

Role Of Social Identity Signalling In Brand Tribalism Of Generational Cohorts

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Abstract

This research delves deep into the complex interaction between brand loyalty and social identity signalling across generations. People now look to brands more than ever before to convey who they are and where they fit in the ever-changing consumer environment.

This study delves into what drives brand loyalists' need to broadcast their social identities via their chosen brands.

The complex ways in which different generations interact with brands as a means of articulating their social identities are explored by looking at factors such as generational traits, identity development, social impact, technological adoption, and cultural trends.

In addition, the research emphasizes the significance of brands in promoting a feeling of community and belonging across generations.

It highlights the relevance of brand identity and message in connecting with the values and goals of target demographics. Brands that resonate with consumers' identities, personal values, and views are becoming more important as consumers negotiate the shifting terrain of brand tribalism.

The results of this study provide useful information for marketers, brand strategists, and companies that want to connect with customers of all ages. To better connect with consumers across demographics, businesses would do well to examine the complex relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism.)

Introduction

Several variables affect how much of a part social identity signalling plays in brand tribalism across different generations. Brands that customers believe make them feel better about themselves socially and/or represent their true selves are said to be "self-expressive" (Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006). To fully grasp the reasons why people of various generations participate in brand tribalism via social identity signalling, it is essential to have a firm grasp of these elements. In particular, the idea of a "self-expressive brand" refers to the extent to which a person's self-image and the brand itself mesh (Loureiro et al., 2012).

Generational characteristics such as Baby Boomers, Gen Xers, Millennials, and Z-ers all have their own quirks and priorities since they grew up in different times. Variations in brand tribalism may result from generational disparities in how people experience and interact with brands. “A network of societal micro-groups in which individuals share strong emotional links, a common sub-culture, and a vision of life” (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009) is what brand tribes are. The expression of one’s identity and principles is frequently tied to the act of signalling social identity. There is a positive correlation between the brand’s function for the self and brand loyalty, as identified by Liu et al. (2012) in the context of luxury brands; they recommend more studies into the link between other types of self-expressive brands and brand outcomes. One way that people of various generations express themselves is via their allegiance to certain brands. It has long been understood that brands function as an extension of the consumer’s self-concept, providing meaning as a means of self-expression and self-definition (Belk, 2013; Papista and Dimitriadis, 2012).

Third, peer pressure and other forms of social influence are important factors in the formation of brand loyalties. The brand preferences and signalling habits of a generational cohort may be impacted by those of their contemporaries or other influential members of that cohort. Because of advances in communication technology, brand associations are now more widely known than ever before. Brand perception and tribal formation may be affected by the platforms and modes of communication used to convey brand allegiance by people of various generations.

Different generations may be drawn to businesses based on how they present themselves and what they stand for. Individuals are more inclined to embrace and indicate their social identity via brands that are consistent with the values and beliefs of their generation. Additionally, brands enable consumers to express group membership (Veloutsou and Moutinho, 2009); tribes arise when members identify with each other, with ‘collective social action’ enabled by brands (Goulding et al., 2013). Humans have a deep-seated need to have a sense of community and a sense of belonging. According to Cova and Pace (2006) and McAlexander et al. (2002), the consumer-brand relationship may be uniquely and significantly characterized by its connection to the brand community. Different generations may seek this feeling of community via brands to varied degrees, and brand tribalism may give that sense of belonging. Although Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) find a connection between self-expressive brands and good WOM, they also stress the need for further research into the link between self-expressive brand consumption and “desirable post-consumption behaviour,” in this case, WOM and brand loyalty. To better understand the connection between the self’s position in the brand and customers’ motives for making purchases, Sirgy et al. (2008) propose that brands that mirror the self increase brand loyalty.

The state of the economy, one’s disposable money, and one’s access to gainful work are all socioeconomic factors that have an impact on the brands people choose to support. Brand loyalty and product choice may be affected by generational changes in socioeconomic status. In order to convey their shared enthusiasm to other members of their tribe and be accepted by them, consumers might forge a social bond (Mitchell and Imrie, 2011; Moutinho et al., 2007).

There are three sorts of value that might give rise to a distinctive and original brand name: value for the buyer, value for the seller, and value for the recipient. The three types of value identified are practical, sentimental, and expressive.

The attitudes and views of one generation may be affected by the norms and fashions of the next. The prestige associated with donning a luxury label and the satisfaction gained from moving closer to one's idealized self-portrait are both examples of the importance consumers place on self-expression. From the consumer's point of view, self-expressive brands are a paraphrase of traits that may be translated into values.

