

James MacDonald, Director of Good Vibes / Marketing & Communication

Interview questions:

1. Physique:

A. What physical symbols or attributes do you associate with your brand?

- a. Three things are simplicity, humility and sense of humour
- b. Speak to consumers
- c. Simplicity is the MOST important attribute with the brand

B. What considerations have you made regarding the physical appearance of your online brand communities?

- 1) Simplicity
 - i) Stick to short brief wall postings
 - ii) 2 sentences at the most
- 2) Humility
 - i) Don't talk about Life is good as a company
 - ii) Not xxx million dollar brand, only talk about what people like about the brand
 - iii) Talk about how people feel about the brand
 - iv) Remind people what they love about their brand
- 3) Humour
 - i) People are on Facebook truly for entertaining
 - ii) If philosophical aspect too heavy...add humour
 - iii) Speak to people in a humourous way

2. Personality

A. What kind of personality does your brand have? (What characteristics and attitudes does the brand have?)

- a. Brand voice- not PR
- b. People connect with another person –human voice- there is another 'person' communicating: approachable
- c. Casual tone- shows we are people
- d. Simplicity: Not too formal
- e. Happy spirit

- B. What personality does your brand community portray? How does it portray its personality?
- a. Personal interpretations of what is 'life is good'
 - b. Jake not too much- Jake says this or that.... embody what Jake stands for but leave imagination to the people
 - c. The fans can interpret the meaning of Jake themselves

3. Culture

- A. What set of values does your brand hold?
- a. High priority on work life balance, recognition require us to have a little fun in order to be healthy – remind people of that
 - b. Conscious of the fact that the brand is for little kids and there parents
 - c. Even 18-25 market - always refers to family
 - d. Open to all family friendly consumers- available for everyone
 - e. Spread optimism to a broad market every generation
- B. How do you try to share these brand values shared in your online brand community?
- a. Highlight what company employees are doing- good things
 - b. Spread news
 - c. Voice for positive values
 - d. Foster a community of people who wants to spread optimism
 - e. FB a place they can go to when negativity takes over
 - f. Philosophy, news
 - g. Aspiring letters – trouble in their lives....fuel letters – can be funny letters

4. Self Image

- a) How do you think your consumers view themselves when they purchase or wear your brand's products?
- a. If you need a t-shirt- you go to target
 - b. If you need to communicate optimism you buy a LIG t-shirt- its not about the shirt, its about the message, you have to believe in the message to wear the t-shirt
- b) How does your brand community help consumers identify who they are?
- a. Discovered FB page through friends
 - b. Communication between brand community members
 - c. Peer-peer interaction

5. Reflection (portrayal of the ideal receiver) (“that brand is for...!”)

- A. How do you think your consumers view the stereotypical Life is good-outfitted consumer? (Outward mirror, “they are...”)

- a. Stereotype consumer- families, strong family bond, often see them on family gatherings,
- b. Outdoorsy, sporty, hikers, camping, healthy active lifestyle

B. How does your online brand community use this image?

- a. View letters support the family friendly approach, important things in people lives, and experiences within families
- b. Photos of campfires etc

6. Relationship

A. How do you describe your relationship with your consumers?

- a. Friendly, personal, one-on-one relationship with all of them
- b. Human being on the other end of the computer screen
- c. 'We are the real people'
- d. Run by people that are everyday folks...just like them

B. How does your online community strengthen this relationship?

- a. Fallen in love with LIG story,
- b. Simple phrased messages

Managerial Questions:

1. How do you choose the content that is posted by the brand?

- Go on guts
- Try to use the same voice
- Get quotes and post material from products and LIG design teams for simple interviews and sayings
- Inspired by a funny quote
- A phrase from everyday life
- Ref. to simplicity, humanity and humour

2. How have you managed or reacted to posts that do not match your brand's identity?

- Yes, although we try to give as much freedom to our members as possible, sometimes the privilege is abused in the form of advertisements. We do get rid of advertisements and certain posts that have to do with religious discussion, posting of business ads, and politics.

3. What is your vision for your online brand community?

- Becoming part of the media
- Not just a t-shirt company
- Have a voice that matches other forms of medias (e.g. radio stations)
- A community where they can always receive positivism and optimism and bring a smile on people faces

4. What have you learned from your online brand communities?

- Thousands of people that are really hungry craving for something good in their lives, to talk about good things
- Confirmed what the company thought from the start
- Simple pleasures in life is more important
- Core believes are spot on
- Affirmation

5. Is there anything else you have found interesting about online brand communities you would like to share?

Didn't need to advertise about the FB fan-site

WOM brand

NO advertisement

NO billboards

You either believe in this message or you don't.

C. Life is good Online Questionnaire Questions:

Life is good brand community academic survey.

Hello fellow Life is good fan!

Thank you so much for participating in our research study. The survey should only take a couple of minutes. The results will be used to analyze some of the strongest brand communities on Facebook today. We appreciate your time and would be happy to answer any questions you may have in regards to the survey.

Please note that multiple answers may be selected OR entered into the option "Other:" for each question.

Thanks again!

Jacob, Julia & Oliver
Lund University

Any questions can be emailed to me at Oliver.Olsson@gmail.com.

*** Required**

What is your gender? *

Male
 Female

Which age group do you fall under?

15-24
 25-34
 35-44
 45-54
 55+

Where do you currently live? *
City and Country

How often do you visit Life is good's Facebook fan page? *

1-3 times a day
 1-3 times a week
 1-3 times a month
 only during promotional activity
 almost never
 Other:

What physical attributes do you associate with Life is good? *
(i.e. soft, rough, etc)

simplicity
 quality
 comfortable
 colorful
 modest
 Other:

When I wear Life is good, I am _____.
(Please use the text below or your own words to fill in the blank)

an optimist
 proud
 humble
 happy
 showing my sense of humor.
 supporting a good cause.
 Other:

A person who wears Life is good is _____.
(Please use the text below or your own words to fill in the blank)

someone who has strong family bonds
 outdoorsy / active
 someone with a healthy lifestyle
 Business Class
 Working Class
 Other:

What characteristics would you use to describe Life is good? *

Humble
 Happy
 Simple
 Easy to talk to
 Casual
 Empowering
 Other:

In general, the company Life is good most values _____.
(Please use the text below or your own words to fill in the blank)

Family
 Work & Play balance
 Having fun.
 Simplicity
 Community
 Other:

How would you describe your relationship with Life is good? *

Personal
 Friendly
 Impersonal
 Somebody you can relate to
 Other:

How likely is it that you would recommend the Life is good fan page?

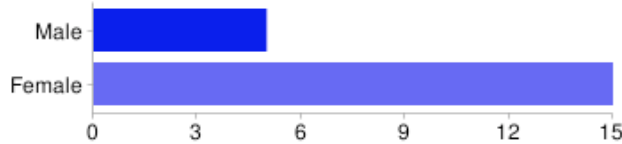
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Not likely at all ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Extremly likely

I am part of Life is good's fan page because _____.
(This survey question is optional, but we would love to hear why you feel you are a part of Life is good's fan page.)

D. Life is good Online Questionnaire Results – Google format:

20 responses

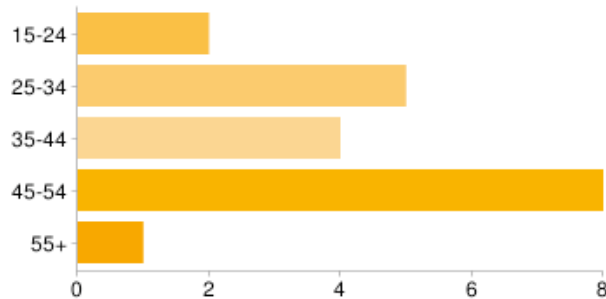
What is your gender?



Male	5	25%
Female	15	75%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

Which age group do you fall under?



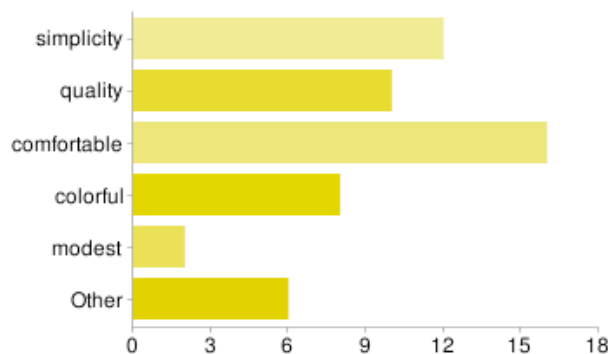
15-24	2	10%
25-34	5	25%
35-44	4	20%
45-54	8	40%
55+	1	5%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

Where do you currently live?

Leadville, CO Corona, USA Wilmington USA country Mary Esther, USA Columbus, OH Phoenix, USA Sulphur,La USA Muncie, IN USA Tinley Park, IL USA Cape May NJ-USA Essen, Germany Miami, Fl. - USA Rochester, MI (USA) ...

