When brands stand for something - or you stand for brands

What is the social interaction dynamic between consumers and fashion brands?

RESEARCH REPORT

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**Declaration of Authorship**

I hereby certify that this thesis has been composed by me and is based on my own work, unless stated otherwise. No other person’s work has been used without due acknowledgement in this thesis. All references and verbatim extracts have been quoted, and all sources of information, including graphs and data sets, have been specifically acknowledged.

Date: 19.06.2017  
Signature:  
(Marion Hindrichs)
Being a firm believer in the power of consumers and marketing as a driving force in change, it was clear to me at a very early stage that my thesis was to focus on these topics. The effect of influencer marketing on consumers’ purchasing decisions fascinates me. As fashion is a luxury good, lately marketeers desperately attempted to generate a loyal customer in the fast changing environment. Fashion brands are reaching for the last straw by overwhelming the market with brand ambassadors and co-created consumer friendly products. In a world where long lived social constructs are questioned, is that actually what consumers want?

As Coco Chanel herself puts it ‘Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with idea, the way we live, what is happening.’ I believe that the fascination for fashion lies in the fact that we face it everyday. Fashion influences society and vice versa, thus fashion goes beyond clothes, yet is a mirror for all social, cultural, technological developments.

The Marketing and Retail Specialization has introduced me to the world of postmodern marketing and shaped my understanding of innovative approaches based on an academic foundation. Therefore I found the postmodern view that we consume to belong, whilst focusing on aestheticized consumption, very intriguing. Furthermore, I have always questioned the idea of set market segments, as it simplifies consumers whilst putting them into boxes of target groups. Although it is important to state, that this approach can not be seen as the sole reason for a loyal consumer base or a businesses’ success.

My work at Ace&Tate confirmed my belief that brands nowadays are strongly trying to establish brand communities and seek a neo-tribal following. This is very understandable as word-of-mouth marketing among consumers makes or breaks a brand. Furthermore the strong focus on customers and also local offerings lies in contrast with the current fast fashion dogma. Therefore I am very eager to find out more about the interaction between consumers and fashion brands nowadays.
Glossary

**Market segments**: A homogeneous group of people often sharing the same demographics, who don’t interact with one another other than consuming the same product.

**Consumer tribes**: Understood in this thesis as a heterogeneous group of people (in contrast to market segments, which are homogeneous groups) sharing the same passion on a social level for a fashion brand and interacting with this brand to a greater extend than just product consumption. Furthermore, I will refer to these consumer tribes also as neo-tribes.

**Serendipitous Brand Hijack**: Accidental take-over of brand values by a community.
'To put it simply, the link is more important than the thing' (Cova, 1997)
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Introduction

Rationale

‘Consumption as a system of meaning is no longer for needs or pleasure, but rather as a system of signs’ (Baudrillard, 1968)

According to this the clothes we put on everyday represent our identity, express the archaic sense of belonging to certain groups and ultimately influences other peoples first impressions. Even though fashion trends constantly change it is noteworthy that there is a trend towards local streetwear brands among youth culture developing. Smaller cities like Copenhagen, Amsterdam or Antwerp represent an alternative to the tourist overrun urban hubs. While growing up in a globalized environment, the Millennial Generation has explored the world, yet maintained a feeling of patriotism. Originality is highly desired by today’s youth in reaction to high street fashion for the masses. Local brands and designers benefit from this newly founded sentiment. It is clear that there is an almost fanatic sense of hyping these local brands, who as a result have developed a highly loyal customer group. Their customers spend not only money, but also their time with the brand. They eat, live and breathe the brands values and almost develop a religious belief in them (Smithuijsen, 2017). There are multiple examples of brands that operate within that scheme, the trailblazer of all being Supreme. However, the brand nowadays operates on a global scale, whilst still in contrast of the established fashion system (Krings, 2016). In Amsterdam alone there is Patta, Daily Paper, Smib, Filling Pieces, but the phenomenon also occurs in Northern America with brands like Supreme, Stussy and Thrasher. In addition, there is Aimé Leon Dore in France and MUF10 in Denmark, which however are less popular. There are plenty of similarities that these brands share, as all evolved from street culture and are connected to local Hip-Hop music or skate communities. When looking at the fashion products that these brands have in stock, it is visible that the designs are very basic. The simplicity of the fashion styles leads to the conclusion that the fandom behavior of the brands customers results from the brand image rather than the design or product. Another similarity that can be identified is that these brands often have collaborations with established brands that were popular mostly around the 1990’s, for example Vetements x Juicy Couture, Patta x Converse or Supreme x The North Face. On the other hand, established fashion houses are struggling to keep up, so how do these local brands become so popular among the youth? As these brands multiply and become increasingly successful, it is important to understand how the interaction between the consumers and these brands work, especially in regard to the fandom behavior of consumers.

‘The fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense that Energy is the fundamental concept in physics (...) The laws of social dynamics are laws which can only be stated in terms of power’ (Russell, 1938)

This quote underlines the importance of power in sociology and therefore our society. Due to the recent increasing interaction between social and economical sciences, this quote is also applicable to postmodern consumer culture. It leads to the conclusion that there is an ongoing power struggle between consumer and brands. In particular the ever changing fashion industry faces its biggest challenge with the growing power of the consumers. Studies show that the Internet has firstly made markets more transparent and information more easy to access for consumers (Umit Kucuk and Krishnamurthy, 2007). Secondly consumers are more likely to connect and protest against companies, and thirdly consumers take initiative with
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Influencing prices and products (Rezabakhsh, Bornemann, Hansen, et al., 2006). Furthermore, latest sociological, technical and cultural developments lead to a less predictable customer (Mossinkoff, Jacobs, n.d.).

‘Clothes are a way to define and communicate our identities and tribal affiliations through a system of signs others can recognize. (...) In this sense, fashion endlessly plays with the conflicting ideas of individualism and conformity’ (Flaccavento, 2015).

Thus long established hierarchies of fashion brands dictating trends are questioned. On the one hand the democratization of the fashion system by means of bloggers has also caused on the other hand disrupts traditional fashion marketing and branding, therefore, it is increasingly difficult to establish a loyal customer base (Flaccavento, 2015) for fashion brands.

In this paper I will first discuss the sociological views on tribalism in fashion marketing and will then present a case study about Patta, the Amsterdam based fashion brand, in order for brands to explore how to activate their tribe.

Aim

Research consumer behavior on a micro-level from a sociological point of view

The aim of my thesis is to research the interaction between contemporary fashion brands and their customers from a sociological and cultural perspective, in order to find out whether postmodern marketing theories guarantee a brands success. This perspective aims at researching in an ethnographic manner rather than from a financial or business point of view. In times of neo-tribalism, where brands increasingly focus on customer-brand relationships, it is important to understand how consumers behave at a micro-level and what the dynamics of interaction are. With my research I want to question and further understand the utopia of marketing that neo-tribalism is (Richardson, 2013), from a consumer and brand perspective. The utopia in this case describing the simple seeming solution for marketeers of reaching out to a neo-tribe, which generates a brands success. The research for this topic in regards to the fashion industry is not only lacking, but also questionable as fashion actually sells highly self-expressive and emotional products.

Marketeers nowadays strongly focus on the exchange of values between brands and consumers and some even go so far as to state that the brand belongs to the consumer (Cova, Cova, 2001). However, Wipperfürth also shows in his studies the dangers of having a community take over brand values such as the example of the Londsdale case (Wipperfürth, 2005). The dangers of actively involving consumers and risking a serendipitous brand hijack are clear, but do consumers even want to be that involved in creating content with brands or are they just in need of a leader? No studies have yet been conducted on this subject, to my knowledge.

