

Cult Analysis of Branding on Apple iPhones

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ABSTRACT: This paper introduces the concept of a cult brand for a more accurate understanding of the extreme loyalty that customers show towards specific brands. This paper focuses on the brand Apple and it explores the elements for which it is considered a cult brand and the impact of its origin on sustaining its cult appeal. Based on the fact that many brands rely on emotional characteristics to obtain consumer's interest and attention, the country responsible for their conception is usually a warranty for quality and respect, features transferred to consumers. One of the most recognizable cult brands is Apple, a trend-setter in innovation. Many Companies have tried to discover and to copy the business model that makes Apple a unique brand, not being able to understand that maybe its secret relies on various factors. Through exploratory research, the research focuses on Apple's Corporate mythology, its brand name, brand origin with its geographical provenance and also the community surrounding it. The results of the study revealed that the brand origin had a major role in creating the image that Apple sustained in the last decades, the conclusion reinforced the idea that on a solid foundation can be built a complex structure.

KEYWORDS: CULT ANALYSIS, BRAND LOYALTY, BRAND ORIGIN

INTRODUCTION

Marketing is defined as the set of tools, processes, and strategies you use to actively promote your product, service, and company. The impact of brand origin is a theme frequently researched in the literature anterior studies focused on the effect on consumer's purchase decision brand or perception towards the brand. This Study focuses on a distinct kind of brands which set a new trend on the market, pioneering brands that used innovation to create a quality-based product known as cult brands.

A Cult brand refers to a product or a service that has a relatively small but loyal customer base that verges on fanaticism. A cult brand, unlike more traditional brands, has customers who feel a sense of self-ownership or vested interest in the brand's popularity and success.

The brand's evolution indicates a stable corporate culture and the ability to adapt and to anticipate consumer's needs in a way hard to imitate. These are the reasons we consider Apple the best brand to examine as being a Cult one, needless to list the qualities that it has in the select category of Cult Brands.

In this paper, we explore the connection between Apple's corporate origin and the cultist universe that surrounds the brands. This paper also brings forward the consumer's perception, in order to understand their loyalty and attachment for Apple iPhones.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In this section of the paper, we will bring to attention the concept of cult brand, itemizing its precursors, presenting different definitions that exist in the literature and some common characteristics, and also the notion of *brand value*, *brand loyalty*, with its definition and particularities, in an attempt to reveal how the latter influences the former.

Srivastava and Shocker (1991), "Brand value is not measured in terms of its advantage over competitors in the market but also about the future prospects it may earn which might be accessible in the market".

Schouten and McAlexander (1995), introduces the subculture of consumption as an analytic category through which to better understand consumers and the manner in which they organize their lives and identities. Recognizing that consumption activities, product categories, or even brands may serve as the basis for interaction and social cohesion, the concept of the subculture of consumption solves many problems inherent in the use of ascribed social categories as devices for understanding consumer behaviour.

Robert V. Kozinets (1999), focused on studying such groups which are present in the online environment that were called *virtual communities of consumption*, termed as E-tribalized Marketing. They were defined as "affiliate groups whose online interactions are based upon the shared enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, a specific consumption activity or related group of activities."

Lee, Clement JianBeng and Lam, JeenMun and Ng, Sutkian and Ooi, ShiYing and Tai, Yu Shiuan (2019), have studied on the topic "impact of branding towards cosmetic products: a comparison study between generation and generation Z's impact of branding towards consumer behaviour. This research aims to examine the relationship between brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand credibility, brand congruence and brand image which have a significance over the dependent variable which is the consumer behaviour. Branding helps for getting attraction from the customers, and being a cosmetic product customers are more loyal to their products because of its importance.

Chris Tyas, Chief Strategy officer at Impero, As of 2022, argues that successful cult brands avoid that trap (*Brand growth can bring with it risk aversion*), following their originality wherever it might lead.

According to Statistics as of 2022, 76% of consumers around the world consider themselves loyal to one or more brands - an increase of 13% from 67% in 2021. But the ways in which consumers are loyal, as well as the brands they offer their loyalty to, has changed.

INDUSTRY AND COMPANY PROFILE

Apple Quick Stats

Founders: Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, Ronald Wayne

Founded: Established on April 1, 1976 in Cupertino, California by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, and Ronald Wayne, to sell the Apple I personal computer kit.

iPhone: The first iPhone was released in 2007 and sold roughly 300,000 in the first weekend. Since then, Apple released 38 different iPhone models, including the latest iPhone 14 lineup (Jan 2023).