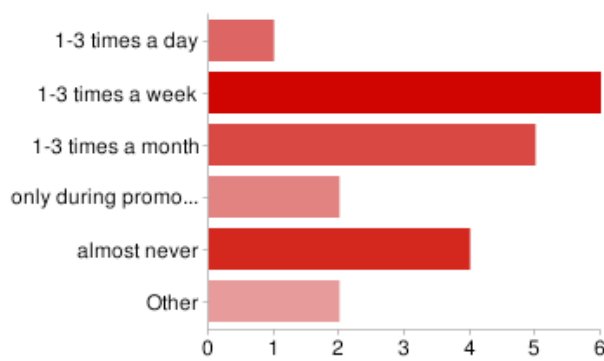
What physical attributes do you associate with Life is good?



simplicity	12	60%
quality	10	50%
comfortable	16	80%
colorful	8	40%
modest	2	10%
Other	6	30%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

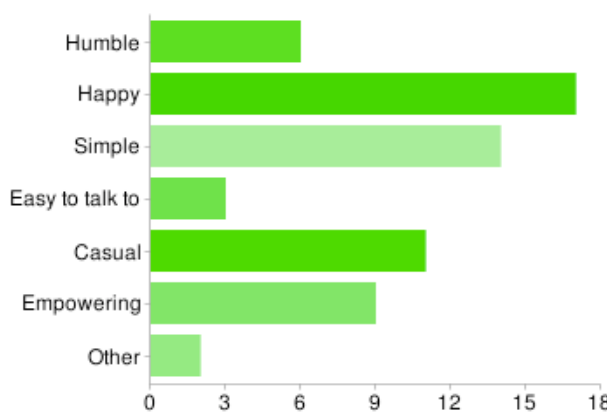
How often do you visit Life is good's Facebook fan page?



1-3 times a day	1	5%
1-3 times a week	6	30%
1-3 times a month	5	25%
only during promotional activity	2	10%
almost never	4	20%
Other	2	10%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

What characteristics would you use to describe Life is good?



Humble	6	30%
Happy	17	85%
Simple	14	70%
Easy to talk to	3	15%
Casual	11	55%
Empowering	9	45%
Other	2	10%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

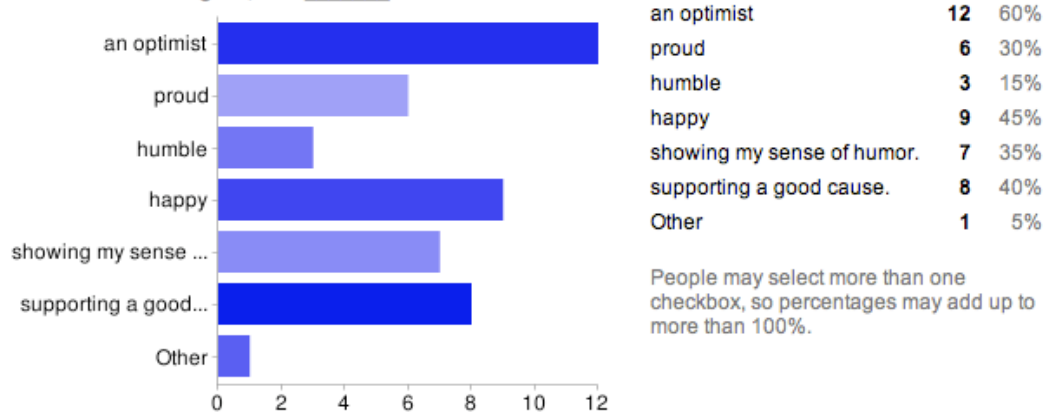
In general, the company Life is good most values _____.



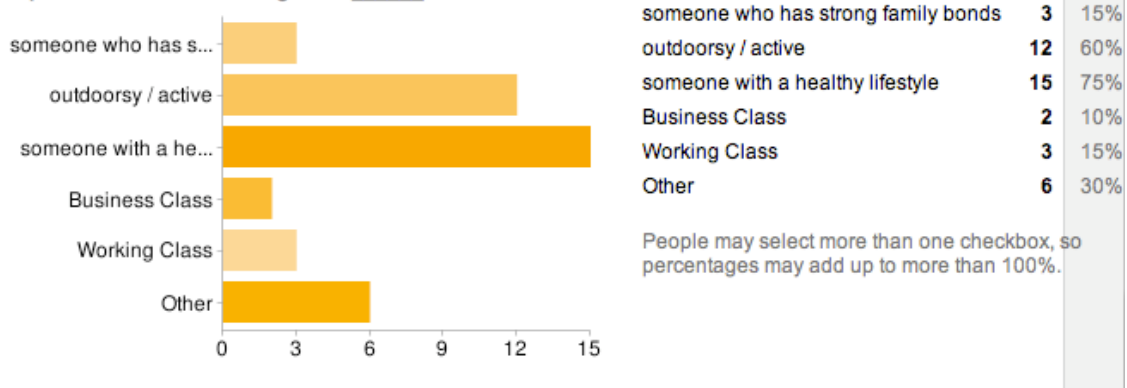
Family	4	20%
Work & Play balance	12	60%
Having fun.	8	40%
Simplicity	7	35%
Community	6	30%
Other	3	15%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

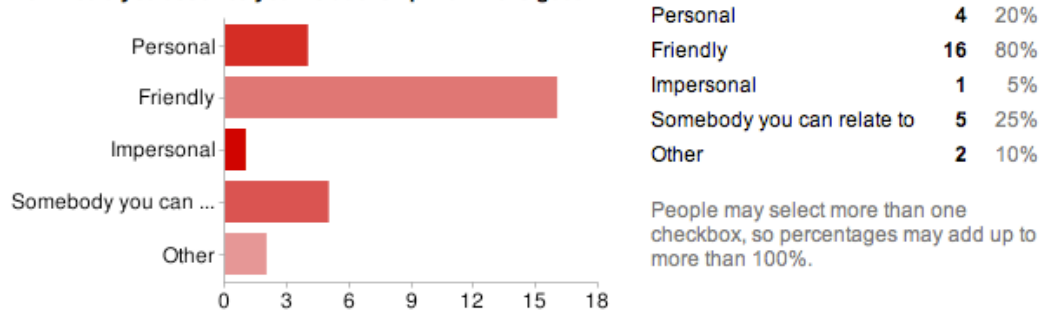
When I wear Life is good, I am _____.



A person who wears Life is good is _____.



How would you describe your relationship with Life is good?



E. Life is good Online Questionnaire Results – Complete Answers:

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1. Timestamp	Which age group do you fall under?	What is your gender?	Which age group do you fall under?	How often do you visit Life is good's Facebook fan page?	Where do you currently live?	What physical attributes do you associate with Life is good?	What characteristics would you use to describe Life is good?	In general, the company Life is good most values
2. 4/23/2010 7:24:04	25-34	Female	25-34	1-3 times a week	Leaville, CO	simplicity, quality, comfortable, fun	Humble, Happy, Simple, Casual, Empowering	Work & Play balance
3. 4/23/2010 18:59:47	55+	Male	55+	1-3 times a month	Cornus, USA	simplicity, comfortable	Happy, Simple, Casual	Work & Play balance
4. 4/23/2010 23:47:41	35-44	Female	35-44	1-3 times a week	Wilmington, USA	simplicity, quality, comfortable, cobfUl, Life is Good is my motto so its awesome to have a brand that states it for me	Humble, Happy, Simple, Casual, Empowering	Family, Having fun, Simplicity, Community
5. 4/24/2010 0:58:08	45-54	Male	45-54	almost never	country	cobfUl	Easy to talk to	Simplicity
6. 4/24/2010 15:12:43	45-54	Female	45-54	only during promotional activity	May, Esther, USA	comfortable, cobfUl	Happy, Simple	Work & Play balance, Simplicity
7. 4/28/2010 15:37:30	35-44	Female	35-44	1-3 times a month	Columbus, OH	comfortable	Simple	Having fun,
8. 4/28/2010 16:21:11	45-54	Female	45-54	Just signed up yesterday	Phoenix, USA	simplicity, comfortable, cobfUl	Happy, Simple, Casual	Having fun, Simplicity
9. 4/28/2010 19:14:27	45-54	Female	45-54	only during promotional activity	Suburba, USA	simplicity, quality, comfortable, cobfUl	Happy, Simple, Casual, Empowering	Work & Play balance
10. 4/28/2010 19:35:19	45-54	Male	45-54	1-3 times a month	Muncie, IN, USA	modest	Happy	Work & Play balance
11. 4/28/2010 23:18:41	45-54	Male	45-54	almost never	Tracy Park, IL, USA	simplicity, comfortable	Humble, Happy, Simple, Casual	Community
12. 4/27/2010 14:42:07	45-54	Female	45-54	1-3 times a week	Cape May NJ, USA	quality, comfortable, cobfUl, FUN	Happy, Simple, Casual	Work & Play balance, Having fun, Community
13. 4/27/2010 17:52:22	35-44	Female	35-44	1-3 times a month	Essex, Germany	simplicity, quality, comfortable	Happy, Simple, Casual	Family, Community
14. 4/27/2010 22:02:24	25-34	Female	25-34	1-3 times a week	Miami, FL, USA	simplicity, comfortable, modest, Corporate messages	Humble, Happy, Simple, Easy to talk to, Casual, Empowering, Strengthening	Work & Play balance, Having fun, Simplicity, Community, Gratitude, Hope
15. 4/27/2010 23:11:21	25-34	Female	25-34	almost never	Rochester, MI (USA)	simplicity, quality, comfortable, cobfUl, "geez"	Happy, Simple, Casual, Empowering	Work & Play balance
16. 4/28/2010 1:22:25	45-54	Female	45-54	it visits me every post	Bullfinch SC	comfortable, good attributes	Happy, Simple, Casual, Empowering	Work & Play balance, being fortunate or happy ever though sick?
17. 4/28/2010 1:34:20	15-24	Male	15-24	1-3 times a week	east Lansing, USA	quality, comfortable	Humble, Happy, Empowering	Having fun,
18. 4/28/2010 19:59:14	35-44	Female	35-44	1-3 times a week	Burns Tn	simplicity, quality	Happy	Work & Play balance
19. 4/28/2010 15:53:47	15-24	Female	15-24	1-3 times a month	Piedmont, US	simplicity, comfortable	Humble, Happy, Simple, Easy to talk to, Refreshing	Family, Work & Play balance, Having fun, Simplicity, Community
20. 5/1/2010 5:13:12	25-34	Female	25-34	1-3 times a day	New Delhi, India	quality	Empowering	Family
21. 5/1/2010 10:34:15	25-34	Female	25-34	almost never	Sacramento, USA	simplicity, quality, comfortable, cobfUl	Happy, Empowering	Work & Play balance, Having fun, Simplicity