In terms of economical implications the aim of my thesis is to create a Brand Guidebook for marketing managers who wish to activate their brand community. The audience for this product are marketing managers of a fashion brand in every segment. Thus my research outcomes will be presented in the form of this guide, which firstly focuses on explaining and stressing the importance of the neo-tribalism in order to generate a loyal customer base. Secondly there is a potential-test for brands, because it is necessary for each brand to find out their potential for having a strong community. However the test result leads to an individual strategy in regards to the given answers. In order to make it more visually appealing for
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In order to answer the research question, I posed the following sub-questions. For this topic it is important to view at the broader scheme of the research and gather a better understanding about where the academic research is at. Thus I want to start from the basics in order to find out more about the interaction between consumers and fashion brands at a micro-level.

Sub - questions

1) What are the social dynamics of interaction between a brand and consumers?

Therefore I want to research the interaction dynamic between consumers and brands from both the consumer and brand perspective at the example of Patta. The brand Patta has not been politically involved, yet quickly rose to unexpected success for a local brand. Thus the Amsterdam based fashion brand aesthetically joins the rank of other profitable pioneers like MUF10 in Denmark, Aimé Leon Dore in France and even big players like Yeezy or Vetements. This trend and the strong community of these brands justify the relevancy of researching their consumer brand relationship.

My exploratory research question, as above mentioned concludes from this research gap and is the following:

What is the social interaction dynamic between consumers and fashion brands?

Methodology

The posed research question is intentionally rather open and descriptive as it aims at gaining insight into the topic of neo-tribalism, which can hardly be explained with statistics and is not easy to fully comprehend. My bachelor thesis is explorative and therefore the research outcomes defined the methodology along the way. I started out by doing netnographic research and collected secondary data from the literature in order to answer the previously posed sub-questions. This part mainly concludes studies from sociologists and marketing experts, who have gathered data about neo-tribes, managerial implications and the response of brands. By concluding the literature and gathering insight in the topic, I have established a hypothesis which will be examined with the case study. The two hypotheses are the following:

Neo-tribes/ consumers want to be actively involved with the brand

In order to prove this hypothesis correct or incorrect, I will research a brand community. This research is conducted by means of a single case study. The netnographic research led to the analysis of the following brands: Patta,
Smib, Daily Paper, MUF10, within the framework of the Marketing Mix. These brands were chosen due to their intense participation and connection with streetwear culture and focus on a local market. The brands were analyzed within the following categories: Product, Price, Promotion, and Place. The complete Marketing Mix can be found in the Process Book. Afterwards I found a suitable fashion brand with a tribal following for my case study, which is Patta. The further research for this brand is included in the Process Book.

Thus, in order to gather more data and understand consumer behavior, I have conducted a survey. After looking at the brand perspective of brands with a strong community by the help of the Marketing Mix, I intend to research consumer behavior from their point of view. Therefore I designed a survey to answer the sub-questions and check the hypothesis. This survey can be found in the Process Book. I want to stress the fact that half of the respondents of the survey are involved in the fashion industry, whereas the other half are strangers to the topic. This is important to get a broader understanding of the consumers’ needs.

As the case study aims at researching consumer behavior at a micro-level, this is best done by using ethnographic research methods. After having an insight about the broader consumer perspective, I want to go in depth and research the Patta community. Therefore I interviewed four members of the Patta brand community by means of semi-structured interviews. The interviews can be found in the Process Book.

The results of the case study lead to my conclusion and prove whether the hypotheses are correct or incorrect. In response to that, I will have three methods of gathering primary data in total: Marketing Mix, Survey, Interviews.
1. Social interaction dynamics between brands and consumers

‘Consumers are influenced by a complex web of interpersonal interconnections’ (Wipperfürth, 2005)

Latest studies reveal that the average consumer is exposed to up to 10,000 advertisements a day (Marshall, 2015). Researcher Anna McAlister even discovered that three year olds have the ability to recognize brands and logos (Bryner, 2010). This means that society is becoming increasingly brand savvy whilst interacting with multiple brands each day, which is why it is important to understand the basic principles of interaction. Marketing as a science can be seen as the managerial link between brands and consumers, thus enhancing the interaction dynamic.

The first and foremost interaction between brands and consumers is the one of buying a product. This unidirectional interaction between brand and consumer is the most obvious interaction whilst focusing on the product a brand offers. In the present day, brands offer products online and offline, whereas Web 2.0 has introduced innovative means of interaction between consumer and brand. Apart from promoting and selling ones brand in a physical store, brands provide large amounts of content on social media and other online channels. The advantages of omni-channel and online marketing (Verhoef, Kannan and Inman, 2015) have influenced the interplay between consumer and brand. However more recent research, mainly after the 1990’s, focuses on more than just the use value of a product the brand offers (Aaker, 1997; de Chernatony 1999).

In contrast to the distinct value of commodities the experience economy nowadays (Pine, Gilmore, 1999) focuses on brand identity and a brand’s value proposition. In addition consumers actually identify with products, rather than consuming them for their use value as successful brands such as Mini or Apple have shown (Mossinkoff, 2015).

As marketing expert Peter Doyle specifies, there are 4 different types of product values: functional, monetary, social and psychological (Doyle, 2013), whereas brands nowadays focus more on the two latter. The table below specifies the different glue values, indicating that a brand with a higher glue value has a stronger community (Mossinkoff, 2012).

In response to the above mentioned glue values and the increasing focus on customer-brand relationships, emotional marketing models arose and consumers were more able to identify with brands. Therefore postmodern marketing theorists focus on the interaction between brand and consumer (Veloutsou, Moutinho, 2009).

In conclusion, the relationship between brands and consumers can be compared to the ones humans have with each other, we have some acquaintances we care about more than others. As previously mentioned it is visible that certain fashion brands have a strong consumer following with almost a fandom behavior, which could be explained by using the framework of neo-tribes (Maffesoli, 1996). As Wipperfürth describes: ‘The concept of brand has evolved from functional product and personal experience to tribal tool and cultural symbol. The simple fact is brands represent something more meaningful within a tribe setting’ (Wipperfürth, 2015).
2. What are neo-tribes?

‘A tribal brand is a consequence of socialised expressions’ (Veloutsou, Moutinho, 2009)

The Maffesolian approach of tribalism in Post-modern Marketing is loosely based on the ethnographic concept of ancient tribes and assigns certain social constructs to consumer culture. (Maffesoli, 1996). Maffesoli introduces so called Neo-tribes for the first time, ever since social scientists and marketing experts have explored the highly celebrated field of tribal marketing. One of the most important scientists in this area of study states that ‘Tribal marketing is by no means just another passing fad but a Trojan horse to induce companies to take on board the re-emergence of the quest for community’ (Cova, Cova, 2001).

Thus it is important to start from the beginning in order to clarify what neo-tribes in social sciences indicate and where this social development comes from. After centuries of individualism, humans have the urge to be part of a group and the archaic sense of belonging sets in. Hetherington identifies the major issue of identity as one of belonging to a group and calls neo-tribes ‘communities of feeling’ (Hetherington 1998, p. 49). This phenomenon in correlation with the aestheticized consumption era (Maffesoli, 1996) is the fertile ground for neo-tribes. However it is important to state that people presently group around a shared passion for a specific amount of time whereby the borders are fluid (Cova, 1997). This is also the main contrast to archaic tribes, due to globalization and interconnectivity neo-tribes are not bound to a geographical place. Nevertheless there exist multiple similarities between archaic and neo-tribes, such as shared behavioral patterns, which validates the tribal metaphor. Several studies show that all neo-tribes have a shared language or argot, ‘sacred places’, rituals, symbols and values (Goulding, Saren, 2007; Goulding, Shankar, Canniford, 2011; Moutinho, Dionisio, Leal, 2007). In contrast to traditional target groups or market segments which are homogeneous groups, neo-tribes are heterogeneous communities in terms of demographics (Maffesoli, 1996). Additionally it is important to mention that there are different levels of engagement, from novices to the hard-core, which also interact differently with each other.