Brands that reflect or adapt to these cultural developments may find more success marketing to certain age groups. Consumers' adoption of brand meaning in self-identity creation has been known to be influenced by reference groups for some time (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). These phrases, which appear to be interchangeable (Cova and White, 2010), have been used to refer to the interactions that consumer subcultures have with companies. These terms are "communities," "brands," and "cults." People's preferences for certain brands may change as they go through the various periods of their lives (such as schooling, employment, and starting a family). For instance, Millennials' brand preferences may shift from their college years to their professional and family years. Individuals' good and bad brand experiences may form the basis for their brand allegiances and the signals they send to others. Tribes is another term that has been used to describe strong brand ties (Cova & Cova, 2002). Generational gaps in brand and product exposure may lead to distinctively different encounters. Reference groups provide a source of information about a brand's meaning (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

Nostalgia, for example, might play a role in fostering brand loyalty. Some brands may have special sentimental value for older generations, whereas newer generations may have distinct associations. Through their self-expressive value and the 'connection value' of brand consumption in connecting with others, consumers get more from brands than the bare necessities provided by a product (Park et al., 1986).

As a result of international trade and travel, consumers now have access to a larger variety of products and ideas from across the world. It's possible that global brands and trends have varying effects on various generations. To fully grasp the intricate dynamics of brand tribalism across demographic groups, it is crucial to have a firm grasp of the interaction between these components. Consumer brand relationships may also be described and quantified in terms of brand personality, brand attachment, brand identity, brand love, brand engagement, and brand experience (Aaker, 1997; Batra et al., 2012; Brakus et al., 2009; Lam et al., 2010; Park et al., 2010). To further understand how these elements emerge across generations and how they affect social identity signalling via brand affiliations, researchers exploring this area may consider undertaking in-depth qualitative research, surveys, and analytics.

Research Gap

Most brand tribalism and social identity signalling research focuses on Millennials. Cross-generational comparative research on brand tribalism and social identity signalling is lacking. Such a study might reveal generational behavioural similarities and variances. Rapid changes in the digital world and social media now influence how people express their social identities via businesses. Research has yet to completely capture how generational cohorts use new digital venues for brand tribalism and identity signalling. Dynamic Cultural Trends greatly influence generational identities and values. Few studies have examined how cultural trends like sustainability, diversity, and ethical consumerism affect brand tribalism over generations.

Limited research examines how brand attachments and social identity signals evolve over generations. Such a study might reveal brand tribalism's durability and fluidity as people mature and travel through life phases. Greater exposure to varied products and cultural influences. Research is lacking on how globalization impacts brand tribalism over generations and whether it converges or diverges signalling behaviour. The internet domain is important, but offline behaviours like in-person encounters and product consumption also contribute to brand tribalism. Research is required to determine how offline and online signalling pathways complement each other in generational cohorts.

Methodological approaches for measuring brand tribalism and social identity signalling might differ among research, making it difficult to compare results. For generational study uniformity and comparability, consistent metrics and methods are lacking. Research on underrepresented generations focuses on Millennials and Generation Z owing to their projected importance in consumer marketplaces. Filling these study gaps would help us understand how social identity signalling and brand tribalism work across generations. It would let firms and marketers modify their tactics to engage varied customer groups across generations.

Objectives Of The Study

The primary objectives of this research are:

- a) To investigate the relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism among different generational cohorts.
- b) To explore the moderating role of generational identity in the relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism.
- c) To examine the mediating effect of brand loyalty on the relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis-1

Null Hypotheses (H0): There is no significant relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism among different generational cohorts.

Alternative Hypothesis(H1): There is a significant positive relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism among different generational cohorts.

Hypothesis-2

Null Hypotheses (H0): Generational identity does not moderate the relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism.

Alternative Hypothesis(H2): Generational identity moderates the relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism.

Hypothesis-3

Null Hypotheses (H0): Brand loyalty does not mediate the relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism.

Alternative Hypothesis(H3): Brand loyalty mediates the relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism.