	J	K	L	M
	When I wear Life is good, I am.....	A person who wears Life is good is.....	How would you describe your relationship with Life is good?	I am part of Life is goods fan page because.....
1	an optimist, proud, humble, happy, showing my sense of humor, supporting a good cause.	someone who has strong family bonds, outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle, pro active, aware outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	Beyond the obvious positive message "Life is Good" I think the company is about making people feel good about themselves and their lives, giving back and spending quality time outdoors. These are all simple things to be thankful for and jokes smile makes me smile! Happiness is a choice and it is one of the most important choices we make every day. Life really is good!
2	an optimist, proud, humble, happy, showing my sense of humor, supporting a good cause.	outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle, pro active, aware outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	Life really is good!
3	an optimist, proud, humble, happy, showing my sense of humor, supporting a good cause.	offer. Someone who looks into life and lives it rather than just wandering around in it.	Personal, Friendly	I love the positive video I got from the page. The comments, quotes and follow fan comments are always a wonderful, simple and progressive read.
4	showing my sense of humor	someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	SMPULSTE - EXCUSE THE SPELLING!!!
5	showing my sense of humor	outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	I like the products
6	an optimist	someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	I truly am a fan. I want to live in the world portrayed by the company.
7	an optimist, happy, showing my sense of humor, supporting a good cause.	outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	I love their products. I went to the website to order a Life is Good sticker for my kayak, then wanted to add them as a friend so my friends would check them out, but saw the only option was to Like the site and become a fan.
8	happy	outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	Because I always make me smile when I see it and everyone could use a smile! Life is good! ;)
9	proud, happy, supporting a good cause.	outdoorsy / active, Business Class, Working Class	Personal, Friendly	Life is short.....I really like the "reminder" to stay positive and enjoy life!
10	an optimist	someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	I try to stay + and so does Life is Good
11	an optimist, happy, showing my sense of humor, supporting a good cause.	outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	I love their philosophy and their clothing, products, etc.
12	causa.	outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	I like to hear the stories of normal people. They are mostly inspiring and help me focus on what is important in life. I also like the clothes abt.
13	an optimist	outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	I identify greatly with their mission & with what they are about. I think it's a great cause & idea.
14	an optimist, proud, humble, happy, showing my sense of humor, supporting a good cause.	outdoorsy / active, Business Class, Working Class, Someone who enjoys & values the simple things in life.	Personal, Friendly	I want everyone to think my life is good. lol... Fun, upbeat, simple, cool, happy, and have a great attitude regardless of what obstacles I am overcoming or have overcome. If we keep the attitude positive then the chances of life being good become better if it isn't already. It is all about a positive attitude.
15	showing my sense of humor	outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle, Working Class	Personal, Friendly	I love your clothes...
16	an optimist, proud, happy, supporting a good cause.	someone with a healthy lifestyle, a good attitude	Personal, Friendly	I am a fan because it makes me smile and peeks up my day when I am not in a very good mood. I can relate to Life is good and I strongly recommend it to everyone, what a change it would bring to all if everyone would read it!
17	happy, supporting a good cause.	someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	For the first time I can be sure that all conversation and comments are not a pain on my parade group of people but an entire community of people here to spread optimism and hope. ;)
18	happy	someone who has strong family bonds	Personal, Friendly	Feels life is glad it so many ways so its glad to express ur view and ideas abt it wd othr who r happy n living close life to the fullest and also for those who r into depress...
19	supporting simplicity at its best.	someone who believes in the simple joys of life.	Personal, Friendly	I love the good vibes! ;)
20	an optimist	someone who has strong family bonds, outdoorsy / active	Personal, Friendly	
21	an optimist	outdoorsy / active, someone with a healthy lifestyle	Personal, Friendly	

Peak Performance

F. Peak Performance Interview Transcript¹⁴

1. Physique

a) *What physical symbols or attributes do you associate with your brand?*

A. Graphic Symbols:

The “P”

Our Logo

+ Sub logos: “HiPe” “R&D” “Black*Light”

Using P / use branding material for ads that are used in stores. Trying to use same material in both web and offline and in retail.

B. Image (photos), Environments:

Mountains

Wilderness

Skiing

Action sports / active people

Mountain

Skiing

Aim- mountain resort brand, associated with all mountain activities

The P- mountaintop

Star- high quality brand

Mountain resort brand and ski mountain resort.

Lumberjack, more sophisticated. Rough/tough look, no fashion models. Sports person who loves nature but still lives the city life. North face – person who goes on the mountain and spends the night. City person who loves the outdoors.

b) *What considerations have you made regarding the physical appearance of your online brand communities?*

Historically our marketing is built around images portraying the attributes mentioned above. We try to communicate that same feeling in everything we do online

Consequent to use the P when posting adds

Branding material, movies etc- also used on the online brand community

Same material offline and online!!

Brand values match the person’s values and therefore the voice matches the company’s voice.

Don’t ask what the customer wants. Produce the product that your employees would want and wear.

Use images more than words. Use images that speak for themselves. Can’t really tell if it works.

Integrating other UGC into their website from Facebook and twitter.

¹⁴ The right indented answers are from the telephone interview and the left indented answers are Fredrik Kjellberg’s written responses.

2. Personality

a) *What kind of personality does your brand have? (What characteristics and attitudes does the brand have?)*

An active person with high demands on function and quality. A traveler.

Lumberjack
Rough attitude
Rough look
Masculine
Outdoorish
Natural touch
Sporty person who loves the nature still live the city life
Outdoor skiing but spend the night at a hotel
In between the extreme outdoor brand and a fashion brand

b) *What personality does your brand community portray? How does it portray this personality?*

We try as best as we can to fill it with the values above, using our Images and videos that are produced to portray that personality regardless if used in print ads, in store screens, store wallpapers, catalogs or on the web. Looking at our followers on Facebook and what kind of profile pictures many of them use we succeed in attracting active people

We also use a lot of our sponsored athletes “Friends” in our online communication (and are looking to involve them even more). The persons we sponsor are chosen more for their personal qualities than on competition results, some of them don’t even compete at all. What’s important for us is that they reflect the personality of the brand.

We do not pretend to be something we are not
Dedicated skiers at the companies, we share the world that we live in
Share photos
Product images- not important
Communicate the peak performance lifestyle
Brand values reflect personal values

3. Culture

- *What set of values does your brand hold?*

As can be read on the webpage:

For real

Long lasting

We believe in and trust people

Team Peak Performance

Building for the future

Renewal

Use images more than words, images that speaks for themselves

Relationship with skiers

- *How are these brand values shared in your brand community?*
- *Core of brand*
Our images and videos are produced to communicate our core values and has been successful in doing so in offline medias, hopefully that breaks through in online as well
- *Values*
believe and trust people: we don't censure people's comments or posts even if possible. if someone blames us or accuses us of something we try to start a dialog with that person rather than deleting the post

Quality: we never compromise on the quality of our clothes; we would never compromise with quality when producing branding content that is used on or offline, to always provide that premium feeling we are striving for

Renewal: always try to keep up with new ways of communicating. King of Style video qualifications is probably the best example of this. We're newer afraid to try something new but will trust our gut feeling and go for it.

Long lasting: we're always honest in our communication to preserve the long-term relationship. We would never say something that is not true and we would never post something under false identity

Team PP: we use our Friends-team as much as we can to get our message out there and build trust

- *Aims*
To always give that personal and premium impression regardless of where you encounter Peak performance, If its in the garment, in the store, through our friends or online.
- *Differentiates from other brands this way?*
Just about everybody working with marketing at pp has a personality that reflects the brand that makes it very easy to give a personal feeling when meeting the consumer online as no one has to pretend to be anyone else. I think that is rather unique for such a large brands Peak Performance

4. Self image (inward mirror, "I am...")

- c) *What do you believe your consumers are thinking with regards to whom they are when they wear or purchase your brand?*

We believe that most consumers are buying “an active lifestyle” regardless if they actually are active or not. We also know that many consumers see wearing peak performance as a statement of appreciating high quality and design.

They want a piece of the lifestyle, outdoor person, skiing resorts, active person,
They want the travelling lifestyle, being outdoor, being active.
Allow you to share how you are proud of the brand.

- d) *How does your brand community help consumers identify who they are [internally]?*

By signing up as Fan on Facebook, making a blog post stating that you bought a peak performance garment or “liking” a film on you tube is a way for a consumer to tell the world that; I like this brand, I share their values, I like what they do. A phenomenon much similar to the fact that people are prepared to pay for, and wear, clothing with large logos from any fashion brand.

Clothing, songs,

5. Reflection (outward mirror, “they are...”)

- a) *What do you think your customers are trying to say about themselves by wearing your brand?*

I’m an active person who makes active choices and appreciates quality, design, and function.

A sporty, strong individual, quality concerned
Design and quality

- b) *How does your online brand community re-enforce this image?*

By connecting to the brand, other fans and our ambassadors, the consumer can project the brand values on himself to make a statement of who he or she is.

Opportunity to express themselves

6. Relationship

- a) *How do you describe your relationship with your consumers?*

We have some extremely loyal fans, more loyal than basically any I came across earlier in my 10+ years of working online marketing. At PP we design stuff “that we ourselves would like to wear” and anyone who wants can buy it. That philosophy along with never compromising on quality has help gain trust, which is a necessity for gaining loyal customers.