2.1 Different terms for neo-tribes

Ever since Maffesoli’s definition of postmodern marketing in ‘The times of the tribes’, various culture theorists have introduced different terms for neo-tribes. For instance the sociologist Bauman uses the metaphor of ‘bird swarms’ to describe the highly unpredictable postmodern consumer in his article ‘Liquid Modernity’ (Baumann, 2000). Additionally Andy Bennett presents the concept of ‘Lifestyles’ as a framework for neo-tribes, emphasizing the shared consumption behavior in order to express oneself within a cultural context (Benett, 1999). In their ethnographic study of the Harley Davidson tribe Shouten and McAlexander suggest a different kind of neo-tribe called ‘marketplace cultures’ (Shouten; McAlexander, 1993). In the scheme of consumer culture theory (CCT) these marketplace cultures form around a brand instead of a shared passion. Though one could argue that Harley Davidson has always been a brand with strong values that picked up the biker tribe, it will lead to a ‘the chicken or the egg’ discussion. Cova and Pace prove with the ‘My Nutella The Community’ case that there is a new customer empowerment, which relies on self-expression by the means of a brand in front of other consumers even with a convenience product (Cova, Pace, 2006). These studies show that tribes can and already do form around brands, not only shared passions. Mu-
niz and O’Guinn showed with the example of three brands (Saab, Ford and Macintosh) that these brands have a tribal following which is based on three pillars of a community: shared knowledge, the same rituals, and moral responsibility (Muniz, O’Guinn, 2001). Which leads us to believe that brands have the power to offer a communal feeling to consumers and are sometimes even praised like religiously, in times when traditional religions are slowly fading. In contrast to the marketplace culture theory which loosely capitalizes the idea of neo-tribes Cova and Cova approach the theory from a different point of view, the ‘Latin view’. In their publication ‘Tribal Marketing: The Tribalisation of society and its impact on the conduct of marketing’ the aim is to reestablish social interaction and ‘re-socialize people’ (Cova, Cova, 2001). Thus the ‘Latin view’ assumes that ‘products are consumed as much for their linking value as for their use value’ (Cova, Cova, 2001), indicating a less commercialized view on neo-tribes than the brand communities display.

2.2 Interaction dynamic between neo-tribes and brands

Research shows that these neo-tribes or brand communities can take on different roles when interacting with brands. These roles depend on the degree of market appropriation and market annexation. The Matrix below illustrates 4 different forms of neo-tribes:

![Fig. 2: “Mapping Consumer Tribes” (Cova, Kozinets, Shankar, 2007, p. 6) Process Book, p.4)](image)

The most desired form, from a brand perspective are ‘tribes as activators’, who actively promote and live the brand identity. ‘Tribes as entrepreneurs’ describe a more complex and less desirable community, as members of the tribe offer products by themselves, increasing a market entry barrier for external companies. Thirdly ‘Tribes as plunderers’ describe the phenomenon of a brand hijack. In this scenario tribes take over the meaning and identity of the brand. This model illustrates the various differences of interaction between neo-tribes and brands, whilst almost hinting at the risks and opportunities that lie in neo-tribes.
2.3 Neo-tribes and subcultures

In addition to the discourse about the different terms and variations of neo-tribes, the question about the difference between neo-tribes and subcultures arises.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary ‘Subcultures’ are ‘Cultural groups within a larger culture, often having beliefs or interests at variance with those of the larger culture’ (OED). Thus youth subcultures are often described as counter-hegemonic (Hall, Jefferson, 1993; Beal, 1995). However researchers nowadays argue for a post-subcultural period which lead into neo-tribal behavior (David Muggleton and Rupert Weinzierl, 2013). Although a clear distinction between neo-tribes and subcultures can be made. The above often described the political nature of subcultures and resistance against social norms (Riley, Griffin, Morey, 2010) lies in contrast with the fluidity and almost ‘nonchalant’ attitude of neo-tribes. As Riley, Griffin and Morey put it ‘The aim is therefore not to change the world, but to survive in it (...) through the creation of sites in which to experience communal hedonism and pleasure’ (Riley, Griffin, Morey, 2010). Neo-tribes are by definition temporary and fluid; but its members, in contrast to the ones of subcultures, rarely eat, live, breathe the shared passion. Several studies show that neo-tribes are solely a ‘temporary escape’ (Goulding et al. 2002), thus the plurality of membership in ones life is a fundamental difference of neo-tribes and subcultures. Additionally, the often geographical and ethnic bond within a subculture implies another difference with neo-tribes (Elliot, Davis, 2006). Nevertheless, apart from the previous arguments, subcultures and neo-tribes have various similarities, as the following chapter shows.

2.4 The commodification process of subcultures

As this report focuses on finding a loyal consumer in order to identify possible marketing strategies behind the theory of tribalism, it is important to understand the economic potential that lies in subcultures and neo-tribes. Goulding and Saren even describe subcultures as ‘cultures of consumption’ (Goulding, Saren, 2007), while describing the ‘commodification process’ (Goulding, Saren, 2007) as follows:

1) Stage 1: Rebellion
2) Stage 2: Fragmentation
3) Stage 3: Commodification

In the first stage, members of the subculture protest against established norms and mainstream culture. Hence, there are two different forms of rebellion -- the commodity and ideological form. The first describes the shared aesthetic expression through fashion, whereas the latter portrays the redefinition of what is deviant accordingly opening the door for the second stage. The ‘Fragmentation’ stage is self-explanatory as it is about breaking down the markets into smaller groups and the following expansion of product to serve the newly developed segments. This links to the findings of Maffesoli that ‘solidarity is based on appearance and form’ (Maffesoli, 1996). In the third stage, the mainstream recognizes the lucrative potential as Marx already identified that ‘Commodity fetishism is the power of thing over people and the importance attributed to commodities in capitalism as opposed to human beings’ (Marx, 1990). With the example of the Goth subculture, Goulding and Saren also analyze that the capitalization and mainstreaming is the least desired outcome for the core tribe. Consequently the development of a subculture is comparable to the Product Life Cycle Model (Goulding, Saren, 2007).
This shows that there is a high market potential within subcultures. Due to the similarities of subcultures and neo-tribes, one could also link this ‘commodification process’ to neo-tribes. Nonetheless as previously mentioned research also describes neo-tribes as ‘transient’ (Goulding et al., 2013), which limits the second stage of the commodification process and therefore shows the difficulty in identifying the market potential of neo-tribes in contrast to subcultures. In short neo-tribes are more fluid and do not have strict boarders like subcultures. Therefore the ‘Fragmentation’ process of neo-cultures simply exists in a lighter form compared to the set subcultures.

2.5 Neo-tribalism and the fashion industry

Due to the shared aesthetics of subcultures, neo-tribes, and brand communities, it is of great interest to research whether fashion brands also have a tribal following. However it is important to mention that there exists the concept of ‘communities of style’, which in contrast to brand communities, describes the social forming of a group based on the combination of styles rather than the groupings around one brand (Pihl, 2014). This is important considering most fashion brands are merely interested in suggesting one type of style through their product offerings.

In times of tribalism, people consume to belong; therefore consumption, becomes meaning based and the symbolic value of brands increases (Elliott, Wattanasuwan, 1998). According to these theories, Featherstone introduced a new concept in consumer culture theory, ‘the performing self’, illustrating the increasing focus on appearance (Featherstone, 1991). As fashion brands naturally develop products for appearances, accessing a tribe should be effortless.

After the first two chapters it is possible to answer the following research questions:

1) What are the social dynamics of interaction between a brand and consumers?
The research in chapter one shows, that consumers and brands interact on a deeper level, than solely the exchange of goods, money and information. In this day and age, brands provide the opportunity of identification for customers. Therefore brands become part of culture and the framework of neo-tribes in regard to the customer brand relationship is introduced (Wipperfürth, 2005).

