

## WHAT'S IN A NAME? A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SURF AND SNOW BRAND PERSONALITIES

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*This paper performs a comparative analysis of niche brands. Within surfing and snowsport markets, key companies, with distinctive brand names, market specifically to their respective subcultures. Each brand embodies an individuated personality, markets according to unique criteria and evolves through a variety of methods including advertising, event sponsorship, film production and concept stores. This paper investigates the manner in which brand names are apprehended by participants, what difficulties may arise in managing brands and suggest how marketers may cultivate brand image more perceptively since the represented brand personality affects company status in or appeal to these highly discriminating subcultural groups.*

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**Keywords:** *subculture, brand personality, brand image, consumer behaviour*

### INTRODUCTION

The issue of brand personality is central to the planning for any successful company and forms the backbone for much marketing and related areas of research. In this paper, the complexities of managing brand personality are considered, including the difficulties associated with marketing to the fickle subcultural consumer and the pressure to meet the needs of a highly selective market. Using the comparative case studies of two companies who market to the snow and surf communities, this paper examines some challenges faced by major companies in attempting to relate to a subcultural base and how their errors may shed light on how to better manage brand personality issues.

Within the surf and snow markets, key companies with distinctive brand names market specifically to their respective subcultures. Each



brand embodies a particular personality and markets according to different criteria. For instance, Rip Curl communicates their brand as being one driven by quality and a long-standing commitment to the surf culture. Established in 1969, Rip Curl's brand trades on its longevity and ongoing commitment to "real" surfers. Conversely, brands like Quiksilver/Roxy represent a different personality, promoting a "cutting edge" personality that attracts more than just the surfing community. Their brand seeks to trade on a sense of fashion appeal and image as well as seeking to maintain an appeal to the genuine surfing consumer base. This divide between capturing a broad non-surfing market and still remaining in touch with the genuine surfing culture has proven to be a challenge to this brand (see Beverland & Ewing, 2005) since the brand personality must yield to two different purposes. Similarly, given that these brands also market to the snow culture, Rip Curl and Quiksilver/Roxy seek to communicate a distinctive brand personality to the ski/snowboard community. Rip Curl, again, seeks to characterise their brand as authentic and quality-based. Quiksilver/Roxy conveys a more hard-edged image driven personality while still wishing to convey a sense of quality.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF BRANDING AND ITS ROLE IN CONSUMER PERCEPTION**

This research engages with current branding theory in the leisure marketing arena. Within the paradigm of research on branding, several themes have been investigated at length. These include issues of brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000; Kapferer 1997; Keller, 1993; Eppler & Will, 2001; Moore, Wilkie & Lutz, 2002; Davis, 2002), brand loyalty (Holt, 2002; Fournier, 1998; Herbig & Milewicz, 1995; Lane & Jacobson, 1995) and brand personality (Aaker, Fournier & Brunel, 2004; Fournier, 1998; Brown, Kozinets & Sherry, 2003; Davies & Chun, 2003; Keller, 2003; Suvatjis & de Chernatony, 2004; Erdem & Swait, 2004). Equally, the more unconscious aspects of brandings have also been interrogated such as brand awareness for repeat-purchasing (Hoyer & Brown, 1990), reflexive effects of brand name (Bargh, 2002) and the phonetic effects of brand name on consumers (Meyers-Levy, 1989; Yorkston & Menon, 2004). Each of these areas have been widely considered by marketing scholars and find resonance in this research.

Thus the following aspects of branding play particular roles in marketing to surf and snow consumers and form the central points for analysis in this paper:

- brand names convey a series of meanings to consumers regarding issues of quality, authenticity and commitment to the subcultural activity itself;
- in certain cases, brand names also convey a series of meanings to a broader consumptive audience known as “adopters” who do not necessarily participate in the activity itself;
- brands seek to evolve through a variety of methods including advertising, event sponsorship, film production and concept stores;
- some brands evolve more readily and appear to gain competitive advantage;
- brand personality and authenticity directly affects brand status in or appeal to subcultural groups;
- brand personality is typically conveyed through perceived participation in and communication with subcultural groups by the relevant company;
- the sound of brand names, and the feelings that such sounds evoke, impacts upon subcultural consumer appeal;
- the integration or adoption of brands (over and above advertising strategies) into subcultural discourse also impacts upon consumer appeal and therefore maximises competitive advantage.