Bigger than Microsoft: As of 2022, Microsoft and Apple shared the \$2 trillion market value club but Microsoft is still at \$2.5 trillion and Apple has crossed the \$3 trillion mark.

Apple Cult Brand Summary

People were drawn together by common bonds, an aspect on which cult branding is based. Creating an experience for the consumer is the first step in obtaining loyalty and engagement. There are seven golden rules of cult branding, according to Ragas and Bueno, mentioned in the book *The power of cult branding, 2002* :

1. Consumers want to be part of a group that's different.
2. Cult brand investors show daring and determination.
3. Cult brands sell lifestyles.
4. Cult brands will make the customers as brand evangelists.
5. Cult brands always create customer communities.
6. Cult brands are inclusive.
7. Cult brands promote personal freedom and draw power from their enemies.

Apple's approach focuses on each statement from above and discusses it in a profound manner. The first rule considers that in a society almost everyone is addicted to communications, consumers develop the necessity of belonging to a different group. This need brings along the feeling of uniqueness which is strongly connected with the concept of a Cult Brand. Apple is not only a leader innovator, but also a brand that encourages consumers to be and to think differently to stand out.

This argument is sustained by the company's attitude toward hierarchy, the employees are encouraged to dress casually, to act free, in order to reduce stress and to create a good working environment. Their actions are not limited by job duties, each employee can participate in the creating process and usually everyone must agree to an idea before it's implemented. Apple has the same mode, on consumers, proven to be an intelligent way of showing them they can find support in the brand's values.

A cult brand relies also on the strength of its inventor. This rule is very much linked with the brand's origin. The history of Apple Computers tells us that Steve Jobs' evolution can be associated with the *Heroic Adventure Myth*. According to him, there are elements like *the call to adventure, the helper, the journey, a trial period, apotheosis, flight and resurrection* that form a heroic adventure.

Apple Computers is the epitome of self-empowerment and self-fulfilment combined in one brand. As *Christopher Escher*, former Vice President of Corporation Communications, noted : "They turned computers, which are essentially a product for business people to crunch numbers with , into symbols of self-realization and liberation against social constraints."

In 2001, Apple announced the launch of the sleekly designed iPod. Apple focused on the small size of the device, ease of use, and the sleek design, and transformed it into the digital music player. After the launch of iTunes, Apple realized that people don't just want to carry music, they want to jam out to songs that reflect their personalities. This attention to what customers want--form, ease of use, and individuality has paid off more than anyone could have ever guessed.

In 2007 Apple brought their sleek design into a new market. Apple released the iPhone and a whole new world of customers was open to them. Consumers went wild for the new phone, which is no surprise considering Apple spent years perfecting an easy to use interface for their customers.

Apple doesn't just build products, they build products that their faithful want. And they have a variety of interesting ways of preaching and listening to the choir. For starters, Apple hosts a User Group University at Mac-world expo. Not only does Apple come away with invaluable feedback from a great group of customers, but it re-energizes the key faithful.

Developing a strong relationship with the consumers determines them to seek the same values in other people. These Customer communities are based on three Components:

1. A shared Consciousness
2. Rituals and Traditions
3. A sense of moral responsibility

Brand Communities present a strong degree of commitment, a good example is the online community *ilounge.com*, dedicated to the Apple iPod. Members discuss every piece of information regarding the existing iPod and make propositions about the new design for the next generation.

Although cult brands are considered by many exclusive brands, the authors Ragas and Bueno described them as being rather inclusive, based on the argument that companies are open to include in their customer list any person who embraces the brand's values. From these perspectives, the brand's origin facilitated the entrance on foreign markets by providing a certain level of quality and familiarity with other products.

This Study examined the cult nature of Apple, by analyzing the Golden Rules of cult brands that sustain the hypothesis. Our goal was also to explore the connection between formation of the cult brand and its origin, an element proven to have an important influence on the perception people have about the company and the brand. This perception is strongly related to the country-origin, in this case, people are especially influenced by the country's prosperity, lifestyle, technological development and culture based on the concept of freedom.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the topic is to discuss the method used in the research. It is also a vital component in order to achieve the objective of the decision clearly, accurately and reliably. The purpose of this topic is to describe the research methodology of the study, explain the sample selection, describe the procedure used in designing the instrument and collecting the data. In this paper, Primary and Secondary data collection is used.

Primary Data

Primary data is the original data that has been collected specially for the purpose. This type of data is generally fresh and collected for the first time. The collection data tool that has been used in this study is Questionnaire.