2) What are neo-tribes?
The previous research led me to this sub-question. Research shows that postmodern marketing theorists suggest to focus on neo-tribes rather than market segments. Neo-tribes are heterogenous groups of people, who share a common passion or interest. The boarders are fluid, whereas the hard core shares common cultural aspects. The research also identifies different variations of neo-tribes, the most interesting for this research being ‘Brand Communities’ (Muniz, O’Guinn, 2001). These form around brands in particular, whereas the main structural pillars: shared knowledge, the same rituals, and moral responsibility are similar to the ones of neo-tribes, who focus on a shared passion and are not linked by a single brand per-se. Furthermore, the research on subcultures and in particular the ‘commodification process’ shows the economic potential that lies in brand communities and neo-tribes.

3) Is there neo-tribalism in the fashion industry?
Even though most researchers focus on the increasing importance of appearance there have only been a few studies about neo-tribalism in the fashion industry, to my knowledge. ‘Communities of style’ identifies a group around the combination of clothes (Pihl, 2014). As there is no evidence of a shared culture and the there-out resulting market potential, this is finding will not be further considered in this research.
3. How brands react to neo-tribes and economic implications

Studies argue that managers are supposed to respect the neo-tribes and accept that they are autonomous (Cova, Cova, 2001), but what are the suggested economical implications for brands?

When trying to take economic advantage of neo-tribes and understanding their potential, it is equally important to take a glance at how neo-tribes are formed. Thus the study of Goulding et al. with the example of the ‘Clubbing tribe’ gives insight about the composition of a tribe. In order for consumers to become part of a neo-tribe, they have to go through the ‘tribal learning process’ (Goulding et al., 2013). This process consists out of three equally important steps ‘engagement, imagination and alignment’ (Goulding et al., 2013). The first step portrays learning unanimous ‘moral codes’ and interacting with the group. The second step ‘imagination’ describes the creation of an identity within the community of like minded people, thus creating similar habitats. Finally the third step ‘alignment’ represents the joining of forces by the individuals and implementing the previously learned behaviors. The learning process of neo-tribes contrasts with the formation of a brand community, as the latter is rather logically formed around a brand (Goulding et al., 2013).

The managerial implication that can be concluded from this study, in perspective to the ‘tribal learning process’, is that consumers need various products to support them during this process. Thus brands entering the market could simply cater to the needs of these neo-tribes according to the different steps of the learning process. This theory is supported by the example of the Goth tribe in the case study by Goulding and Saren (Goulding Saren 2007). Multiple brands offered products and services for the neo-tribe and therefore became part of it. ‘The learning procedure is important for brands to market to the tribe in form of awareness, fashion, hardware, tourism, physical skills, and tribal knowledge’ (Goulding et al., 2013). It is also important to mention that this study suggests that neo-tribes become entrepreneurial when brands do not react to their needs. However Goulding et al. come to the conclusion that brands are driven by their consumers and marketing managers should enhance the three steps of the tribal learning experience.

When communicating with the customer, the brand is supposed to take the tribal consumer experiences into account (Cova, Cova, 2001) and react with an ethnographic approach. As Badot already puts it ‘the company can be seen as a social actor between the market and consumers within a social context’ (Badot, et al., 1993, p.51).

The red threat that can be identified through all studies is that brands should not try to control neo-tribes and instead support them (Cova, Cova, 2001; Wipperfürth, 2005). Thus Cova’s studies redundantly suggest to provide spaces for the neo-tribal members to interact (Cova, Cova, 2001). ‘The partnership of brand and tribe is most important, co-creation is key’ (Cova, Cova, 2001). More specifically like the example of Citroen proves, the Internet is a useful tool for brands to enhance tribal behavior (Cova, Cova 2001). In conclusion, an alliance between the brand and neo-tribal consumers leading towards co-creation is required. Thus innovative marketing models focus on ‘market-oriented ethnography’ (Arnould, Wallendorf, 1994).
Lastly, a study of online brand communities (OBC’s) within the luxury fashion segment, showed that these OBC’s due to their impulsive and unpredictable nature ‘represent both a serious menace and a an amazing opportunity for brands’ (Borgi, Calabrese, Campisi, Cappaec, Costa, Di Pillo, 2013). This leads us to the question of what happens when the consumer has too much control and brand values are hijacked?

3.1 Brand Hijack

Wipperfürth describes the phenomenon of brand hijacks in great detail and provides multiple examples of brands with a strong community. Yet what happens when this community influences brand values? (Wipperfürth, 2005)

Generally speaking are there two types of hijacks:
1. Serendipitous hijack
2. Conscious co-creation

A serendipitous hijack can lead to a case like Lonsdale, where Neo Nazis took over the meaning of the brand and spread a very radical message while completely changing Lonsdale’s brand image. On the other hand, we have Dr. Martens with a co-created brand hijack and a tribal following, which maintains the brands success. Touching upon Cova’s theory of co-creation, Wipperfürth describes the roadmap of a brand hijack as follows:

1. Hijack ideation
2. Tribal Marketing
3. Co-creation
4. Mass marketing

This ideal scenario of a brand hijack is difficult to control by marketing managers as the Napster example clarifies. The success of this brand model ironically lied within the brand becoming public property and thus allowing the consumer to have full control. Meanwhile, Lonsdale is still fighting to get rid of their ‘Nazi’ image, studies shows that serendipitous brand hijacks are difficult to control (Schwab, 2015).

In conclusion, a brand hijack can be an advantage for the brand as long as the tribe does not have a negative image or mismatches with the brand values (Schwab, 2015). Although it can be quite difficult for a brand to determine which hijack ends up being successful and which is too much of a risk. Therefore brands have to be careful when developing a neo-tribe not to be hijacked.

4) How do brands react to neo-tribes and what are economic implications?

The previous chapter identifies the following economic implications for brands and suggestions on how to react to neo-tribes:
1) Enhance the neo-tribal learning process and offer products that supports the neo-tribe (Goulding et al, 2013)

2) Take the tribal experience into account, e.g. experience marketing (Cova, Cova, 2001)

3) Use an ethnographic approach, whereas the brand is facilitator between consumers and market (Badot, et al., 1993, p.51)

4) Do not control, but support tribes and offer co-creation (Cova, Cova 2001)

5) Provide spaces and use the internet as a tool (Borgi, Calabrese, Campisi, Cappaec, Costa, Di Pillo, 2013)

As the previous chapter shows if brands do not react to neo-tribes, they might become entrepreneurial. This could lead to a harmful brand hijack. Brand hijacks have occurred in the fashion industry in particular (e.g. Lonsdale, Dr.Martens). These brand hijacks are difficult for brands to control, but might also be a lucrative opportunity. Brands have to decide whether it is worth the risk.
4. The advantages of having a neo-tribe

The previous chapter shows the dangers of a neo-tribe and that giving power to consumers can actually harm a brand. However in order to be able to discuss the subject, it is crucial to look at the advantages of neo-tribes. Post-modern marketing theories often suggest to focus on neo-tribes rather than target groups, so there undoubtedly are benefits (Cova, Cova, 2001; Muniz, O’Guinn, 2001). Additionally as previously mentioned many brands already focus on getting a strong brand community and therefore focuses on the customer-brand relationship.

Neo-tribes are heterogenous groups of people who communicate with each other about their shared passion. Therefore they have the ability to create a loyal customer base and increase word-of-mouth marketing (Muniz, O’Guinn, 2001). The ability of peer activity and the resulting promotion of a brand within the community is praised in the literature. In this context it is also important to mention that neo-tribal members can be seen as unpaid brand ambassadors. Generally, consumers are more influenced by other consumers rather than brands. Thus recommended products are perceived as more authentic. From a consumer perspective, research shows that brands offer the possibility of identification (Mossinkoff, 2015), which shows that society also benefits from a neo-tribal marketing approach.

In conclusion, the main advantages of a neo-tribal following or brand community are the following:
1. Consumers become ambassadors
2. Community offers global promotion
3. Loyal consumers are willing to buy new products

Apart from the previously mentioned identification offer by brands for consumers, the goal of brands within Western capitalist society, is to be profitable and use marketing to generate revenue. Therefore marketing nowadays caters to the needs of these tribes, it is as simple as it is self-serving. When people want to show their identity and belonging to a group, brands anthropomorphize and offer a sacred place of identification. The thankful consumer takes that offer and spreads the message. Sounds familiar? That is how religion started out. Brands without any identity or purpose are considered uncool by youth-culture, which leads to the question whether this strong relationship be-

Figure 2 illustrates how brands and consumers collectively create value. The mutual creation of value between consumers and brands is another benefit of having a strong brand community (Schau, Muñiz, Arnould, 2009).