## **AN OVERVIEW OF SUBCULTURES AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO MARKETING**

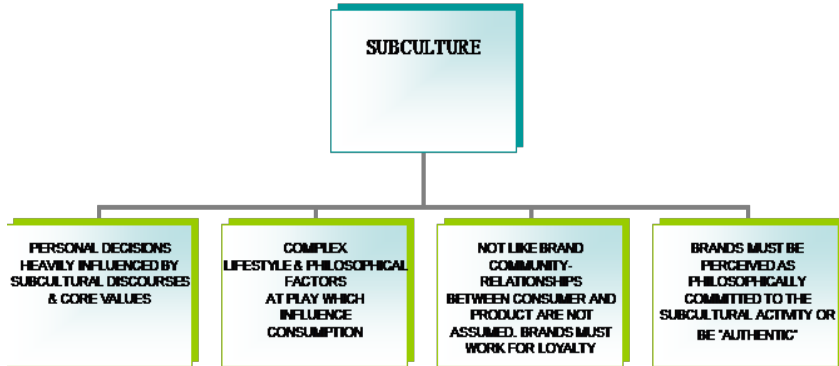
Before we can understand how brand personalities are perceived in the arenas of surf and snow, we must first understand the nature of the subcultural communities to whom they must market their brand. Figure 1 outlines some of the key factors associated with marketing to subcultures.

The function of specific subcultures is not widely researched in marketing discourse to date. Typically, marketing research has focussed on groups of consumers as being united by common consumptive practices or brand, known as brand communities. Muniz and O'Guinn define a brand community as a

*...specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its center is a branded good or service (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001:412)*

The emphasis is on the role goods have to play in people's lives and the social connections that stem from a sense of sharing the advantages or effects of owning a particular branded item.

**Figure 1.** Key factors in marketing to subcultures



However, this paper proposes an alternate view, arguing that actual subcultures are quite different from brand communities and that these subcultures should hold just as much interest for marketers. While the subcultures discussed here are formed through common activities, lifestyle and aspirations which flow through to a commonality of experience, outlook and discourse, these groups nonetheless require a consumption habit in order to exist. More importantly for marketers, this research suggests that in order to gain competitive advantage, marketers need to understand how these groups function, how they remain cohesive and then integrate their products into a larger lifestyle-based context (see Sherry, 1990). This paper suggests that unlike brand communities where the product is the focal point of the community and the relationship between consumer and product is the antecedent to brand community, marketing discourse must conceive of and re-act differently to subcultural consumption. This is not to suggest that the relationship between subcultural consumer and marketer need be a confrontational one. Indeed, as Schouten and McAlexander point out, the relationship between marketer and subcultural communities can be potentially "symbiotic" and mutually beneficial (1995:57). The relationship between consumer and product is not consolidated or emphasised in the same way as in a brand community and the steps the marketer must take in order to gain advantage when marketing to subcultures must be, it is argued here,

highly specific. Marketing to subcultures requires a greater level of knowledge about the consumer and their context in order to be successful.

We must turn our attention to the definition and role of niche groups or "subcultures" as they are typically termed in scholarly discourse (Hebdige, 1979; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Kozinets, 2002; Brumbargh, 2002; Kates, 2002; Solomon, 2004). The term "subculture" finds resonance in various fields of study. In contemporary scholarship, the term has come to refer to a manifold scope of social groups and practices, leading to an interchangeability with other labels such as cult or sect (Kaplan & Löow, 2002). Typically, though, the study of subculture has emanated from the field of sociology (Durkheim, 1951; Parsons, 1959). However with the advent of cultural studies, subculture has been invoked as a way of describing counter-resistance and social fragmentation as well as marginalisation (Cohen, 1972; Hall, 1981; Thornton, 1995; Gelder, 1997; Jenks 2005). As Diane Crane points out in her discussion of the British Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies group (CCCS), famed in the 1970's, it is useful to suppose that