Large group of followers- loyal customers (10years)
Mutual trust and reward system
Loyal fans source of inspiration

Relationship is the customers are followers. Very loyal. The trust is placed in Peak Performance to bring them the products they will wear. The goal is to satisfy the consumer. LOYAL.

b) How does your online community strengthen this relationship?

Through the online community the consumer now has a way of interacting and bonding with the brand in a way that was not possible a couple of years ago.

Consumers interact more and more with PP online

Tool to retrieve customer details

Get better idea of how they consumers actually are- better understanding of consumers

Usage of statistics- where PP is popular, demographics – marketing research

Increased interaction from consumer side. In social media a little over a year. Want to get more information about the customers. Design and customer service, use social media to better understand whom the consumer is. This used to be limited to those working on the retail front.

Facebook- what people react and inter react to- indicates what customers are interested in.

7. Control/Management Questions:

a. How do you choose the content that you post?

Based on season, news value, and a lot of gut feeling.

-Very little editing from PP- not deleted any posts

-Fur example- explained that they DID not use fur

-Start and encourage conversation with consumers

b. How have you managed or reacted to posts that do not match your brand's identity?

We try to start a dialogue to see how we can improve ourselves

c. What is your vision for your online brand community?

Steadily grooving itself and has now reached a size that makes it a bit easier to work structured with. WE now have a history that tells us what and when to post something. We can measure and calculate in advance what we will achieve and how much attention we can get when promoting something online.

-Reproduce the offline brand community into the online BC

-share as much info as possible (current online trend)

-add customer service support for customers

-Facebook for internal use as well

d. What have your learned from your online brand communities?

It gives a lot of demographic information of where and who likes us. It also provides feedback of what consumers' likes/dislikes about our branding content and products

Using the web analytics to find that they are very popular in specific cities Germany. Getting gender and age. Facebook, you see if people react, who reacts.

How react to content that is in line with brand identity. Never had to delete a post by a consumer. Accused of using real fur so someone posted something about the Chinese fur trade, instead of deleting, they responded and clarified that we don't use real fur.

Learning from the bad content and engage instead of deleting.

If consumers want to, they can, that's fine with that. Anyone wants to communicate with us, we'll let them. Lack of time and resources in order develop and engage the consumer. Vision is to incorporate social media to be utilized by other departments.

The shift to mobile internet.

e. Is there anything else you have found interesting about online brand communities you would like to share?

As I told you on the phone I think that the cell phones will have a huge impact on everything we produce in the online marketing field in the future. We aint seen nothingyet...

-shift to mobile internet/ broadband

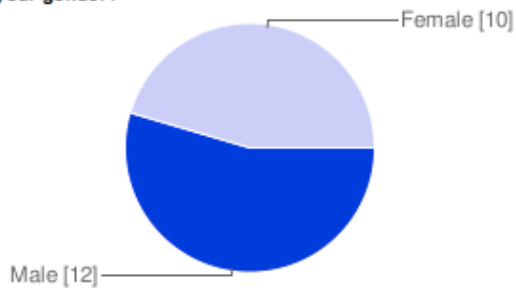
-mobile phone advancement

-will change how the online marketing activities will take place

H. Peak Performance Online Questionnaire Results – Google format.¹⁵

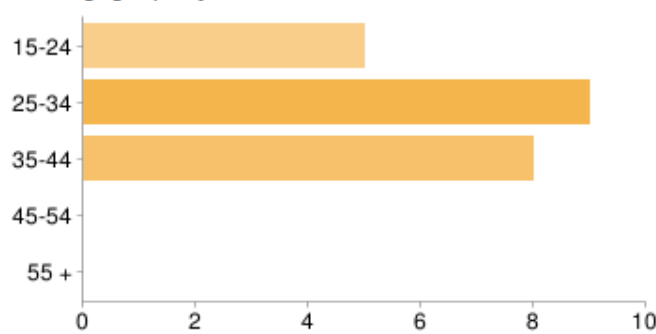
22 responses

What is your gender?



Male	12	55%
Female	10	45%

Which age group do you fall under?

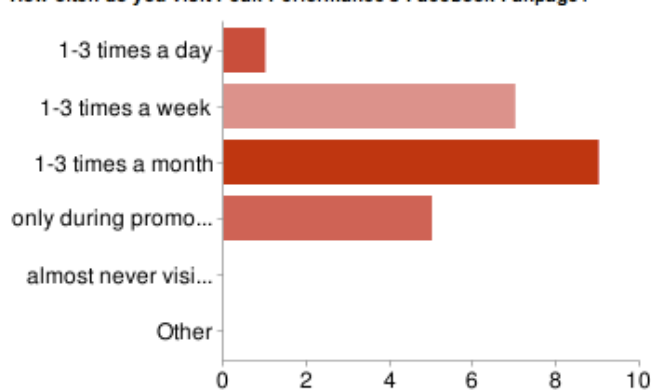


15-24	5	23%
25-34	9	41%
35-44	8	36%
45-54	0	0%
55+	0	0%

Where do you currently live?

Switzerland Lyngby, Denmark Pori, Finland Aarhus Denmark Zilina, Slovakia Oslo, Norway Stuttgart, Germany Munich, Germany Amsterdam, Netherlands madrid. spain Verona, Italy Norrköping, Sweden bergen, norway Lyon ...

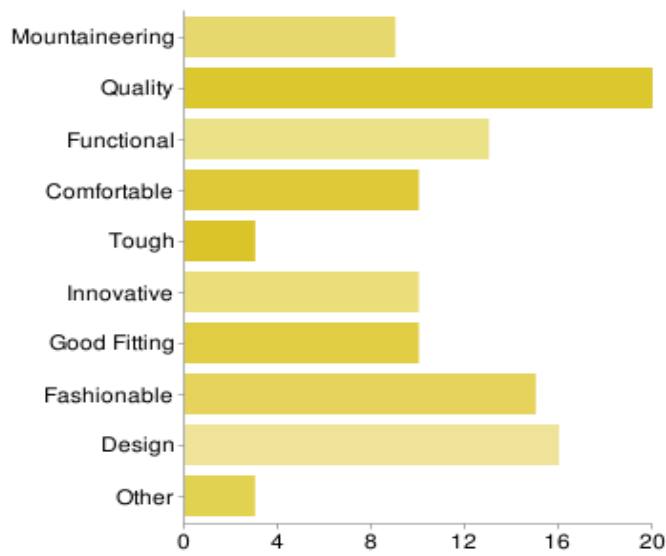
How often do you visit Peak Performance's Facebook Fanpage?



1-3 times a day	1	5%
1-3 times a week	7	32%
1-3 times a month	9	41%
only during promotional activity	5	23%
almost never visit the page	0	0%
Other	0	0%

¹⁵ Due to an uncorrectable malfunction in Google's Questionnaire Editor, it was not possible to delete two respondents even with the help of Google employees to make the total respondents 20. This however does not make the results invalid, merely giving the results a 10% larger sample pool, giving a more exact representation of the members' voice.

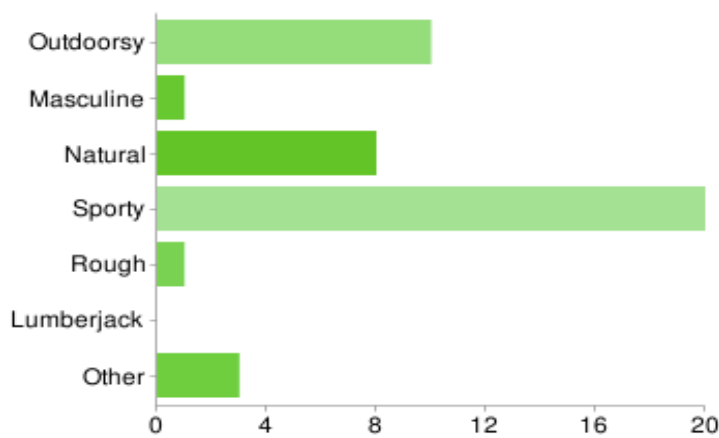
What physical attributes do you associate with Peak Performance?



Mountaineering	9	41%
Quality	20	91%
Functional	13	59%
Comfortable	10	45%
Tough	3	14%
Innovative	10	45%
Good Fitting	10	45%
Fashionable	15	68%
Design	16	73%
Other	3	14%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

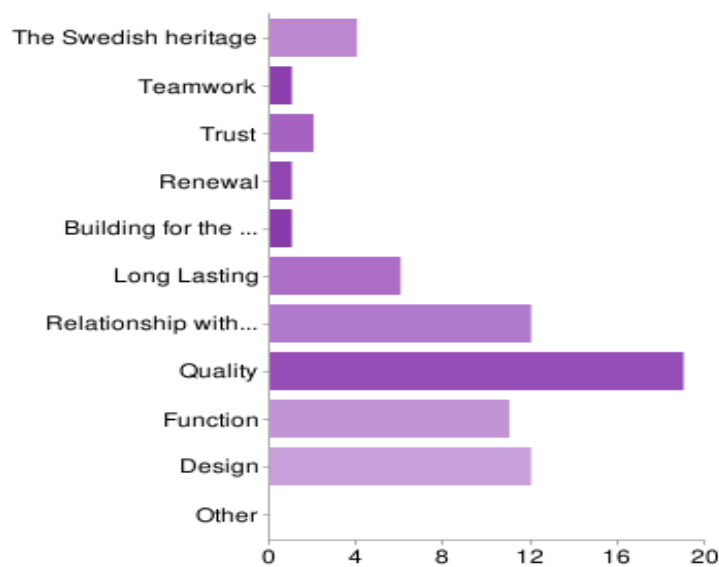
What characteristics would you use to describe Peak Performance's personality?