Lastly, there are also some examples of brands, who are successful due to focusing on a neo-tribe. Wipperfürth shows with the example of Napster’s willingness to let the market decide without having set brand values, how a lucrative brand driven by consumers looks like (Wipperfürth, 2005). Another example is the brand Salomon, who actively used tribal marketing methods. Salomon recognized that there is a strong community around in-line skating, they therefore organized events and tried to promote their inline skates within the community. This worked very well and Salomon came out top against competitors like Nike (Cova, Cova, 2001).
tween brands and consumers and the construct of neo-tribalism, is actually fandom behavior?

4.1 Fandom behavior

When looking at the social interaction dynamic between brands and consumers, it is visible that nowadays consumers involve brands in their daily life more often (Gutman, 2012). Furthermore, people spend a fair amount of time connecting to others with the same passion using brands as an interface. Thus when does a shared passion or a strong interest in a brand become fandom?

In the literature many studies about fandom behavior in sports can be found (Dixon, 2001), as sport clubs tend to have cult following. However research also shows that fandom affiliation and neo-tribal behavior is comparable (Dionísio, Leal and Moutinho, 2009) According to the study of Dionísio, Leal and Moutinho ‘it is possible to distinguish several distinct fan typologies varying with the level of fan commitment.’ (Dionísio, Leal and Moutinho, 2009). The level of engagement also plays an important role for neo-tribes and different sub-groups. This shows that there are similarities between neo-tribes and fandom behavior. Additionally, the study also proved that the manner of conduct of football fans is mainly affected by ‘the need for social recognition, socialization and symbolism’ (Dionísio, Leal and Moutinho, 2009). These three factors as previously described are crucial for the affiliation of neo-tribes.

All these similarities between neo-tribes and sport fandom behavior are compelling for a marketeer, since fans have the ability ‘to create a fan culture with its own systems of production and distribution […]’ and therefore offer the possibility of a complimentary marketing channel (Fiske, 1992). Thus fandom often occurs in popular culture according to the hegemonic value system, within the genres of music, movies, books or sports (Fiske, 1992). Therefore the literature rarely provides evidence that fandom behavior also happens for brands or at least the terminology describing brand fanatics is dissimilar.

However Wipperfürth mentions the following steps that brand fanatics follow, when becoming one (Wipperfürth, 2005):

1. Get your foot in the door
2. Become indoctrinated or initiated into the community
3. Start living in a parallel social universe
4. Move from a casual interest to a near obsession

This shows that there are certain similarities to the neo-tribal learning process (Goulding et al, 2013), but from the third step onwards the neo-tribal formation differs, which will be explained in the following part. The borders for neo-tribes are more fluid and people do not tend to start ‘living in a parallel universe’. This fandom behavior or brand fanaticism can be compared to a subculture and the difference between neo-tribes and subcultures has been previously explained. In conclusion fandom behavior offers another possibility of interaction between brands and consumers and is referred to as brand fanaticism, which differs from neo-tribal practices. The latter is more interesting for marketeers as fandom behavior is difficult to trigger or influence and neo-tribes are more accessible and have a broader range of influence. Additionally, brand fanatics might take over brand values and cause a harmful brand hijack (Anja Schwab, 2015).
In conclusion, the most interesting interaction dynamic between consumers and brands, marketing-wise and in regard to social sciences, is currently the neo-tribal theory or theory of brand communities. There is plenty of literature according to this phenomenon suggesting this marketing approach. However, it is important to differentiate between neo-tribes, subcultures and fandom behavior. The literature also suggests that in our aestheticized postmodern consumption era, the consumer belongs to a certain group and buys into a feeling or identity. Thus social recognition and symbolism are crucial. This is highly beneficial for fashion brands, as the fashion industry already provides products within that range of self expressive goods. Additionally, successful fashion brands already use neo-tribal marketing approaches in order to establish a loyal customer base by offering multiple spaces for consumers to interact. From a consumer perspective it is also clear that recognition plays an increasingly important role in the identification process. Thus confirming that the neo-tribal phenomenon is not only the current dogma in marketing, but also a promising opportunity for fashion brands.

5) What are the advantages for a brand of reaching out to a neo-tribe or brand community?

When conduction research on the topic of neo-tribalism, it is of great interest to point out the advantages for brands that focus on a neo-tribal strategy or the formation of a brand community. In this regard, the two can be seen collectively. The main advantages researchers propose are the following:

1) A loyal customer base and the therefore growing word-of-mouth marketing (Muniz, O’Guinn, 2001)

2) Peer activity and the resulting promotion of a brand as the community is already connected

3) Salomon shows that it is a strategy to eliminate competitors (Cova, Cova, 2001)

4) Brands offer identification (Mossinkoff, 2015) and are therefore more interesting for youth culture

6) Does fandom behavior play a role for neo-tribes?

As research shows, fandom behavior results out of the ‘need for social recognition, socialization and symbolism’ (Dionisio, Leal and Moutinho, 2009) this identifies a similarity to neo-tribes as these are also communities, built around a shared passion in order to identify. However, fandom behavior offers another possibility of interaction between brands and consumers and is referred to as brand fanaticism, which differs from neo-tribal practices as it is more extreme. Thus it is too difficult to influence or trigger fandom and hardcore fans can easily harm a brand. Further fandom behavior occurs mostly in sports or popular culture according to the literature.
Interaction between brands and consumers goes beyond the exchange of money, products and information (chapter 1)

Aestheticized consumption era (chapter 2)

Brands offer identification and social recognition for consumers (chapter 2)

Advantages (Chapter 4) — Neo-tribal marketing approach (chapter 2)

Don’t control, but support the community (chapter 3)

Consumers want to be actively involved

More information required to prove whether this hypothesis is true for brand communities within the fashion industry

Case Study: Patta

≠ Differs from subcultures, fans and brand communities

Economic implications (chapter 3)

Literature gap

Fig. 4 (Hindrichs, M.)
Single Case Study: Patta

Research shows the importance for brands to introduce a different marketing strategy according to their tribe (Moutinho, 2007), also in order to maintain control of the brand image (Veloutsou, Moutinho, 2009). The almost romantic social theory of tribalism and consumers determining brand values, thus being in the lead, leads to various questions about the consequences. According to that Cova, Kozinets and Shankar propose a compound model where consumers en masse decide about how much they are being manipulated by the brand and vice versa (Cova, Kozinets, Shankar, 2007). This discourse goes to the extend where researches describe consumer tribes as active stakeholders, who are ‘partners in the co-creation of brand equity’ (Bradshaw, 2008) and not only customers.

In addition to the research outcomes regarding the interaction dynamic between consumers and brands (see figure 4, p. 19), the two following hypothesis concerning neo-tribes is constituted:

1. Neo-tribes/consumers want to be actively involved with the brand

Thus the phenomenon of neo-tribes can be best analysed by means of ethnographic research methods and a case study. As this thesis focuses on fashion brands in particular, it is logical to choose a brand operating in the fashion industry. In order to prove or disprove the hypothesis, I will research the case study from a brand and consumer perspective separately. The research continuously suggests that the brand is a facilitator between consumer and the market, which is why it is important to take both dimensions in consideration. In addition, my research focuses on finding economic implications for fashion brands that want to activate their brand community.

My research also leads to the following matrix, which is part of the reason why the brand Patta

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Neotribes</th>
<th>Brand community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salomon (skate tribe)</td>
<td>Patta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smib</td>
<td>MUF10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily Paper</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Fig. 5 ‘Neo-tribalism / Brand communities Matrix’ (Hindrichs, M.)