Secondary Data

Secondary data is the data that has been collected and compiled and readily available from other sources. It has been collected through various sources like online articles, research, newspaper and books etc.

Sampling Unit

The Sampling Unit included the Customers.

Sample Size

Number of people surveyed for the sample consists of 126 customers.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Number of Samples: 126

Table no.1
Apple iPhone's are a trust-able brand

<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Strongly Agree	52	41
Agree	62	50
No answer	9	7
Disagree	1	1
Strongly disagree	2	1
Total	126	100

Source: Secondary data

From the table and graph 49% agree that the iPhone is a trust-able brand and 41% strongly agree that it is a trust-able brand.

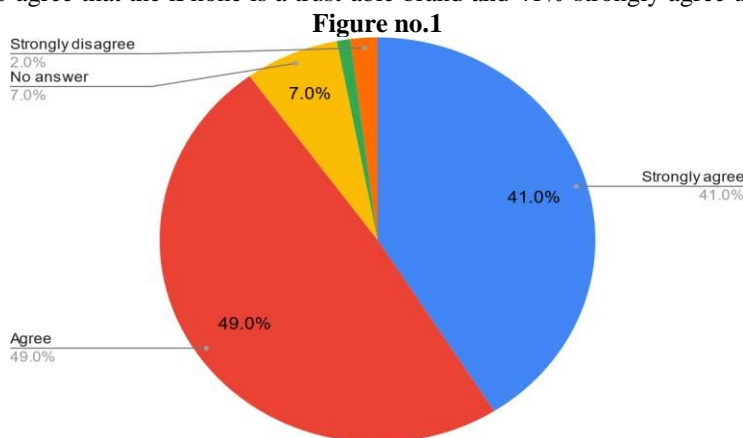
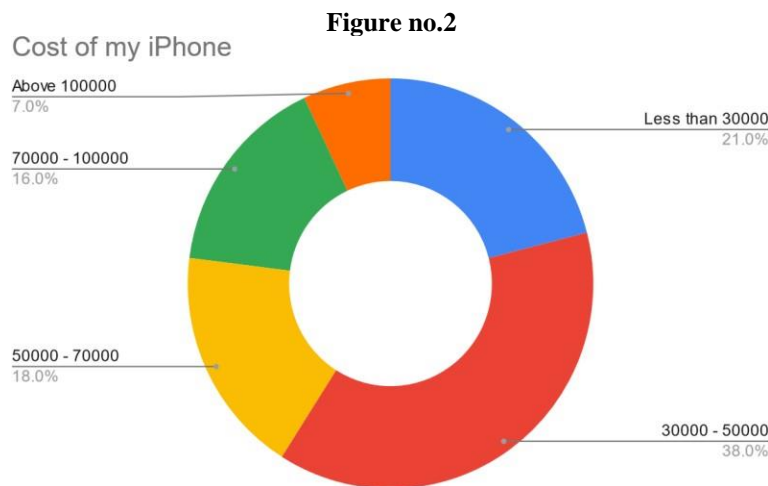


Table no.2
The cost of my iPhone is

<i>Particulars</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Less than 30000	26	21
30000 - 50000	48	38
50000 - 70000	22	18
70000 - 100000	21	16
Above 100000	9	7
Total	126	100

Source: Secondary data

The above table no.2 and chart shows that 38% of respondents have iPhone costing 30000 - 50000. And 17% of respondents have a cost of more than 50000 - 70000. Few of 7% of users have above 100000.



FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS AND CONCLUSION

Findings

1. Majority of the iPhone user's phone is costing above 50000. Few of them are in the range of 50000 - 70000.
2. Majority of the respondents are in the opinion that the Apple iPhone is a trust-able brand.

Suggestions

- Iphone is a very good brand and people love the brand, but for a normal person, it is very costly and it should be better if the company reduces the cost.
- Complexity in managing and using iOS is costly apps and no widget support. It must be simplified by ensuring safety and security.

Conclusion

Modern society gathers a large spectrum of elements that create a perfect environment for developing cult brands. It is found that more than a brand it is a part of their life and they are madly loved by the brand. They love the iPhone and they feel proud and confident while using iPhone. The cost of the iPhone is very high, but still people buy it because of brand image and status. More than a gadget it creates and boosts their prestige and confidence. From the above facts, it is clear that iPhone is not only a brand, *it is a Cult Brand* and it creates love and madness towards it.

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