Outdoorsy	10	45%
Masculine	1	5%
Natural	8	36%
Sporty	20	91%
Rough	1	5%
Lumberjack	0	0%
Other	3	14%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

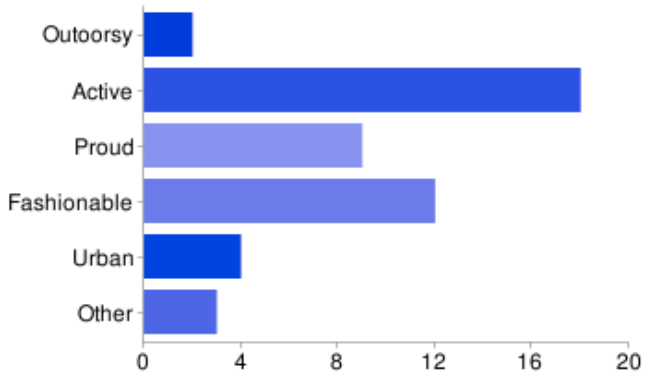
In general, Peak Performance most values _____



The Swedish heritage	4	18%
Teamwork	1	5%
Trust	2	9%
Renewal	1	5%
Building for the future	1	5%
Long Lasting	6	27%
Relationship with skiers	12	55%
Quality	19	86%
Function	11	50%
Design	12	55%
Other	0	0%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

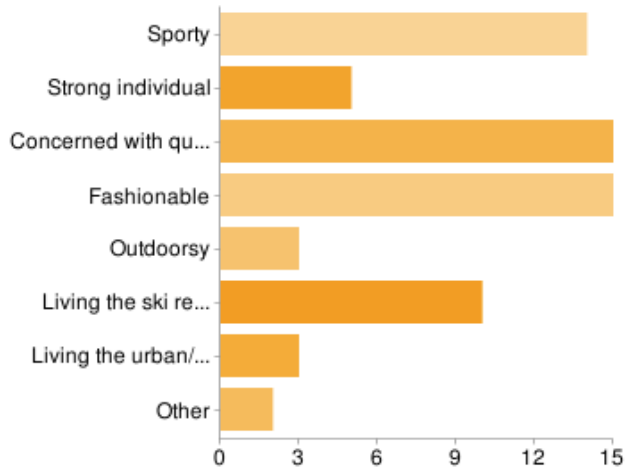
When I wear Peak Performance, I am _____



Outdoorsy	2	9%
Active	18	82%
Proud	9	41%
Fashionable	12	55%
Urban	4	18%
Other	3	14%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

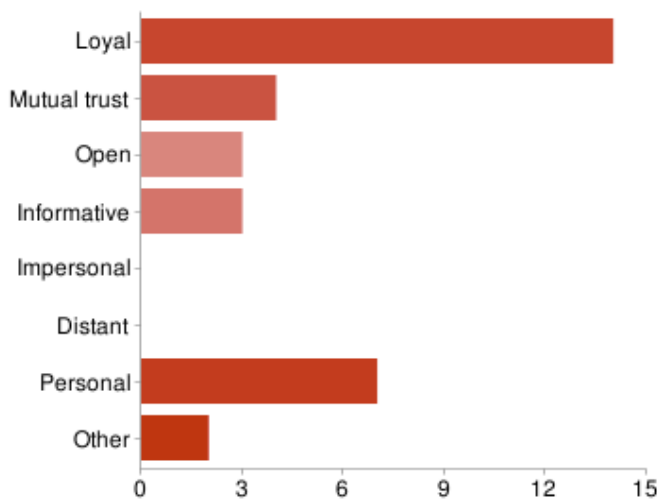
A person wearing Peak Performance is _____



Sporty	14	64%
Strong individual	5	23%
Concerned with quality	15	68%
Fashionable	15	68%
Outdoorsy	3	14%
Living the ski resort lifestyle	10	45%
Living the urban/city lifestyle	3	14%
Other	2	9%

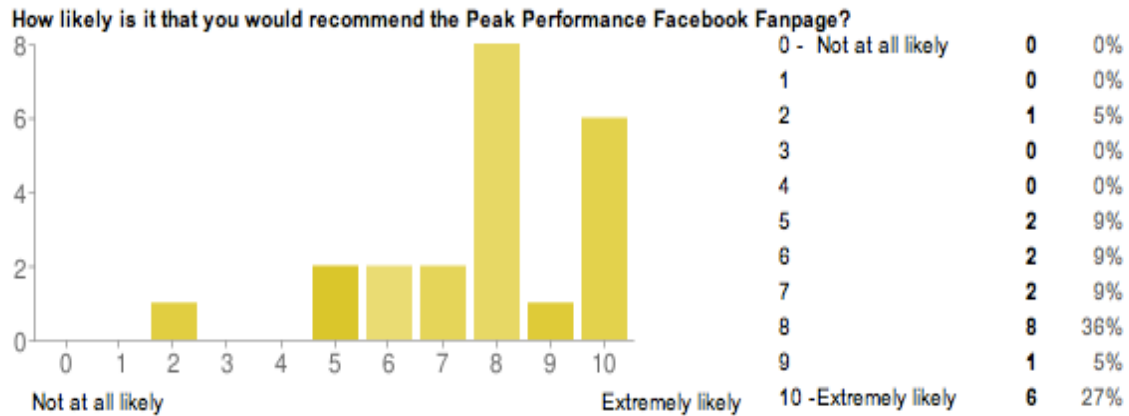
People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

How would you describe your relationship with Peak Performance?



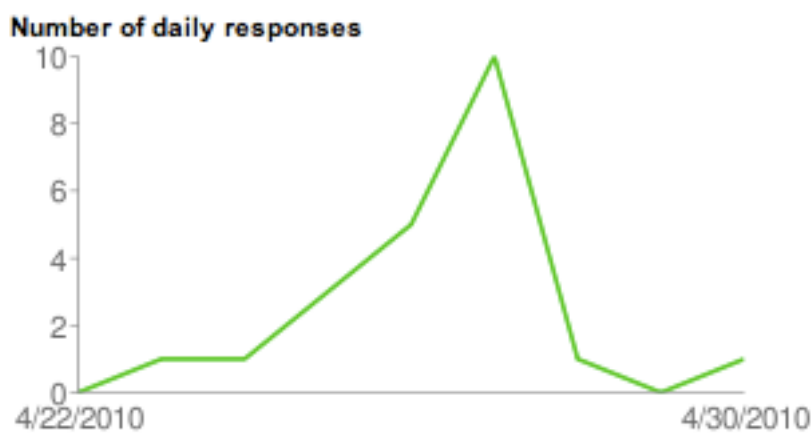
Loyal	14	64%
Mutual trust	4	18%
Open	3	14%
Informative	3	14%
Impersonal	0	0%
Distant	0	0%
Personal	7	32%
Other	2	9%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.



I am part of Peak Performance's fanpage because _____

I love the jacket of Peak Performance and want to get always all news about the new collection. I'm 24/7 skier and like very much PP's brand and superior quality, also I work in Intersport where we sell PP so I'm aware every time there's something new from PP and very often buy something from PP. My friends often say about my clothing that I'm like walking PP-commercial :) I have worked for them in 9 years I am a huge fan of Scandinavian outdoor brands, I simply love the lifestyle they represent... I work in the Oslo store and I am a huge fan of the brand! I love the brand Peak Performance beca ...