Patta is the brand with the strongest brand community, whilst neglecting power the most.

The following research methods will be used in the empirical part:

1. Marketing Mix (see Process Book, pp. 7-9)
   At first I will compare the chosen brand Patta to other brands from the above mentioned Matrix of neo-tribalism/brand communities. I will conduct research within the following dimensions: Product, Price, Promotion, Place. This framework will allow me insight on the brand perspective and identify similarities. These patterns of the brands marketing strategies will lead to the survey questions.

2. Survey (see Process Book, pp. 9-13)
   The survey focuses in particular on the consumer perspective and was designed based on the literature outcome and the results of the Marketing Mix.

   The interviews will be conducted with members of Patta’s brand community and employees, combining the brand and consumer perspective whilst generating insight on a brand community.
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Case Study

1. Patta – an introduction the brand

The Amsterdam Zuidoost based brand ‘Patta’ has made a name for themselves in the fashion industry and even operates internationally nowadays. Starting out by flying across the world to buy sneakers and bringing them back to the Netherlands, Patta started out, like many millennial brands, as a hobby. It was officially founded back in 2004 by Edson Sabajo and Guillaume ‘Gee’ Schmidt (patta.nl), who were prior to their business partnership both involved in the dutch Hip-Hop scene. Before the age of concept stores, Patta made selected sneakers available to the Dutch public and catered to a rising trend ‘streetwear’. Ever since they have become an established name in the streetwear scene and collaborated with popular high-street brands such as Umbro, Puma and Nike. The renowned website in the community ‘Hypebeast’ even calls Patta ‘one of the most renowned footwear and boutique collaborators’ (Peng, 2017). Their worldwide success led to the launch of the in-house brand, which continues growing each season. Even though they opened their second store in London in the Fall of 2016, Patta has never lost touch with its dutch heritage. They introduced an all dutch capsule collection in collaboration with Thijs Kauffman, illustrating their cultural background. Further they established the Patta Soundsystem which supervises various artist and invites the consumers to join events. Patta even describes themselves as a ‘creative network and platform’ (facebook.com/pg/Patta-SoundSystem), which shows the intent of forming a community with likeminded individuals around the brand. Interestingly the brand operates mostly on a local level, for example with supporting dutch artist (patta.nl/blog) while maintaining an international following. At the end of this year Patta wants to open up multiple pop-up store in the US and mainly Asia “We bring a little bit of Amsterdam to every city we visit” state the founders (Loovere, 2017). In contrast to their decade long heritage Patta embraces the current streetwear trend by providing logo tees, skate attire and engaging in unsuspected collaborations (Duin, 2017). The current approach is comparable to the one of successful Paris based brand Vetements. In combination with a much lower price point Patta also does not have a high-end fashion attitude like Vetements. The streetwear approach to fashion is not only current, but in contrast to Vetements Patta exhibits a loyal following, which is why the business sustains for over a decade.

New collection launches are shared on media, like Hypebeast, Highsnobiety or sneaker specific media, that is consumed by Patta’s followers. In contrast to other streetwear brands the interesting fact about Patta is that they don’t only engage with one community, for example like Vans with skaters. The brand successfully includes various passions and aspects of life like art, music, fashion and even engages with different sub-groups in those categories (Patta.nl). For example with music Patta collaborates with Electro record label Dekmantel (Pearson, 2016) as well as Hip-Hop artists (Patta.nl). The community around Patta is based upon all these different aspects of the brand, like logo sweaters, the media usage of consumers and the different interaction platforms.
2. Marketing Mix

In order to prove or disprove the hypothesis it is important to take a close look at the brand’s marketing strategy. Consecutively I will compare Patta to three competitive brands (Smib, Daily Paper, MUF10) to find out whether a scheme regarding their marketing actions and interaction with consumers can be identified. All these brands operate in the same sector of street fashion and have a similar design approach (See images 1-4, p.21). Further it is visible that these brands have a strong community, which makes them eligible to analyze regarding my study. I used the Marketing Mix to evaluate the following brands: Patta, Smib, Daily Paper and MUF10 within the following categories: Product, Promotion, Price, Place. I will present the main outcomes in the following paragraph, thus some patterns of the interplay between brand and consumer could be identified. The complete Marketing Mix can be found in the Process Book on pages 7-9.

Promotion (Process Book on pages 7-9)
It is visible that all the analyzed brands interact with the consumer via social media, whilst offering content on these accounts. Thus it is a pattern that all the brands have a Soundcloud account next to the common social media accounts. The brands also provide content in the genres of music and art, which is in line with their customers interests. By organizing local events the brands are also engaged in different aspects of the consumers life. Another similarity that these brands shared regarding their customer group, is that all these brands were formed within already existing communities, such as Hip-Hop. All of the founders don’t have a background in fashion, which the MUF10 founder confirms by saying ‘I did not fit in to “fashion” so that was not only my interest but also my motivation to learn more.’ (the-counsel.com, 2016). Therefore the strong communication of the brands’ heritage is a logical step, for example Smib is Bims backwards, which describes the Amsterdam Bijmer area. This particular area in Amsterdam is also where the Patta founders are from and it is known for its multicultural neighborhood. However the founder of Smib contradicts this finding in an interview stating: ‘I don’t want it to be about where we’re from,’ GRGY continues, ‘I want it to be about what we’re representing.’ (Merell, 2016). This shows that the brand Smib is aiming to create an international community. It is also noticeable that all of the brands promote themselves as more than just fashion brands. The Patta founder for example says ‘I just want it [Patta] to be a brand that stands for a certain quality and a certain attitude and a certain way of making choices in things’ (Synamatix, 2017). This attitude further influences the customer brand relationship as it goes beyond the product offer from the brand perspective. All the web-shops of the analyzed brands were mostly sold out, which indicates that they use common promotion strategies like artificial scarcity.

Place (Process Book on pages 7-9)
The combination of online and offline engagement in both physical and virtual spaces is another pattern that can be identified when analyzing these brands. The stores also provide inspiration for customers, which might be the fertile ground for communities to develop and consumers to interact with each other. However it is important that the brands do not have big retail spaces, but rather small stores in selected locations.

Product (Process Book on pages 7-9)
It is also recognizable that all the brands have very simple streetwear styles. The small range of products includes multiple styles with the brands’ logos. Thus consumers have not only
the possibility to represent the brand, but also to be recognizable. Thus consumers have the opportunity to identify with one another. When analyzing the collections, most of the brands also have collaborations with major sports brands like Nike, Puma or other designers. However the consumer is not actively involved in the design process.

**Price** (Process Book on pages 7-9)
All the brands have a relatively high price point for the basic styles. The prices are all in the mid-segment varying from 35€ to 90€ for a simple t-shirt with the logo print.

In conclusion it is visible, that the analyzed streetwear brands **offer more than just clothes**, but a **lifestyle** and therefore enable a community. Another main result is that these brands offer **multiple ways for consumers to interact online as well as offline spaces**. Active involvement in terms of participation is wanted, but not in terms of co-creation. Thus disproving the hypothesis from a brand perspective, that neo-tribal consumers are actively involved with the brand. This proves that brands with a strong community do not necessarily have to involve customers in the design process, but offer other forms of **active involvement**, for example the participation in events. Furthermore, the **local approach** of the analyzed brands displays, not only that they focus on a niche market, but also that the place has an influence on the formation of a brand community. **Brand awareness** is created through local offers like events or retail spaces, which is why this can be linked to the community. In terms of the **social recognition**, that was mentioned in the literature (see chapter 2) it is interesting to see that all these streetwear brands offer products with their logo. Logo’s give customers the opportunity to recognize one another easily. The literature proves that recognition is crucial for a brand community and this study confirms the finding.
3. Survey

After finding out about the initiatives that brands take to create a loyal customer basis and consequently nurture their community, I will now focus on the consumer perspective. In order to get a better understanding of how consumers interact with brands nowadays and whether they are interested in the previously mentioned diverse offers, that are made by brands, I designed a survey. I also gathered more data about the recognition of Patta and the purchase behavior of consumers in regards to one of the brands designs. As the hypothesis is, that consumers want to be actively involved with the brand, it is highly valuable to gather insight on the consumer perspective in order to find out if a randomly chosen consumer agrees. Furthermore, I want to find out more about the consumer behavior in regards to the fashion industry and the interaction with brands. Even though two questions were posed about the case study Patta (Questions 4 and 5, see Process Book, pp. 10-11), I chose to keep the survey general, in order to gather broader information and I will focus on the case study with the qualitative interviews.