Variables Used In The Study

Dependent Variable: Brand Tribalism

Independent Variable: Social Identity Signalling

Moderating Variable: Generational Identity

Mediating Variable: Brand Loyalty

When generational cohorts participate in brand tribalism, a fascinating phenomenon occurs within the area of consumer behaviour. This phenomenon is known as “brand tribalism.” Tribes are less structured than communities, and they may not be centred on a product or a lifestyle (Cova & Shankar, 2012). The purpose of this research is to investigate how people from various generational cohorts use and react to brand choices as a method of expressing and reinforcing their social

identities. This will be done by looking at how individuals from different generations use and respond to social identity signalling in this context. This study intends to uncover the processes via which social identity signalling promotes the establishment and persistence of brand tribes within various generational cohorts by diving into the subtle dynamics of brand tribalism.

Research Methodology

The study focuses on 500 consumers of self-expressive brands, which are taken as a sample and surveyed with the help of a questionnaire for the study through online surveys. The study is an empirical study. Secondary data is sourced from various credible sources like books, newspapers, and journals, as well as from access to various websites. Primary data is collected through a stratified random sampling technique.

Sampling technique

A stratified random sampling method was applied to select the sample from the probability sampling method. 125 consumers from Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Z were selected, and the questionnaire was distributed. Hence, the total number of questionnaires distributed was 500. Thus, the sample size of this study was 500 respondents.

Research design

A descriptive research design is employed for this study.

Tools and Techniques

Statistical tools like descriptive analysis, ANOVA, Pearson correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis were employed in the study. Cronbach's Alpha is calculated to find the reliability of the data. The validity of the instrument is determined through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using AMOS.

Pilot Study

A pilot test was undertaken prior to distributing the questionnaire, with the aim of pre-testing the instrument. The pilot test was administered to a sample of 50 respondents. The pilot study was conducted, during which the personnel were provided with a concise explanation of the research objective. The collection of all surveys was completed successfully. Based on the preliminary investigation, it can be seen that the variables (Social Identity Signalling, Brand Tribalism, Generational Identity, and Brand Loyalty) exhibit a high degree of reliability, above the acceptable threshold of 0.80. The surveys were not modified, and all items were retained in their original form.

Data Analysis

Table Demographic background of Respondents

Demographic characteristics		n (Total=500)	% of n
AGE	Less than 30 years	70	14.0
	30 years - 40 years	353	70.6
	40 years -50 years	35	7.0
	50 years & above	42	8.4
GENDER	Male	318	63.6
	Female	182	36.4
EDUCATIONAL STATUS	School level	84	16.8
	Diploma	27	5.4
	Graduation	225	45.0
	Post Graduation	104	20.8
MONTHLY INCOME	Professional	60	12.0
	Less than Rs. 25000	116	23.2
	Rs. 25000- Rs. 50000	360	72.0
	Rs. 50000- Rs. 75000	5	1.0

	More than Rs. 75000	19	3.8
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Source: Primary data

n – Number of respondents

The table makes it comprehensible regarding the age of the consumers. It was found that those belonging to the age group between 30 years and 40 years (70.6 %) are higher in representation in the study, and only 7.0 of them belong to the age group 40 years and 50 years. 14.0 % of the consumers belong to the age group of Less than 30 years. Likewise, 8.4 % of the consumers are between 50 years & above.

36.4 % of the consumers in the sample are female, and 36.6 % of them are male. Regarding educational status, 5.45 % of the consumers in the study have a diploma, and 12.0 % are professionals. 16.8 % of them have school-level literacy, and 45.0 % are graduates. 20.8 % have completed post-graduation.

Regarding the monthly income, 23.2 % of the sample respondents earn Less than Rs. 25000. 72.0 % earn Rs. 25000– Rs. 50000 monthly, 1.0% draw an income of Rs. 50000– Rs. 75000, and 3.8 % of the consumers in the study earn a monthly income of More than Rs. 75000.

Hypothesis-1

Null Hypotheses (H0): There is no significant relationship between Social Identity signalling and Brand Tribalism among different Generational Cohorts.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant positive relationship between social identity signalling and brand tribalism among different Generational Cohorts.

Table: One-Way Analysis for Social Identity Signalling and Brand Tribalism among Different Generational Cohorts

		Sum of Squares	df ^a	Mean Square	F ^b	Sig. ^c
SIS	Between Groups	0.870	3	0.290	0.019	0.996
	Within Groups	7571.168	496	15.264		
	Total	7572.038	499			

BT	Between Groups	4.198	3	1.399	0.118	0.949
	Within Groups	5869.504	496	11.834		
	Total	5873.702	499			

Source: Statistically analyzed data

Note: SIS refers to Social Identity Signalling.

BT refers to Brand Tribalism.