*...to understand a subculture or a counterculture it is necessary to understand its relationship to both the dominant culture and to the social class within which the subculture or counterculture is emerging." (Crane, 1992:89)*

Subcultures have come under a degree of scrutiny by marketing scholars for their individualistic and cohesive cultural practices (Arnould, Price & Otnes, 1999; Belk, & Costa, 1998; Celci, Rose & Leigh, 1993; Kozinets, 2002; McCracken, 1986; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Yet there is no general definition to date in marketing discourse that fully apprehends their structure and which demarcates them from the brand communities. At first glance, the term itself "Subculture" with its opening prefix of "Sub" gives us an intimation as to the fundamental condition of these groups. They operate *beneath* culture, eluding dominant cultural narratives and the surface world of mainstream society. Some argue that

*Subcultures emerged in resistance to dominant culture, reacting against blocked economic opportunities, lack of social mobility, alienation, adult authority and the 'banality of suburban life' (Haenfler, 2004:406)*

which applies in part to the specific cultures of surfing and snowboarding. Crane's (1992) discussion on subcultures echoes this re-actionary aspect of subcultures, viewing them in line with the CCCS model of subcultures as engaged with but resistant to the dominant culture.

It might be argued that this break with classical theories of subculture as representative of a disenfranchised, deviant subset gives way even further to contemporary syntheses of subculture. In legitimating subculture as a politically auspicious counter-culture of resistance, this repositions subculture back into a culturally and socially relevant framework. Although subculture preserves its 'marginal' status, this assignation of subversive social power opens up greater possibilities. In a sense, this fresh potential reaches its apotheosis in the work of current marketing and cultural studies where the term subculture has been designated a new meaning. In the context of consumption, for instance, Michael Solomon comments that:

*Consumers' lifestyles are affected by group memberships within the society-at-large. These groups are known as subcultures, whose members share beliefs and common experiences that set them apart from others. Every consumer belongs to many subcultures. These memberships can be based on similarities in age, race or ethnic background, place of residence, or even a strong identification with an activity or an art form. Whether "Dead Heads," "Netizens," or skinheads, each group exhibits its own unique set of norms, vocabulary, and product insignia (such as the skulls and roses that signify the Grateful Dead).* (Solomon, 2004:472-3)

Solomon's definition signals several critical breaks with traditional discourses of subculture. Firstly, his inclusive statement of subculture as existing "within" society, rather than at its margins as classical discourse would have it, substantiates the work of both Cohen and Crane. Subculture, then, is simply a portion of society, a visible fragment of the greater whole. Further, Solomon suggests that *everyone* is part of subculture, thus undermining the concept of the organic whole in the first instance. For, if we are *all* subculturally allocated by virtue of our intrinsic features (such as age, ethnicity etc.), then there can be no dominant or normative whole around which subcultures tangentially orbit. Further, Solomon's work propounds that subculture requires no marginal, political or subversive agenda to legitimate its existence. Subculture exists by virtue of individual identity and activity or indeed by the act of consumption. Held together by shared experience, language (a point to which we shall return in much greater detail) and habits, subcultures draw on these facets to proliferate (see also Thornton, 1995). Thus, at the end of the twentieth century, the role, function and social positioning of subculture has altered dramatically. Relinquished from its metaphorical signifier of marginality, subculture now describes a relatively normalised

cultural pre-occupation with fragmented, individuated habits and praxis. This definitional transference has perhaps been aided by the sublimation of subculture into disciplines such as marketing and cultural studies, rather than leaving subculture suspended in the net of sociological study.

Within marketing, the concept of subculture has evolved to collide with the idea of selective consumption. This re-appraisal of subculture and its connection with consumption, shared habits and experiences gives rise to the kind of definition such as offered here:

*a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand or consumption activity. Other characteristics of a subculture of consumption include an identifiable, hierarchical social structure, a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values; and unique jargons, rituals and modes of symbolic expression.*  
(Schouten & McAlexander, 1995:43)

While the first part of this definition solely emphasises the commercial or consumptive practices of subcultures (returning them to the status of brand communities), it is perhaps the second part of this definition that better encapsulates the actual contemporary structure of subcultures as they are now regarded in cultural studies and marketing discourses.