The specific framework as well as the complete questions and outcomes can be found in the Process Book on pages 9-13. However, the survey was designed to gather the following data from random consumers up to the age of 30: Demographics (Questions 1-3) Brand recognition Patta (Question 4) Spending behavior in regards to logo recognition (Question 5) Influence of fashion purchases (Question 6) Interaction between consumers in regards to fashion (Question 7) Engagement of brands in different aspects of the consumers life (Question 8) Preference of consumers in terms of active involvement (Question 9) Average time that consumers spend on getting informed about fashion (Question 10)

Over the course of seven days 26 people responded and answered the survey. In order to get a broad overview, only half of the respondents work in the fashion industry or study a similar subject. Additionally 73% of the participants are between 18-25 years and 60% live in the Netherlands (see Process Book, pp. 9 -11). This is important as the literature review shows that most brand communities are formed within youth-culture.

The previous chapter suggests that Patta has a local approach, which is why it is important to note where the participants lived in order to make a statement about Patta’s recognition. Even though 60% of participants live in the Netherlands only 56% recognize Patta (see Process Book, p.10). As Patta exists over the course of some years now, this however proves that it is mostly due to their local approach. This brand awareness rate might also play into the value participants assign to a Patta T-shirt in comparison to a regular black T-Shirt. It is visible that the participants would actually spend a lower amount than the actual price of the shown T-shirt. Further as question 5 shows most participants would actually pay 10€ - 25€ for a T-shirt that costs 50€ (www.patta.nl; see Process Book, p.11).

Another beneficial factor for brand communities is, as the participants confirmed, that their fashion purchases are mainly influenced by their Friends/Family, as well as Retail stores both 50% (see Process Book, p.11). Retail stores are places where customers can interact with one another and they also represent the brand values. The survey shows that consumers still have a desire for those place, also in regards to interaction with peers. Even though the survey audience was rather young, more people are influenced by stores rather than social media. This again proves the local relevance and shows that social media including bloggers might be overrated when it comes to the fash-
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Price
The survey shows that product value cannot be determined by price, as the range of what people would spend for a basic T-shirt highly differs. Recognition also plays an important role in the determination of value, because Patta’s customers are willing to spend the amount for a T-shirt, whereas most survey participants are not.

Place
As shown in the Marketing Mix analysis, Patta focuses on a local approach (see p.20). This indicates a more local brand awareness, because the survey shows that people from outside the Netherlands hardly recognize the brand. Therefore, the place that a brand chooses when pursuing a neo-tribal strategy, needs to be chosen carefully. On the other hand this also shows that consumers do focus on local brands.

Promotion
Question 8 shows that consumers do want brands to provide content and engage with them (see Process Book, p.8). Brands however have to be careful, as it highly depends on the content. In reference to the previous finding it is also visible that the majority only gets informed about fashion less than once a month, meaning that all the blogs and social media offerings by brands are not regularly seen by consumers, which makes them inefficient. This goes hand in hand with the finding that most fashion purchases are influenced by Friends/Family and retail stores (see Process Book, p.11). It suggests that brands should concentrate on a local approach and interact with customers on a ‘friendly’ basis. It also proves the advantage of a brand community, because here people are already connected and will influence Friends/Family.

Survey Conclusion
The results of the survey can best be concluded by again using the framework of the Marketing Mix, also in regards to coherence. As this survey does not focus on the design or ‘Product’ aspect, there are no outcomes for this category, which is why it is left out. As the hypothesis could not be confirmed in the Marketing Mix, the outcomes of the survey regarding this will be shown under the part ‘Consumer Involvement’.

Consumer Involvement
The participants do not necessarily want to be involved in the design process, therefore the hypotheses of consumers wanting to be ac-
tively involved with the brand in terms of design can be dis-confirmed (see Process Book, p.13). However more data needs to be gathered from community members to support this statement, because the survey was only directed towards random consumers. Furthermore, it is important to see whether brand community members agree. The survey illustrates, that consumers prefer it when brands give instructions design-wise, also because of a timely issue (see Process Book, p.13). Lastly it is easier for brands to reach customers, who are already familiar with the subject, as they are more aware and get informed about fashion more often.


After looking at the consumer and brand perspective separately and generating quantitative data, it is now crucial to use ethnographic research methods to gather qualitative data. After broadening the horizon and directing the survey at random consumers, I want to focus on the case study again. Therefore, I interviewed four members of the Patta brand community, two of them also currently work at Patta and were able to provide some valuable inside. In terms of methodology for three interviewees, I used structured interviews that were sent via mail. One participant was able to talk to me in person, with whom I did a semi-structured interview. The full questionnaire for the structured interviews can be found in the Process Book on pages 14-19. A transcribed version of the semi-structured interview can also be found in the Process Book on pages 19-25. It is also important to note that the participant engage in different ways with Patta. One interviewee (Lea) is more at the periphery of the community and a rather new member. Two participants (Marvin and Connor) are working for Patta within different departments and the last participant works in online Marketing at Ace&Tate and calls himself a fan of Patta. The latter therefore has knowledge about marketing and is part of the Patta brand community.

The following chapter gives insight on a brand community, whereas the participants answers are structured in regards to the following topics:
1) Authenticity & Brand story
2) Product = Lifestyle
3) Consumer involvement
4) Recognition
5) Identification

The previous research and literature has shown that these are important pillars of a brand community, which is why they are used to structure the answers.

1) Authenticity & Brand story
Connor: ‘I think this ‘no fucks’ given attitude keeps the brand authentic’

When asked to explain their purchase decision or the fascination about the brand Patta, it is visible that it is mostly routed in the brand story and authenticity. For all of the participants authenticity plays an important role and they all perceive Patta as authentic for multiple reasons. One of the obvious and repetitive ones was that, as Marvin puts it ‘It’s about being able to work on projects that they personally want to do.’. This shows that staying true to the brand values is appealing to community members and increases authenticity. Another aspect that the interviewees mention is the openness towards customers. Patta in particular started out as a small brand for friends and family. They were able to maintain that spirit and therefore the customers perceive Patta as approachable, whilst considering it a benefit. However Nate
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and Marvin also stress that a strong brand story and Patta’s background in Hip-Hop culture is important. Lea confirms this by saying that the ‘storytelling’ of Patta is what fascinates her about the brand. Thus it is also interesting to see that both Nate and Marvin stress the fact that a balance between commercial success and niche market needs to be found. In regard to the research question Connor also mentions that the ‘constant interaction and treatment of their customers’ is a reason for him to consider the brand authentic. Lastly it is also visible that all participants mention that Patta is ‘Amsterdam based’ and Lea also defines this one of the reasons why she considers Patta authentic. This touches upon the finding of the survey and Marketing Mix and shows that a local approach is crucial in order to establish a brand community.

Product = Lifestyle
In order to find out something about the interaction between tribal members and the brand Patta, it is important to find out if their purchase decision is product driven. As Patta operates within the fashion industry and provides fashion items, I asked the interviewees if they consider Patta only being about fashion. All participants agreed that Patta is not only about fashion, which is also due to the streetwear sector they are in. This style already shows multiple connotations to personality and attitude.

Marvin states that ‘It has never really been about fashion in the first place, but bringing people together by sharing own interests and things they think are cool with friends and other like-minded people. They are indeed style and trend aware, but wouldn’t start following others on things that they wouldn’t be into or don’t make sense to them - something a lot of business in the fashion industry struggle with as well.’