^aDegrees of Freedom, ^bF-Statistic, significance

The table shows that there is no significant relationship between social identity signalling and generational cohorts. Hence, the Null Hypothesis is accepted since the P value is greater than 0.05. Also, there is no significant relationship between Brand Tribalism and Generational Cohorts. Therefore, the Null Hypothesis is accepted since the P value is greater than 0.05.

Hypothesis-2

Null Hypothesis (H0): Generational Identity does not moderate the relationship between Social Identity signalling and Brand Tribalism.

Alternative Hypothesis(H2): Generational Identity moderates the relationship between Social Identity signalling and Brand Tribalism.

Table: Regression Analysis- R Square – Generational Identity

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.931 ^a	0.885	0.882	2.696

a. Predictors: (Constant), Zscore(SIS), INT

Table: shows the R (0.931) is the multiple correlation coefficient of the independent variables, with the dependent variable as generational identity. The R square value is the total variance in the

dependent variable. Also, in the above result, the R square value is 0.885 (88.5%), which is a good fit.

Table: Regression Analysis- Generational Identity

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	2260.523	2	1130.261	155.470	0.000 ^b
	Residual	3613.179	497	7.270		
	Total	5873.702	499			

a. Dependent Variable: BT

b. Predictors: (Constant), Zscore (SIS), INT

In Table:, the F value of 155.470 is found to be accepted at a significance level of 0.01 per cent. Hence, 88.5 % of the variance in Generational Identity is significantly explained by the independent variables such as Social Identity Signalling and Brand Tribalism.

Table: Regression Analysis- Significance- Generational Identity

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	31.511	0.122	-	257.828	0.000
	INT	1.006	0.115	0.325	8.780	0.000
	Zscore (SIS)	1.501	0.127	0.438	11.831	0.000

a. Dependent Variable: BT

Table: explains that the highest positive value in beta is 0.614 for Generational Identity, which is significant at 0.001 level.

The interaction term (INT) has a p-value of 0.000. Since the p-value is lower than 0.010, we can consider the moderator value. Generational identity has an effect on the relationship between the independent variable, Social Identity Signalling and the dependent variable, Brand Tribalism.

Hypothesis-3

Null Hypothesis (H0): Brand Loyalty does not mediate the relationship between Social Identity Signalling and Brand Tribalism.

Alternative Hypothesis(H3): Brand Loyalty mediates the relationship between Social Identity Signalling and Brand Tribalism.

Table: Regression Analysis- R Square – Brand Loyalty

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.943 ^a	0.859	0.857	3.388

a. Predictors: (Constant), SIS

Table: shows the R (0.943) is the multiple correlation coefficient of the independent variables, with the dependent variable as Brand Loyalty. The R square value is the total variance in the dependent variable. Also, in the above result, the R square value is 0.859 (85.9%), which is a good fit.

Table: Regression Analysis- Brand Loyalty

ANOVA ^a					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.

1	Regression	358.199	1	358.199	31.198	.000 ^b
	Residual	5717.823	498	11.482		
	Total	6076.022	499			

a. Dependent Variable: BL

b. Predictors: (Constant), SIS

In Table:, the F value of 31.198 is found to be accepted at a significance level of 0.01 per cent. Hence, 85.9 % of the variance in Brand Loyalty is significantly explained by the independent variables such as Social Identity Signalling.

Table: Regression Analysis- Significance- Brand Loyalty

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	38.808	1.231	-	31.516	0.000**
	SIS	0.217	0.039	0.243	5.585	0.000**

a. Dependent Variable: BL

Table: explains that the highest positive value in beta is 0.217 for Brand Loyalty, which is significant at 0.001 level.

Brand loyalty has the highest influence on 'Social Identity Signalling' (0.217), has a positive effect, and would increase the unit on brand loyalty, which is significant at 0.001 level.

Table: Regression Analysis- R Square – Brand Loyalty

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.938 ^a	0.889	0.888	2.894

a. Predictors: (Constant), SIS

Table: shows the R (0.938) is the multiple correlation coefficient of the independent variables, with the dependent variable as Brand Loyalty. The R square value is the total variance in the dependent variable. Also, in the above result, the R square value is 0.889 (88.9%), which is a good fit.

Table: Regression Analysis- Brand Loyalty

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1700.144	1	1700.144	202.866	0.000 ^b
	Residual	4173.558	498	8.381		
	Total	5873.702	499			

a. Dependent Variable: BT

b. Predictors: (Constant), SIS

In Table:, the F value of 202.866 is found to be accepted at a significance level of 0.01 per cent. Hence, 88.9 % of the variance in Brand Loyalty is significantly explained by the dependent variable, such as Social Identity Signalling, and the independent variable, Brand Tribalism.