This paper offers another definition of subcultures that, extrapolating from Schouten and McAlexander's (1995) characterisation, attempts to incorporate both their internal traits and cultural power. A subculture, as the term is used in this research, is

*a social subset of individuals bound together by a common activity, unique philosophy and outlook which finds its origins in cultural, historical and social influences. This commonality is practiced through specific language, formation of discourses that drive values and mores, commodity use, appearance and social organisation. While internal hierarchies may emerge, for the large part subcultures possess the philosophical capacity to re-appropriate external barriers such as class, race and gender.*

While subcultures may, as part of their philosophy, seek to re-act against perceived authority institutions, alienation and lack of social mobility, they are internally content and concerned principally with the praxis of their own activities and agendas. Subcultures are pro-active. It is significant to emphasise the active nature of surf, snow and sail subcultures, rather than viewing them as marginal or passive groups who participate in a past-time activity. This definition is tailored somewhat to the three activity-based subcultures of surf, snow and sail, although many

of the qualities cited here apply to other subcultural groups such as techno (rave), gothic, and art and punk communities.

## **METHODOLOGICAL AVENUES FOR UNDERSTANDING SUBCULTURAL DISCOURSES**

Within the heterogeneous web of private, social and commercial interests, it is argued that language plays a fundamental role in guaranteeing the basic ongoing cohesion of subcultural groups. Language is used in a multitude of ways by the participants, consumers and marketers of surf and snow with varying degrees of impact and importance. Participants use language as a mode of inclusion (and exclusion); a means of generating internal meaning and cohesion among them (Solomon, 2004). As consumers, participants (and any aspirational marginal consumers) use language to define their consumptive needs or desires and to consolidate their affinity with the culture. Marketers also employ language to consolidate their affinity with the (sub)culture and obviously to elevate their competitive advantage on the basis of authenticity and perceived engagement with its consumer base. These three positions of participant, consumer and marketer are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor do they have to occupy hierarchicised positions. Rather, they are identified as the collectively intertwined groups that exist within the surf and snow communities. It is argued here that language binds them together and creates a foundation of discursive *sympatico* that ensures sustained yet ever evolving unity.

In order to study these niche (and sometimes inaccessible) groups, marketers have adopted from various disciplines to undertake diverse forms of qualitative research (case study, ethnographic field work, cultural anthropological, interpretivist, phenomenological) aimed at investigating the complicated layers that bind these groups internally (Arnould, Price & Otnes, 1999; Belk, & Costa, 1998; Celci, Rose & Leigh, 1993; Kozinets, 2002; McCracken, 1986; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). As Kates notes, the dominant theoretical aspects around which subcultures are investigated are structure, ethos and boundaries (Kates, 2002). The use of language (including jargon) among subcultural groups is one critical component of their internal cohesion which has been identified as central to the expression of these theoretical concerns. Much research has been conducted into structural devices of language such as rhetoric, tropes word frequency and schemes and their link to persuasion in advertising (McQuire, 2000; McQuarrie & Mick, 1996; Meyers-Levy, 1989; Scott,

1994). However the actual use of language itself by consumers and the ways in which meanings are attributed, adapted and assigned by subcultural consumers has not been substantially investigated.