With Patta’s focus of bringing people together and not focusing on the benefits of the product, it indicates that there is more than just an exchange of products or money with the consumer.

Consumer involvement
After finding out from the previous survey, that for consumers it depends on how much time they would have to spend when it comes to being involved with the brand, it is important to understand the views of community members. Therefore the question was posed if as a consumer they would like to be more actively involved (co-create) with the brand and if they feel like they have an influence on the brand values?

It was very visible that all community members cherish the brand the way it is and would not want to influence or change the brand values in any perspective. Nate even said the following ‘when you admire a brand so much, you’re willing to follow everything they do’, this just shows the opportunity for brands that lies in brand communities. Marvin also went so far to say that the brand Patta influenced his decision to move to Amsterdam, which represents another level of involvement. On the other hand Connor, who has been working for Patta adds that the brand is open for consumers to influence them and is even looking for innovative ways to reward that loyalty.

It can also be identified that the interaction between consumers is supported by Patta. All participants interact with others, who also wear Patta clothes, which is proof for a group or brand community. Nate also adds multiple times that he feels like he is part of something and thinks that consumers nowadays always buy into a feeling or to be part of something. But the styling also matters as Connor says, that it depends how people combine the clothes, only wearing a Patta T-shirt is not enough in his
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Recognition
As it is previously identified that Patta amongst other streetwear brands has mainly simple styles with their logo, the community was asked if they would rather buy a style with a logo or without. It is visible that the core tribe members like Marvin or Connor do not really mind, but see the advantages.

Marvin also states that ‘At the same, time there is the aspect of branding and its effect of showing the belonging to certain group of people or being associated with certain set of values that a brand might stand for.’

Connor also mentions this ‘gang feeling’, that he has when wearing Patta, which is another trait of a brand community. The brand therefore actively supports the feeling of community by providing styles with their logo. Lea also states that she ‘wouldn’t pay that much for a basic style’, which clearly means that the logo adds value for the community members.

Identification
Nate: ‘People wouldn’t buy Patta if they couldn’t identify with the brand’

Throughout the interviews all participants mention some kind of identification or similar, because they all at some point said that they felt like they are part of a group, when wearing Patta and could also identify with the brand values. It is also interesting that both Nate and Marvin describe one of the brand values as hustling and all participants have, even if varying, clear visions of the brand values. This clearly personifies the brand as usually only a person can be hustling or hard working. It is interesting that Patta has these highly human and therefore accessible brand values. The identity of a brand also influences the consumers purchase decisions. All participants said that they would not buy an H&M T-shirt over a Patta T-shirt. Marvin adds that he buys Patta styles, because he ‘has respect for the brand, the people behind it and what they stand for in my opinion’. They all agree that there is no identity in an H&M shirt and therefore would not buy it. This proves that focusing on a strong brand story and having a community that not only believes in product, but the brand values, sustains a businesses’ success in terms of sales.
Conclusion

‘Forward-looking, communities will be important for consumers, as well as for marketers, as they represent a reaction to the lack of traditional forms of collectivization’ (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995)

The rationale shows that there is a current trend going on in the fashion industry, where streetwear brands have similar marketing strategies, whilst building a strong brand community. It is also visible that the consumers of these brands are willing to go above and beyond for them, whilst incorporating the brand in their lifestyle, which is an interesting phenomenon from a marketing perspective.

As the sub-questions have been answered in the literature review, I want to start my conclusion by answering the main research question: What is the social interaction dynamic between consumers and fashion brands?

The literature suggests a holistic view and postmodern approach. The literature review shows that the customer brand relationship firstly goes beyond the exchange of money or goods and secondly does not focus on target markets anymore. Further the postmodern view suggests the active involvement of consumers, open brand values and an increasing focus on the customer brand relationship rather than the use value of a product. The social phenomenon of neo-tribalism is introduced and identified as the current dogma of postmodern marketing strategies. Neo-tribes are communities that gather around a shared passion, whilst having their own cultural aspects (e.g. rituals, language, values, actions). On the other hand there are brand communities, which also function within a postmodern view of interaction between brand and consumer. Thus ‘A clear-cut distinction between brand communities and consumer tribes may be difficult to draw’ (Richardson, 2013), indicating that the two terms describe a similar theory, which is why they can be used interchangeably. The literature review leads to the framework of brand communities and neo-tribes, which was further researched with the case study Patta. However, I want to stress the fact that the case study focuses on a brand community of a fashion brand.

When it comes to the first hypothesis of the consumer wanting to be actively involved with the brand, this has not been proven correct. Even tribal members have difficulties agreeing to this statement and the survey shows, that the average consumer simply lacks time to get actively involved with a fashion brand. Furthermore, consumers still require some kind of leadership by brands., which the community members continuously state.

Social theorists suggest, that people nowadays consume to belong to a certain group, which this study proves right. All community members state that they feel part of a group when wearing the brand, but why would consumers then desire open brand values? The research outcome is that brands, especially start-ups, need a strong background story and brand values, when trying to reach a tribal following. Further tribal members confirm that they have no desire in changing the brand, because ‘when you want to change a brand, it’s not your brand’ (Process Book, p. 22) and it is as simple as that.

The case study also shows, that brand community members, become brand ambassadors on an unpaid basis. Thus, the ability of promotion and an increase of word-of-mouth marketing is the main power that lies in brand communities, which displays a financial advantage. This however needs to be further researched and more data has to be conducted in order to confirm this finding.

Thus the interaction dynamic between consumer and brand is highly influenced by signs and symbols, but for tribal members the exchange of values is at the core. All participants confirmed that Patta is more than just fashion and for example triggers current societal issues of integration, whilst providing a community.
Conclusion

As this often described ‘feeling of being part of something’ when purchasing a brand is highly intangible and very personal, it is however clear that all brands with a community provide some kind of identification for their customers. Marketeers need to carefully construct this brand identity and understand that consumers anthropomorphize brands. For fashion brands it is highly important to understand their interaction with consumers has to go beyond the offer of clothes. Thus the study proves that the relationship is personal and individual. Even members of the same community act differently depending on their level of engagement and the strongest brand member does not necessarily generate sales, but rather promotion.

The literature review shows that next to the identification offer, authenticity plays an important role in the purchase decision. The survey displays that most consumers are still mainly influenced in their purchase decision by their Friends/Family. This leads to the conclusion that products, that are recommended by Friends/Family are perceived more authentic by consumers. The brand community members also underline that they grasp the brand as more authentic, in comparison to other high street fashion brands. This is another competitive advantage of a strong brand community.

The given case study shows that brands, who want to sustain a sufficient interaction between them and their consumers need to focus on local offers and inspire customers by means of lifestyle recommendations. It is important to underline that brands have to carefully create content, that suits their audience. Further the study shows that a local approach in terms of brand awareness is beneficial and desired by neo-tribal members.

However the analyzed streetwear brands also use basic marketing principles, such as artificial scarcity. This shows that next to authenticity, identification, lifestyle and community the analyzed brands also fulfil a since wanted desire of consumers: exclusivity.

Lastly, I want to point out the main findings of the study, in order to provide an overview. These show the desired actions, by community members, that brands should consider in their marketing strategy. I will also give economic implications according to these findings in the product.

1) Community members, because of brand story and authenticity, the brand is considered authentic, because they stay true to their values and have a strong background

2) Brand community members cherish a communication on eye sight and an approachable brand, they also lie a focus on the customer experience rather than the product

3) The analyzed brand (Patta) was formed within an existing community of Hip-Hop/ Rap culture which helped them to establish a consistent image

4) A local approach creates brand awareness and increases the chances of forming a strong brand community

5) The purchase decision is not product driven, the analyzed brand (Patta) does not focus on use value in their promotion

6) Community members cherish the brand as it is and would not want to influence the brand values in a harmful way, reducing the chances of a hijack

7) The logo styles add value for community members

8) The analyzed brand (Patta) offers identification, whereas consumers personify the brand
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