Alignment – Managing Brand Identity in Online Communities

I. Peak Performance Online Questionnaire Results – Complete Answers:

Timestamp	What is your gender?	Which age group do you fall under?	Where do you currently live?	How often do you visit Peak Performance's Facebook Fanpage?	What physical attributes do you associate with Peak Performance?	What characteristics would you use to describe Peak Performance's personality?	In general, Peak Performance most values	When I wear Peak Performance, I am	A person wearing Peak Performance is	How would you describe your relationship with Peak Performance?	How likely is it that you would recommend the Peak Performance Facebook Fanpage?	I am part of Peak Performance's fanpage because
4/23/2010 3:55:59	Female	25-34	Switzerland	only during promotional activity	Mountaineering, Quality, Functional, Fashionable, Design	Outdoorsy, Sporty	Relationship with skiers, Quality	Outdoorsy, Active	Sporty, Fashionable, Outdoorsy	Loyal	8	I love the jacket of Peak Performance and want to get always all news about the new collection.
4/25/2010 14:43:50	Male	15-24	Pori, Finland	1-3 times a week	Quality, Innovative, Fashionable, Design	Sporty	Relationship with skiers, Quality	Active, Proud, Fashionable	Living the ski resort lifestyle	Loyal	8	I'm 24/7 skier and like very much PP's brand and superior quality, also I work in intersport where we sell PP so I'm aware every time there's something new from PP and very often buy something from PP. My 8 friends often say about my clothing that I'm like walking PP-commercial :)
4/25/2010 21:58:37	Male	25-34	Zlina, Slovakia	1-3 times a month	Mountaineering, Quality, Innovative, Fashionable	Natural, Sporty	The Swedish heritage, Teamwork, Quality, Design	Active	Sporty, Concerned with quality, Fashionable	Loyal	7	I am a huge fan of Scandinavian outdoor brands, I simply love the lifestyle they represent....
4/26/2010 21:23:59	Male	15-24	Oslo, Norway	1-3 times a day	Mountaineering, Quality, Functional, Tough, Good Fitting, Fashionable	Outdoorsy, Sporty, diverse	Long Lasting, Quality, Function	Active, Fashionable, Urban	Living the ski resort lifestyle, not broke?	Mutual trust, Personal	10	I work in the Oslo store and I am a huge fan of the brand!
4/26/2010 21:31:16	Female	25-34	Stuttgart, Germany	1-3 times a week	Quality, Functional, Innovative, Good Fitting, Fashionable	Sporty	The Swedish heritage, Building for the future, Relationship with skiers, Quality, Function, Design	Active, Proud, Fashionable	Living the ski resort lifestyle	Personal	10	I love the brand Peak Performance because of its style, quality and functionality and the ability to combine these components.
4/26/2010 21:34:59	Female	25-34	Munich, Germany	1-3 times a month	Design	Sporty	Long Lasting	Proud	Fashionable	I work for Peak	8	Peak isn't a bulk commodity brand!!!!!!!
4/26/2010 22:06:04	Male	15-24	Amsterdam, Netherlands	1-3 times a month	Quality, Functional, Innovative, Design, Mountaineering, Functional, Comfortable, Design, love in details	Outdoorsy, Natural, Sporty	Relationship with skiers, Quality, Function	Active, Fashionable, Urban	Sporty, Concerned with quality, Living the ski resort lifestyle, Living the urban/city lifestyle	Loyal	5	
4/26/2010 23:28:59	Male	35-44	Madrid, Spain	1-3 times a month	Mountaineering, Quality, Functional, Comfortable	Outdoorsy, Masculine, Natural	Trust, Relationship with skiers, Quality, Function, Design	Active, responsible (nature and environment)	Sporty, Strong individual, Concerned with quality	Mutual trust, Open, Informative	8	Love the design and the function of Peak & Performance clothes. Interested ..
4/27/2010 10:15:01	Female	35-44	Verona, Italy	1-3 times a month	Mountaineering, Quality, Functional, Comfortable, Tough, Innovative, Good Fitting, Fashionable, Design	Natural, Sporty, fashion in sports	Quality, Function	Active, Proud, Fashionable	Living the urban/city lifestyle	Loyal, Personal	8	
4/27/2010 10:47:43	Female	35-44	Norrköping, Sweden	only during promotional activity	Quality, Functional, Comfortable	Natural, Sporty	Quality, Function, Design	Active, Proud, Fashionable	Sporty, Concerned with quality, Fashionable	Loyal	8	I love Peak Performance clothes. Unfortunately aren't there any Generalstore or other stores in Norrköping which sells PEAK women. :(Just a few shirts, but nothing else. I wish that Peak performance open a store in Norrköping!!!
4/27/2010 14:42:50	Male	15-24	Bergen, Norway	1-3 times a week	Mountaineering, Quality, Functional, Comfortable, Tough, Innovative, Good Fitting, Fashionable, Design	Sporty	Renewal, Long Lasting, Quality, Function	Active	Concerned with quality, Fashionable	Loyal, Personal	10	work for peak performance

Timestamp	What is your gender?	Which age group do you fall under?	Where do you currently live?	How often do you visit Peak Performance's Facebook Fanpage?	What physical attributes do you associate with Peak Performance?	What characteristics would you use to describe Peak Performance's personality?	In general, Peak Performance most values	When I wear Peak Performance, I am	A person wearing Peak Performance is	How would you describe your relationship with Peak Performance?	How likely is it that you would recommend the Peak Performance Facebook Fanpage?	I am part of Peak Performance's fanpage because
4/27/2010 15:00:13	Male	15-24	Lyon France	1-3 times a week	Quality, Functional, Comfortable, Innovative, Good Fitting, Fashionable, Design, it's the best!	Outdoorsy, Sporty	The Swedish heritage, Trust, Long Lasting, Relationship with skiers, Quality, Function, Design	Active, Proud, Fashionable, a better freerider	Outdoorsy, Living the ski resort lifestyle	Loyal, Mutual trust, reliable	10	I just had lunch with one of my best friend who i ride with. I was telling him how it was great to have some news about peak performance via my facebook page. (He is not on Facebook...).
4/27/2010 15:19:30	Female	35-44	Oslo, Norway	1-3 times a week	Quality, Comfortable, Good Fitting, Fashionable	Outdoorsy, Sporty, Rough	Long Lasting, Relationship with skiers, Quality, Function	Active, Fashionable	Outdoorsy, Living the ski resort lifestyle	Open	5	I wear Peak Performance clothes when i ride, and i only use head's skis. I had the head PEAK 78 that last season. It was the best combination. We had amazing conditions this winter in the Apes! (I came from La plagne). So sad it's over....
4/27/2010 16:54:28	Male	25-34	BELGIUM	1-3 times a week	Functional, Comfortable, Innovative, Good Fitting, Fashionable, Design	Natural, Sporty	Long Lasting, Relationship with skiers, Quality, Design	Proud	Strong individual, Living the ski resort lifestyle	Loyal, Personal	10	Anyway, to answer your question i would say that i am part of peak performance's fanpage because i want to know everything's new about peak... I always think your clothes are too expensive, but it's always worth it after all. I never had a problem with them. It's also great to see your videos. By the way you should make an other "stop go stop". It was a great movie, with a great music.
4/27/2010 17:13:32	Female	35-44	Boulder, USA	1-3 times a month	Innovative, Good Fitting, Fashionable, Design	Outdoorsy	Relationship with skiers, Quality, Design	Active, Fashionable	Concerned with individual, Fashionable	Loyal	6	I am sorry i have nothing bad to say about you ! i am one of your biggest fan. Maybe there is something. You used to have a store in Lyon three years ago but it disappears... That sucks... The nearest one is in Chamonix i think !!
4/27/2010 17:18:04	Female	35-44	Espoo Finland	1-3 times a month	Comfortable, Good Fitting, Fashionable, Design	Outdoorsy, Sporty	Function, Design	Outdoorsy, Fashionable, Urban	Concerned with quality, Fashionable	Loyal	9	Also i am a big fan of your country. (I am doing anything i can to continue my studies there), this is one of the reason i love english.
4/27/2010 18:41:05	Male	25-34	Annecy France	1-3 times a week	Quality, Functional, Comfortable, Good Fitting, Design	Sporty	Quality	Active	Sporty	Informative	6	I am sorry for my broken english. We don't speak very well english in France.
4/27/2010 20:20:44	Male	35-44	Dordrecht Netherlands	1-3 times a month	Quality, Functional, Fashionable, Design	Outdoorsy, Sporty	Relationship with skiers, Quality	Active, Proud, skiing	Concerned with quality, Living the ski resort lifestyle	Personal	8	I like to be informed of new products/lifestyle ideas and follow the sponsored athletes
4/28/2010 7:48:01	Female	25-34	Switzerland	only during promotional activity	Quality, Functional, Comfortable, Innovative, Good Fitting, Fashionable, Design	Natural, Sporty	Quality, Design	Fashionable	Sporty, Fashionable, Outdoorsy	Mutual trust, Open	7	I got the latest design in knowledge. I can follow what peak products are available
4/30/2010 3:28:31	Male	35-44	Vancouver, Canada	1-3 times a month	Functional, Comfortable, Innovative, Good Fitting, Fashionable, Design	Natural, Sporty, Like the R&D behind the products	Quality, Function, Design	Active	Concerned with quality, Thoughtful about their purchase	Loyal, Informative	2	I hope this is helpful. And you can ask me for anything to help you.

Timberland

J. Timberland Interview Transcript

1. Physique

- c) *What physical symbols or attributes do you associate with your brand?*

The Timberland tree
Yellow boot- iconic

- d) *What considerations have you made regarding the physical appearance of your online brand communities?*

Yellow boot- display products online
The tree -you will see it everywhere; the tree is also the fan-site image
Tree represent- outdoor, nature, respect for outdoor, family, friendly, open, honest

2. Personality

- c) *What kind of personality does your brand have? (What characteristics and attitudes does the brand have?)*

Outdoor, active, proactive environmental concerned, modest, New England, quality, hard working, family oriented, not allowing fashion to dictate you, don't follow others

- d) *What personality does your brand community portray? How does it portray this personality?*

How we communicate a boot
Engage activities- highlight benefits of boots
Interested members, playful and fun

3. Culture

- a) *What set of values does your brand hold?*

Hard working
Intelligent
Competitive with ourselves
Competitive as a team, not like Nike individuals

- b) *How are these brand values shared in your brand community?*

- Core of brand
- Values
- Aims
- Differentiates from other brands this way?

Smart, take risks, honest
Blog, intriguing conversations challenging
How can we get brand better- improvements
Open as possible, transparency

4. Self image (*inward mirror, “I am...”*)

- e) *What do you believe your consumers are thinking with regards to who they are when they wear or purchase your brand?*

Pride, craftsmanship, represents your value
Value of quality, hardworking, honesty, undependability

- f) *How does your brand community help consumers identify who they are [internally]?*

Involvement, engagement

5. Reflection (*outward mirror, “they are...”*)

- c) *What do you think your customers are trying to say about themselves by wearing your brand?*

Italy- high fashion
US- urban, young people
New England- khaki

Part of market and part of the world , appeals to different segment

- d) *How does your online brand community re-enforce this image?*

Targeting younger population
Core market

6. Relationship

- c) *How do you describe your relationship with your consumers?*

Open, friendly, honest, not in your face, engagement, and warmth
Bring back the customer back into the outdoors even if you are inside a store

- d) *How does your online community strengthen this relationship?*

Different expressions
Younger and faster
Allowing people to have fun

7. Control/Management Questions:

How have you managed or reacted to posts that do not match your brand's identity?

Try to allow customers to communicate in on voice
Completely irrelevant or harmful- take it down

What is your vision for your online brand community?

Growth
Communicate

Offer break through experiences
Add something to a person's day
Give something special, part of community

What have you learned from your online brand communities?

