Look What They’ve Done to My Brand: Clashes of Brand Tribes

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The notion of “postmodern tribe” connotes micro-groups where individuals interact and pursue strong emotional links and shared passions. Rituals of (re)construction or (re)possession help tribes maintain cohesive identity. Yet recent research emphasizes the co-existence of multiple interpretive sub-tribes within the same tribal phenomenon. In the so-called inline skating tribe, factions find expression through internal rivalries. Fitness and stunt skaters belong to antagonizingly different worlds, and ascribe different meanings to the same cult-brand. Our investigation reveals how shades of meaning exist within the same brand tribe, and how these meanings take shape through the subversion and diversion of the product, logo, and other brand-related phenomena

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SESSION OVERVIEW
Branding is the subject of robust discussion among both practitioners and academics interested in marketing strategy. Yet little is known about how different groups of consumers co-create meanings for the same brand. For example, research that examines brand community tends to emphasize homogeneity of brand meaning within a particular subculture or subset of the consumers of interest. This session focuses on why and how specific brands acquire different meanings, or retain aspects of their meanings, across demographic, cultural, or communal groups. Thus, this research picks up where work on brand relationships and brand community leaves off. This session will broaden our understanding of the motivations for, and the mechanisms pertaining to, changes in brand meanings across developmental, cultural, and/or communal boundaries, rather than within groups assumed to create and share homogenous brand meanings. As such, it offers insights into a theoretically significant question—what accounts for divergences in the brand meanings promoted by marketers and those held by distinct groups of consumers?

“Brands in Transit: The Dynamics of Cross Cultural Brand Meanings and the British Royal Family Brand”
Eileen Fischer, York University
Pauline Maclaran, De Montfort University
Cele Otnes, University of Illinois
Pia Segal Munther, York University

The British Royal Family (BRF) brand enables us to explore two key issues pertaining to the transfer of brand meaning: 1) how a brand can resonate simultaneously with distinct cultural myths in different cultures; and 2) how challenges to the cultural resonance of these myths impact brand meaning in these cultures. We collected and analyzed data in three cultural contexts where the BRF is assumed to be (or has been) a powerful brand: England, Northern Ireland, and English Canada. Interviews, observations, and examination of media enable us to identify the patterns of meaning of the BRF brand in each culture.

“The Development of Brand Meaning in Children and Adolescents”
Lan Nguyen Chaplin, University of Illinois
Deborah Roedder John, University of Minnesota

In a study with 54 children and adolescents ages 7-18, we examine how brands change meaning across age groups. Results indicate age differences in the overall meaning and image of brands. Specifically, 3rd/4th graders view brands more concretely, as a picture or word, compared to 7th/8th graders, who view brands more abstractly, as socially significant aspects of their environment. Differences of this nature were less clear between 7th/8th and 11th/12th graders, suggesting perhaps that most of the dramatic changes in children's development of brand meaning and brand images occur by early adolescence.

“Look What They’ve Done to My Brand: Clashes of Brand Tribes”
Bernard Cova, ESCP-EAP
Stefano Pace, Bocconi University

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