This paper suggests that the evolution of brand personality which in turn affects consumer perceptions of the brand and their potential loyalty to that brand can be both generated and monitored by study of subcultural language formation. To this extent, marketing discourse which seeks to understand and refine brand personality would benefit from the insights generated by theories such as poststructuralism, deconstruction and semiotics. While marketing scholars have identified the positive effects that structuralist/poststructuralist and de-construction theory may potentially render upon the discipline, there nonetheless appears to be a reluctance to fully interrogate these potential effects and promulgate effective methodological practices based on said theories. Stephen Brown even suggests that while certain marketing scholars exploit the term 'postmodern' to describe their work and espouse these theoretical sentiments, there might also be a misapprehension of what both the term postmodern and what these theoretical positions in fact connote (Brown, 1995:153). Scholarship to date has referred warmly to these theories and has, at times, invoked their tenets in some aspects of methodological design. However, thus far, these theories have essentially remained at the periphery of marketing discourse and their adoption might be best characterised as occasional, limited (Stern 1996) and superficial. By understanding that language can have more than one intended meaning and that meaning is ascribed by the subcultural consumer, marketers can "go in search" of the kinds of meanings ascribed by subcultural consumers and thus gain further insight into the discourse into which they must integrate. Equally, if the language and discourses generated by subcultural groups is better understood, then companies are able to accurately gauge the reception and status of their brand.

Further, by understanding the way in which language is used specifically by subcultural groups, this also enables marketers to use this codified language - "jargon" - to reduce the risk of having their message misunderstood or read negatively.

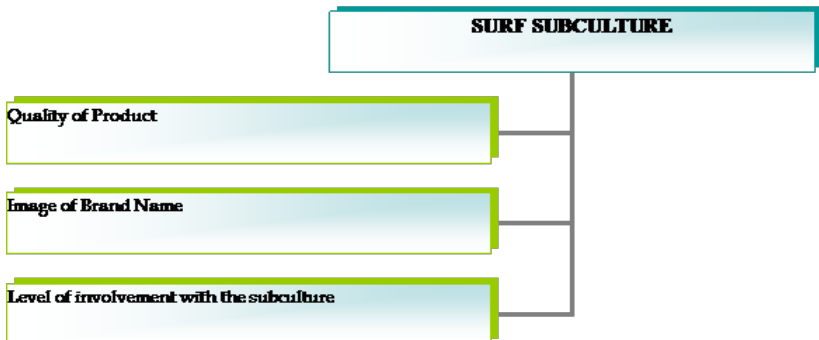
In being able to better select language, this enables marketers to better research and monitor the degree of success in their communication with consumers by "speaking the language" of the consumer. In the case of marketers wishing to market products to a specific consumer audience, such as the snow, sail and surf markets, the ability to speak with the consumer in their own language is vital in order to gain status within that

market and maintain a competitive advantage over companies who do not connect as effectively with their consumers.

## **SOME COMPARISONS BETWEEN BRANDS – THE DIFFERENT KINDS OF SURF/SNOW IMAGES AND CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS**

Why, out of a variety of choices, do participants choose the brands that they do and how do they see the companies involved connecting with their activities and community? Contemporary marketing scholarship has investigated these themes at some length (see Celsi, Rose & Leigh, 1993; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Holt, 2002; Thompson, 2004) and the questions of brand loyalty, communication and authenticity will be explored in the specific context proposed here. The following breakdown shows some anticipated trends within the two subcultures as to the issues surrounding on what criteria products may be regarded. This breakdown shows how different factors affect the perception by subcultural groups regarding how they choose products and why certain companies appeal over others. Companies who engage with these concerns better than others would presumably gain a competitive advantage:

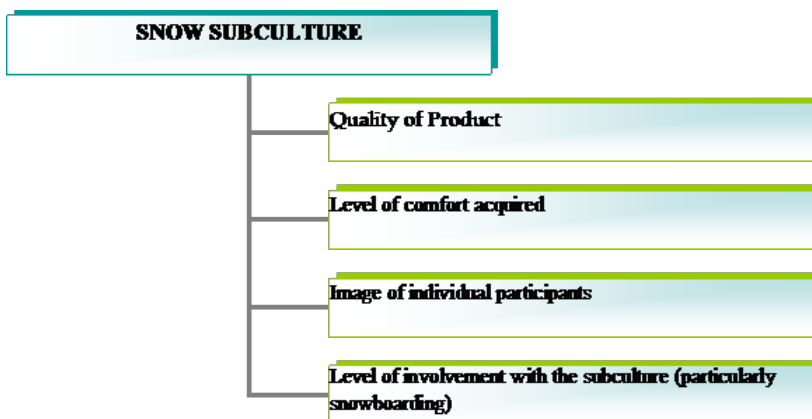
**Figure 2.** Consumer Expectations in the Surf Subculture



In the instance of surf, the division between those who surf and those who do not surf but still wear surfing clothing, see surfing films and participate in the general culture is reflected in the anticipated division between quality of product (such as quality surfboards and wetsuits) and image of brand name where key companies are perceived as desirable.