How passionate people are about the products
People are positive and helpful
They really care, and are involved

Is there anything else you have found interesting about online brand communities you would like to share?

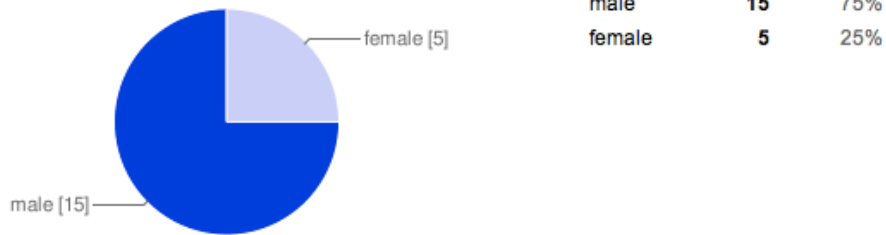
We want it to become easier for customer to find stores for different countries
Reaching out to right people, expand focus from US to other locations

L. Timberland Online Questionnaire Results – Google format:

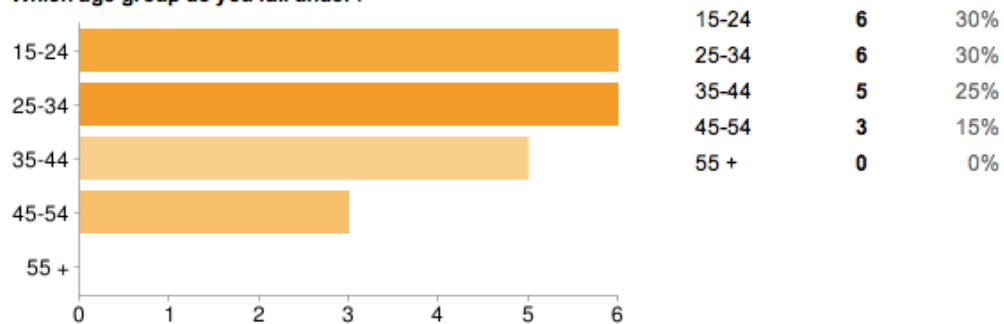
20 [responses](#)

Summary [See complete responses](#)

What is your gender?



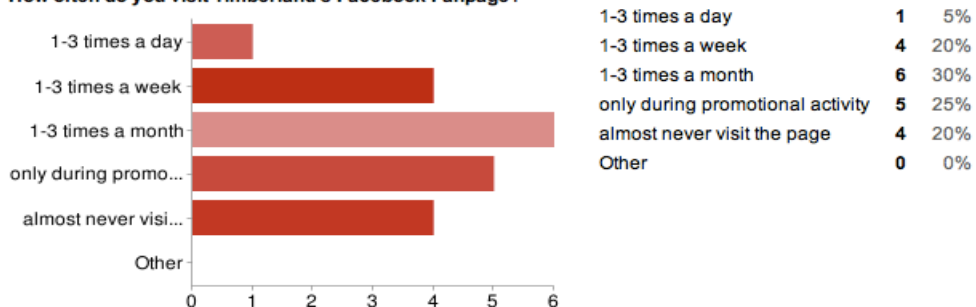
Which age group do you fall under?



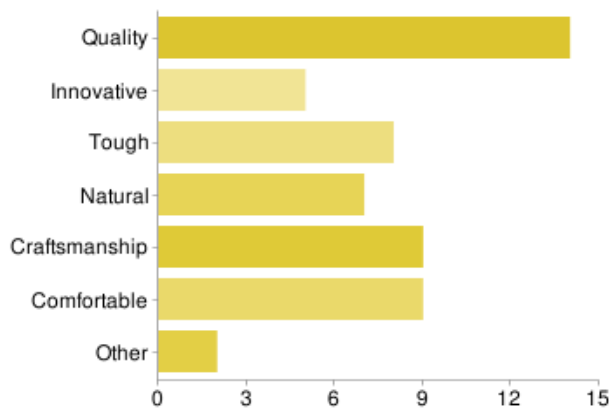
Where do you currently live?

us Dublin, Ireland torino italia roma malaysia Rancho Cucamonga, USA Tirana
 Albania Kassel, Germany Richmond, USA malaysia youngstown, USA frankfurt, germany st louis,
 US Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia Athens, Greece Jeddah ...

How often do you visit Timberland's Facebook Fanpage?



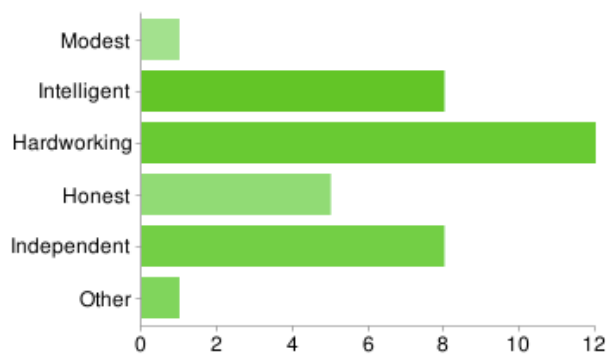
What physical attributes do you associate with Timberland?



Quality	14	70%
Innovative	5	25%
Tough	8	40%
Natural	7	35%
Craftsmanship	9	45%
Comfortable	9	45%
Other	2	10%

People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

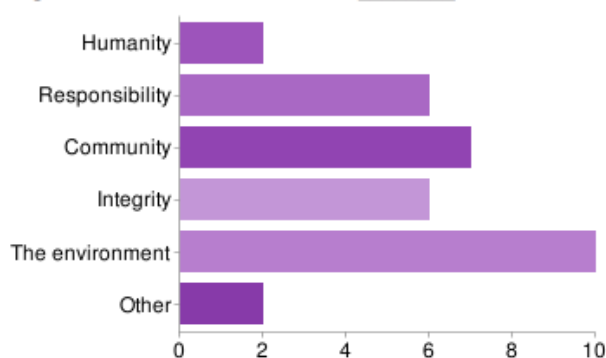
What characteristics would you use to describe Timberland's personality?



Modest	1	5%
Intelligent	8	40%
Hardworking	12	60%
Honest	5	25%
Independent	8	40%
Other	1	5%

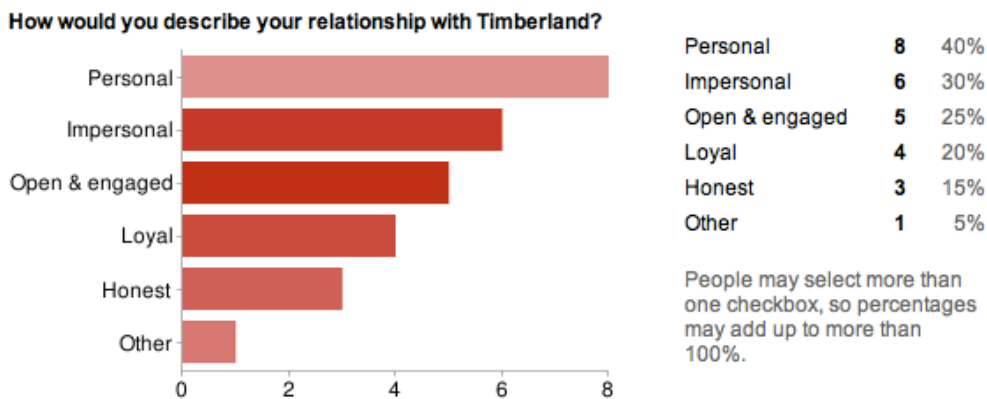
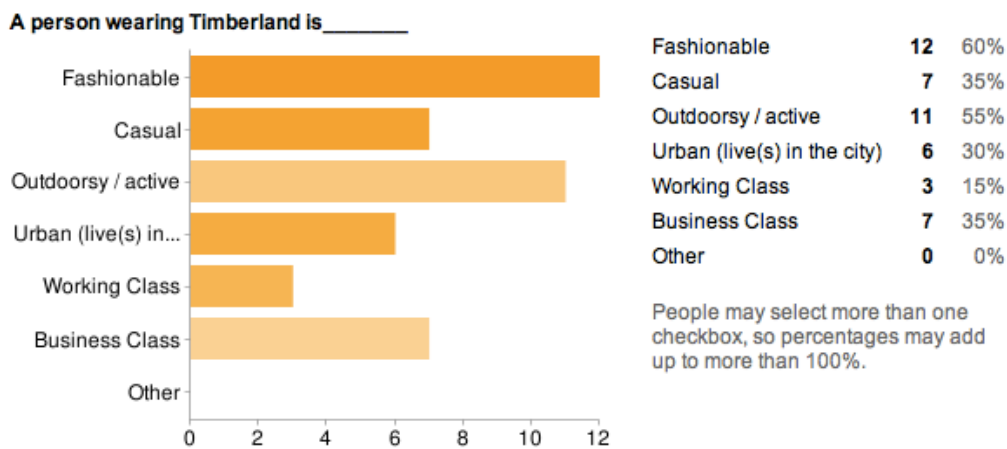
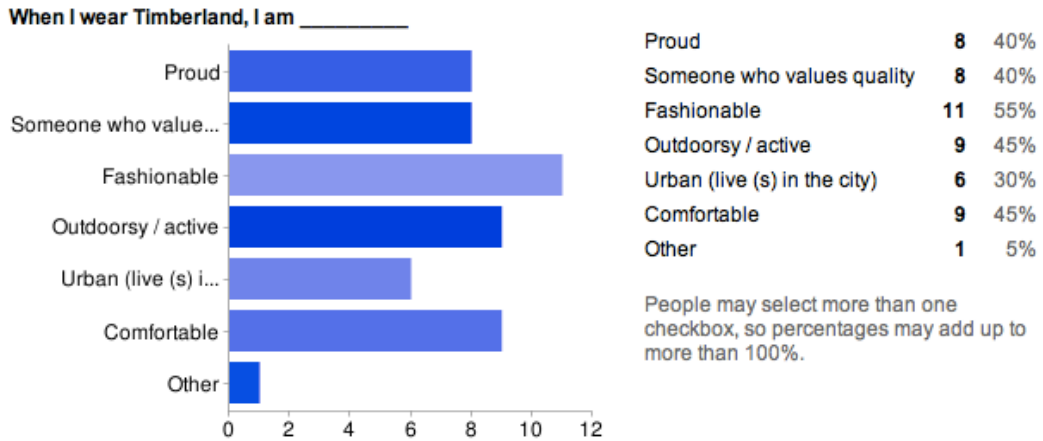
People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.