Table: Regression Analysis- Significance- Brand Loyalty

Coefficients ^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	16.816	1.052	-	15.984	0.000**
	SIS	0.474	0.033	0.538	14.243	0.000**

a. Dependent Variable: BT

Table: explains that the highest positive value in beta is 0.474 for Brand Loyalty, which is significant at 0.001 level. Brand Loyalty has the highest influence on 'Social Identity Signalling.'

The beta value of Social Identity Signalling (0.474) has a positive effect and would increase the unit of Brand Loyalty, which is significant at 0.001 level.

Table: Regression Analysis- R Square – Brand Loyalty

Model Summary				
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.958 ^a	0.867	0.863	3.377

a. Predictors: (Constant), SIS, BT

Table: shows the R (0.958) is the multiple correlation coefficient of the independent variables, with the dependent variable as Brand Loyalty. The R square value is the total variance in the dependent variable. Also, in the above result, the R square value is 0.867 (86.7%), which is a good fit.

Table: Regression Analysis- Brand Loyalty

ANOVA ^a					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.

1	Regression	405.681	2	202.840	17.779	0.000 ^b
	Residual	5670.341	497	11.409		
	Total	6076.022	499			

a. Dependent Variable: BL

b. Predictors: (Constant), SIS, BT

In Table:, the F value of 202.840 is found to be accepted at a significance level of 0.01 per cent. Hence, 86.7 % of the variance in Brand Loyalty is significantly explained by the independent variables such as Brand Tribalism and Social Identity Signalling.

Table: Regression Analysis- Significance- Brand Loyalty

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	37.015	1.510	-	24.515	0.000**
	BT	0.107	0.052	0.105	2.040	0.002**
	SIS	0.167	0.046	0.186	3.626	0.000**

a. Dependent Variable: BL

Table: explains that the highest positive value in beta is 0.167 for Brand Loyalty, which is significant at 0.001 level. Brand Loyalty has the highest influence on 'Social Identity Signalling.'

The beta value of Social Identity Signalling (0.167) and Brand Tribalism (0.107) has a positive effect and would increase the unit on Brand Loyalty, which is significant at 0.001 level.

Conclusion

Finally, brand tribalism is a dynamic and diversified kind of social identity signalling among generational cohorts, reflecting the changing consumer environment. Brand loyalties vary by age group because of differences in life experiences, beliefs, and social conditions. Millennials and Generation Z may find other like-minded individuals via digital channels and join brand tribes. Physical product usage and community involvement may be highly valued by Baby Boomers and Generation X as a means of social identity signalling. People in a group or tribe who all love the same brand and who support each other emotionally and intellectually because of their shared love of the product. To accept the brand as genuine within the confines of an ad, it is essential that one party have faith in the reliability and honesty of the other (Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2010). Our research demonstrated that common brands may strengthen bonds between generations. Successfully connecting with consumers across generations requires a strong brand identity and strategic marketing. A brand's ability to appeal to a certain generation may do wonders for the brand's bottom line.

Cultural factors such as sustainability, diversity, and ethical consumption were shown to be significant drivers of generational identities and brand tribalism. If they want to connect with clients of different ages, businesses should study how different generations see and value different brands. Customers' purchasing choices may be influenced when the brand is seen as a means of self-expression (Fan, 2005).

Our research also highlighted the need to do further studies that compare generations, particularly in the rapidly evolving realms of digital and social media. Research on the brand allegiances and social identity signalling of different age cohorts may shed light on the stability and changeability of brand tribalism.

Our findings imply that more investigation of brand tribalism across generations is warranted in this era of globalization when individuals are exposed to a wide variety of brands and cultural influences. It is unclear whether globalization causes signalling behaviour to converge or diverge. We believe that in order to ensure consistency and comparability in future generational research, standard measurement and analytical methodologies must be used.

Understanding how various generations participate in brand tribalism via social identity signalling is both academically and practically significant in today's fast-evolving consumer market, where brands are more than simply goods and vehicles for self-expression and social connection. According to research by Taute and Sierra (2014), consumer intent is increased when people have an emotional attachment to the products they plan to purchase. With this information in hand, companies may tailor their marketing to a wider range of consumers of all ages. Understanding consumer behaviour and branding may benefit from more research into the complex relationship between generational identification, brand tribalism, and social identity signalling.

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