In the snow culture, it is anticipated that like the surf and sail cultures, quality of product plays a significant role in purchase choices. As with surf and sail, the importance of good equipment that does not fail readily is expected to be a significant factor relayed by consumers. However, by contrast with the surf culture, it is predicted that while there may be a pool of brands who cater to the snow culture it is the individual's image, not the brand image, that is seen as important.

**Figure 3. Consumer Expectations in the Snow Subculture**



## **Two Examples of Surf and Snow Brands – a comparative analysis**

### ***Rip Curl***

The brand Rip Curl was established in Victoria Australia in 1969. Located in Torquay, home to one of the most famous surf beaches in the world - Bells Beach- the brand Rip Curl was founded on the bedrock of an authentic relationship with surfers, consolidated by its geographical and emotional proximity to Bells Beach and the orbital surf community. The brand began by manufacturing good quality surf boards by hand in the back shed of one of its founders and enjoyed immediate success among local surfers. The reputation of the boards quickly extended to other surf communities and by the 70s, Rip Curl was a famous company.

Today Rip Curl still manufactures boards (which continue to be acknowledged as excellent) and has developed all of the commercial accoutrements such as clothing, wet suits, bags, accessories and a ladies range and have concept stores (along with retail distribution) all over the

world. When we compare Rip Curl to its humble beginnings, the brand has certainly evolved into an international enterprise, hosting surf and snow events on every continent. However, the essence of the Rip Curl brand, for all of its commercial growth, has remained largely the same. Certain changes in brand logo and image over the years have attracted criticism from hard-core surfing communities but nonetheless the brand has continued to be the choice for serious surfers. Their recent marketing slogan "The Search: it's closer than you think" again captured the core surfing ideal of searching for the perfect wave, thus re-iterating the Rip Curl commitment to the spirit of surf. The launch of the slogan was accompanied by a Rip Curl documentary showing the staff of Rip Curl (all of whom surf) on a boat in Indonesia and Fiji roaming about looking for great swell - the message being that "The Search" was a *bona fide* quest not only preached but practiced by Rip Curl itself.

Thus, the status and brand personality of Rip Curl could be described as one based upon a visible solidarity with "real" surfers, a company run and managed by surfers and therefore characterised by authenticity. On the one hand, this has proven to be a driving factor behind the brand's longevity since the brand represents an image of surfing connected temporally and spiritually to a romantic, almost nostalgic by-gone era of lazy days in the swell. As Brown, Kozinets and Sherry indicate, this form of nostalgic authenticity can work effectively because of the personal and social meaning generated for consumers

*Personal and communal nostalgia are closely intertwined, nowhere more so than in marketing. Long-established brands evoke not only former epochs but also former selves. Old brands serve to bind consumers to their pasts and to the communities that shared those brands... Indeed, old brands may link people together even more powerfully, because they strongly evoke a sense of a utopian past and because of the close knit "caring and sharing" communities that are associated with it. (Brown, Kozinets and Sherry, 2003:20)*

On the other hand, this effort to locate the brand at the inner-circle of the surfing culture has posed its own limitations with which Rip Curl has struggled to cope, both financially and in terms of image. These shortcomings have included a perception of the brand as masculine, thereby alienating women surfers. The auxiliary brand "Rip Curl Girl" failed to strike a chord with women and was perceived as an unsatisfactory adjunct or tack-on to the main brand. Further, in its efforts to repeatedly articulate brand authenticity, Rip Curl eternally utilised images of men on waves without generating a discourse of solidarity to

compliment the visual image. This resulted in a stale image with no supporting discourse to connect it with the subcultural base. These issues were identified in 2003 when Rip Curl decided, for the first time, to consult an external advertising and marketing consultancy called The Nest. The weaknesses associated with an "authentic" brand were quickly pinpointed and as The Nest director Freddie Baveystock suggested