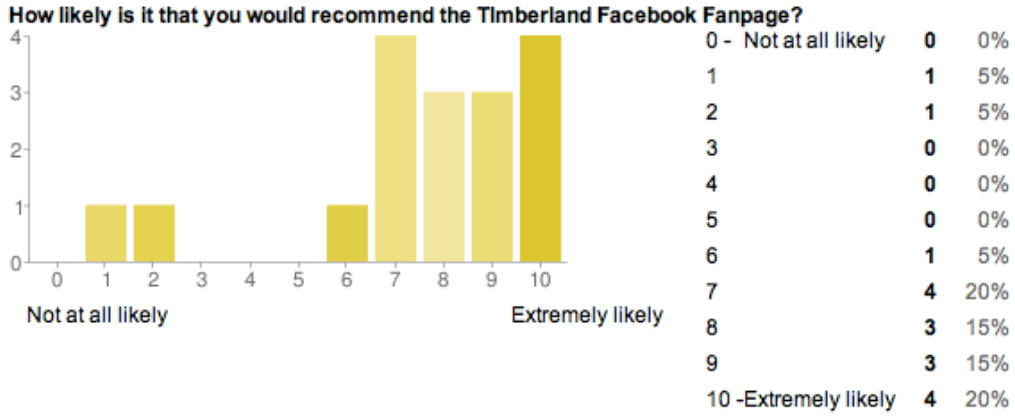
In general, Timberland most values _____



Humanity	2	10%
Responsibility	6	30%
Community	7	35%
Integrity	6	30%
The environment	10	50%
Other	2	10%

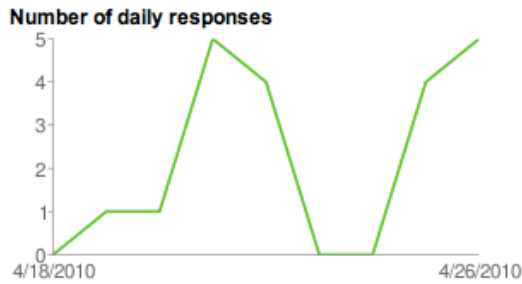
People may select more than one checkbox, so percentages may add up to more than 100%.





I am part of Timberland's fan page, because _____.

I work with Timberland i have 4 shop in Rome. active n outdoorsy I work for Timberland. i feel so great when i wear it..sure,it just part of my life... i wanna keep up w/ fashion I like to get product updates love the brand coz i want to see new collection stuff



Alignment – Managing Brand Identity in Online Communities

M. Timberland Online Questionnaire Results – Complete Answers:

Timberland	What is your gender?	Which age group do you fall under?	Where do you currently live?	What physical attributes do you associate with Timberland?	What characteristics would you use to describe Timberland's personality?	In general, Timberland's most valued values	When I wear Timberland, I am	A person wearing Timberland	How would you describe your relationship with Timberland?	How often do you visit Timberland's Facebook Fanspage?	How likely is it that you would recommend the Timberland Facebook Fanspage?	I am part of Timberland's fan page, because
4/18/2019 22:57:33	female	35-44	us	Coffmanisho Tough	Intelligent Independent	Integrity The environment	Outdoorsy / active I do not wear Timberland	Outdoorsy / active	Intentional	1-3 times a month almost never visit the page		
4/25/2019 14:59:17	male	45-54	Dublin, Ireland	Tough	Independent	The environment	Someone who values quality Proud, Someone who values quality, Outdoorsy / active, Comfortable	Outdoorsy / active	Intentional	1-3 times a month I work with Timberland have 4 shirts in Europe	10	
4/21/2019 19:22:19	male	35-44	rome	Natural	Hardworking Independent	The environment	Someone who values quality Proud, Someone who values quality, Outdoorsy / active, Comfortable	Casual	Open & engaged	1-3 times a day		
4/21/2019 19:23:47	male	25-34	malaysia	Quality, Tough, Coffmanisho, Comfortable	Hardworking Independent	Responsibility, Humanity, Community, Integrity, The environment	Outdoorsy / active Comfortable	Outdoorsy / active Business Class	Honest	only during promotional activity	7	7 active in outdoors
4/21/2019 21:30:00	female	25-34	Rancho Cucamonga, USA	Quality, Inocative, Tough, Coffmanisho, Comfortable	Intelligent, Hardworking, Honest, Independent	Responsibility, Community, Integrity, The environment	Proud, Fashionable, Comfortable	Fashionable, Outdoorsy / active, Working Class, Business Class	casual	1-3 times a week	7	I work for Timberland
4/21/2019 22:56:04	male	25-34	Traun Albans	Quality, Natural, Comfortable	Intelligent, Honest, Independent	Community, Integrity, The environment	Someone who values quality, Fashionable, Outdoorsy / active, Urban (live in the city), Comfortable	Fashionable, Casual, Business Class	Personal, Loyal	1-3 times a week	9	
4/22/2019 13:43:17	male	15-24	Kassel, Germany	Quality, Natural, Comfortable	Intelligent	Community, The environment	Proud, Someone who values quality, Fashionable, Outdoorsy / active, Urban (live in the city), Comfortable	Fashionable, Casual, Business Class	Open & engaged, Honest	1-3 times a week	8	
4/22/2019 14:18:01	male	25-34	Richmond, USA	Quality, Tough, Coffmanisho, Comfortable, waternof	Intelligent, Hardworking, Honest	Integrity	Someone who values quality, Fashionable, Outdoorsy / active, Urban (live in the city), Comfortable	Fashionable, Casual, Urban (live in the city)	Intentional	only during promotional activity	2	I feel so great when I wear it, sure I just part of my life...
4/23/2019 16:37:04	male	15-24	malaysia	Quality, Inocative, Tough, Natural, Coffmanisho, Comfortable	Modest, Intelligent, Independent	Integrity, The environment	Proud, Fashionable, Urban (live in the city), Comfortable	Outdoorsy / active, Urban (live in the city)	Personal, Open & engaged	1-3 times a week only during promotional activity	10	I like to get product updates
4/25/2019 17:00:24	male	45-54	Frankfurt, germany	Quality	Hardworking	The environment	Outdoorsy / active	Outdoorsy / active	Intentional	1-3 times a month	7	
4/25/2019 17:04:54	male	35-44	atouis, US Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia	Coffmanisho Quality	Hardworking Intelligent, Hardworking	The environment Community	Outdoorsy / active, Comfortable Someone who values quality	Outdoorsy / active	Personal	1-3 times a month	9	
4/25/2019 17:06:38	female	15-24		Quality	Hardworking	Community	Someone who values quality	Fashionable	Open & engaged	1-3 times a month	10	I love the brand
4/25/2019 17:08:00	male	15-24	Athens, Greece	Quality	Independent	Responsibility	Fashionable Proud, Someone who values quality, Fashionable	Fashionable Business Class	Personal	1-3 times a month	9	
4/26/2019 17:51:33	male	15-24	Jeddah, Saudi Arabia	Quality, Inocative, Tough, Coffmanisho, Comfortable	Hardworking, Honest, Independent	Responsibility, Community, The environment	Outdoorsy / active, Urban (live in the city), Comfortable	Fashionable, Casual, Outdoorsy / active, Urban (live in the city), Working Class, Business Class	Personal, Open & engaged, Loyal, Honest	1-3 times a month	10	002 I want to see new collection shirt
4/26/2019 20:28:17	female	15-24	strasbourg, france	Tough, Natural	Hardworking	The environment	Outdoorsy / active	Outdoorsy / active	Intentional	almost never visit the page	6	
4/26/2019 20:28:32	male	35-44	düsseldorf, germany	Natural Coffmanisho	Hardworking	Community	Fashionable	Fashionable Business Class	Personal	only during promotional activity	6	
4/26/2019 20:30:28	male	45-54	Istanbul, tr	Quality	Hardworking	Community	Outdoorsy / active	Casual, Outdoorsy / active	Personal	only during promotional activity	7	
4/26/2019 20:31:30	female	35-44	london	Quality	Independent	Responsibility	Fashionable Proud, Someone who values quality, Fashionable, Outdoorsy / active, Urban (live in the city), Comfortable	Fashionable Business Class	Intentional	almost never visit the page	8	
5/20/2019 0:49:33	male	45-54	Auckland, New Zealand	Quality, Tough, Comfortable	Hardworking	The environment	Outdoorsy / active, Urban (live in the city), Comfortable	Fashionable, Casual, Outdoorsy / active, Urban (live in the city), Working Class, Business Class	Personal, Loyal, Honest	1-3 times a week	10	
6/4/2019 10:30:34	male	35-44	Torino, Italy	Quality, Inocative, Natural, Comfortable	Intelligent, Hardworking, Honest	Responsibility, Integrity	Proud, Fashionable, Outdoorsy / active, Comfortable	Fashionable, Working Class, Business Class	Personal, Loyal	1-3 times a month	9	