*In the past [the brand] has thrived on visual communication and endless action shots of heroic surfers. We've brought words into the picture.* (Baveystock, 2003:5)

Further the question of Rip Curl Girl as a viable brand was addressed and the decision was made to abandon the failed brand extension. However the question of female surfers and their significant presence in the surfing subculture was not ignored, thus forcing Rip Curl into a new strategy of inclusion. As Baveystock points out

*It's a big change for the brand, which has had a very masculine focus. Rip Curl Girl felt like the brand's little sister. This generation of female surfers are very skilful and we want to give them due respect* (Baveystock, 2003:1).

As a result of Rip Curl Girl's failure, the women's range was re-integrated under the banner of Rip Curl and synthesised into the general brand, making it more of a unisex brand in the genre of other surf brands such as Billabong and Cult. The fact that Rip Curl identified the need for these changes and a re-appraisal of the surf market demonstrated two important factors: 1) that Rip Curl had remained unwavering in its devotion to an authentic, if not outmoded, surf culture 2) that its devotion to this subculture ultimately limited its ability to grow and develop as a brand. The failure to apprehend an emergent female surfing community that stood on equal footing with men's surfing or the need for a fresh discourse with the subculture significantly hampered the brand.

### ***Quiksilver/Roxy***

By contrast, the Quiksilver/Roxy juggernaut tells a very different story of commercial success in the surfing and snow arena. Established 34 years ago, Quiksilver is now based in America and represents the largest surf/snow company in the world. Their expansion has been rapid and all-consuming, buying up brands such as DC Shoe Company, Rossignol and Hawk alongside its Quiksilver and Roxy brands. Quiksilver/Roxy has also developed a major media and promotional wing, involving themselves in projects for Fox Sports Net, MTV and Boost Mobile phone (where they developed the Roxy phone which played "California Dreamin'" as its ring tone). In 2004, the documentary "Riding Giants"

opened the Sundance Film Festival thanks to the partial funding of Quiksilver/Roxy. As Jonah Bloom points out "the apparel giant has stumbled on a branding model that is based on offering the consumer entertainment rather than interruption" (Bloom, 2004:17). These media interests sit alongside event and athlete sponsorship which accompany their surf and snow events throughout the world. In 2002, Quiksilver/Roxy opened its flagship store in Times Square, New York which has in turn spawned several other concept stores around the world. It is fair to say that Quiksilver/Roxy is a commercial monster, posting sales of \$705 million in 2002 (Cuneo, 2003:18), a 44% increase in sales in 2003 and a hallmark \$1billion profit in 2004.

Quiksilver/Roxy tells a different story from Rip Curl (certainly in terms of profit and market share if nothing else). As a result, the challenges that Quiksilver/Roxy as a brand faces are different from those of Rip Curl and smaller more "authentic" surf and snow companies. Randy Hild aptly isolated the problem in that

*the brand walks a thin line between holding onto an authentic grassroots surfing community (with its underground mentality) and going too mainstream and ending up an uncool sellout.* (Cuneo, 2003:18)

As much as Entertainment President Danny Kwok, an ex-surfer, may assess each decision the company makes against "criteria of what is the core [surfer community] going to think of this? Is this going to take us down?" (Cuneo, 2003:18), this awareness of the need for perceived authenticity has not stayed the company's hand in adopting mainstream mass marketing tactics which in the short term have paid off since a significant non-surfing consumer base wear Quiksilver/Roxy. This has led to some speculation that the Quiksilver/Roxy brand will become the next Nike with the capacity to saturate all avenues of the marketplace. But as Aaker notes, the question of loyalty is central to a brand's equity which in turn affects its longevity. He comments that

*Loyalty is a core dimension of brand equity. You usually offend your core first because they are connected to the brand and they care. Therefore brand blunders that go to the heart of the customer relationship should affect loyalty.* (Aaker, 1996:105-6)

In the instance of subcultural consumption, the issue of loyalty is augmented by the notion of authenticity where consumers expect a level of genuine participation by brands in their activities. The possibility of being betrayed by large-scale commercial interests such as those

envisaged by the Quiksilver/Roxy empire ultimately places pressure on the brand's relationship with the core surfing community of the world.

Equally, as Beverland and Ewing identify in their study of adoption and diffusion process to enhance brand re-positioning, a rapid and saturated marketing strategy does not always produce sustained effects. The short term gain can often give way to long term brand failure. In the instance of Dunlop Volley in Australia, the brand was adopted by a select group of rave party goers who made the brand "cool." The moment that the brand was taken on by a larger circle of 'adopter' consumers, the original consumer abandoned the brand, taking with them the essence of cool. Beverland and Ewing identify the need for authenticity as a critical component of subcultural marketing and brand personality (Beverland & Ewing, 2005:389). In the instance of Quiksilver/Roxy, authenticity has given way to consumer pleasure, evidenced in decisions such the one to release the Roxy Life line of clothing for women. The line was pitched as an office-formal wear style of clothing using luxurious fabrics such as wool and silk instead of the conventional cotton and acrylic used for surfwear. The price tag for this line did not come cheap either with many items priced into the several hundred dollars bracket. This line was certainly not aimed at the sun-kissed goddesses of the beach, content in their sarongs, rashies and bikinis with a board under their arm. This range was for young urban business women who wanted a slightly more relaxed corporate look.

### ***Rip Curl and Quiksilver/Roxy – a discussion of the challenges facing brand personality***

These two major surf and snow brands offer two different insights into how companies who must market their products to a highly selective, subcultural consumptive audience have dealt with the pressure of brand personality and evolution. These two companies have faced a divergent range of issues in the evolution of their brand personality and while Rip Curl has undeniably held onto the "real" surfing community it remains to be seen whether or not Quiksilver/Roxy will be punished by the inner surfing core for its ambitious commercial development into the mainstream marketplace. Essentially, the conclusion to be reached when we compare the two brands is that Rip Curl attempted to remain too authentic, thus ignoring the evolution of women's surfing and the new world of glamour surfing. Bu contrast, Quiksilver/Roxy has not remained authentic enough, moving away from the hard-core surfing community into a global empire. It remains to be seen whether this step away from the subcultural base will ultimately harm the status and thus financial

power of the company, although marketing research would indicate that an alienated core frequently results in long-term damage. The two case studies of brand evolution in the subcultural context offered here raise several issues in respect of developing a brand identity and then monitoring the elaboration of that brand. Firstly, the question of brand personality itself and the characteristic attributed to a particular brand must be understood where the strength and weaknesses of those attributes can be managed. These characteristics may in part be manufactured by the company but the ultimate architect of a brand's identity is the consumer for they must read and assign meaning (and therefore personality attributes) to the brand. Thus is particularly so in the case of highly selective subcultural consumers. Secondly, the evolution of a brand personality is governed by ongoing brand perception but also by company awareness both of its own brand status and of the shifts in the subcultural context. One might argue that Quiksilver/Roxy has responded too strongly to these changes with commercial overkill and that Rip Curl has not re-acted enough in failing to identify earlier that their image was tired and that their female base was alienated.

## **CONCLUSION**

While the challenges facing these companies in their management of their brand personality vary according to their origin and market position, one thing is clear from both of these cases. Marketers, in managing brand personality, need effective tools to gauge their consumer base, their tastes and shifting predilections, and find ways to re-invent themselves according to the needs of their consumers. This paper suggests, through its discussion of subcultural formation and cohesion, that language provides a vital link both within subcultures and to relevant companies. In marketing, much attention is given to the internally referential development of campaigns, advertising and promotion, yet this method can, at times, miss the mark and fail to apprehend the real perception of brand. Rip Curl and Quiksilver/Roxy have both in their own ways opened themselves up to a major crisis of brand identity by making decisions that failed to take account of how their brand was perceived by the snow and surf subcultures. This could have been mitigated and better managed by marketing tactics that listened to what the consumer was saying about their brand and responded accordingly.

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