

Using the Looking Glass Self Theory to Cultivate Identity Value: A Study of the Apple  
Brand

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## **Abstract**

### Using the Looking Glass Self Theory to Cultivate Identity Value: A Study of the Apple Brand

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This thesis introduces *looking glass identity value* as an extension to current identity value theory, arguing that consumers use the brand outgroup as a reflexive entity to reflect back to them their own beliefs and feelings regarding a brand. This brand outgroup consists of individuals who do not consume a given brand, yet are perceived to make assumptions about those who do. The consumers of the brand then use these perceived assumptions, which are in fact manifestations of their own opinions, to determine what the brand communicates to others.

The study uses in-depth interviews as well as supplementary netnography to research consumers of Apple to better understand their consumption experiences with the brand. It is found that these individuals use a looking glass process to determine the brand's identity value, while exhibiting traits of a dependent relationship with the brand. The combination of this looking glass identity value and dependent relationship on the brand manifests in identity value management strategies by the consumers, which are used to manipulate their personal evaluations of the brand and avoid abandonment.

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## Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	v
List of Tables.....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Theoretical Background.....	7
2.1 Theory of Identity Value and its Limitations.....	7
2.2 Consumption and Self-Presentation.....	8
2.2.1 Self-Monitoring and the Social-Adjustive Function.....	9
2.2.2 Self-Presentation and Public vs. Private Consumption.....	10
2.2.3 The Spotlight Effect and Embarrassment.....	12
2.3 Brand Outgroup and its Social Influence.....	13
2.3.1 Differentiating the In- and Outgroups.....	15
2.3.2 Who is the Brand Outgroup?.....	16
2.4 Summary.....	20
Chapter 3: Methodology.....	21
3.1 The Research Context.....	21
3.2 Selection of Participants.....	23
3.3 Interview Approach.....	26
3.4 Other Data Sources.....	27
3.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation.....	29
Chapter 4: Findings.....	31
4.1 Looking Glass Identity Value.....	31
4.1.1 Consciousness of the Brand Outgroup.....	35

4.2 Dependency Relationships.....	40
4.2.1 Obsessive, Highly Emotional Attractions Cemented by the Feeling that the Other is Irreplaceable.....	41
4.2.2 Separation from the Other Yields Anxiety.....	43
4.2.3 A High Tolerance for the Other’s Transgressions.....	47
4.3 Identity Value Management Strategies in Dependency Relationships.....	52
4.3.1 Active Selling to the Brand Outgroup.....	53
4.3.2 Defending the Brand from Negative Comments from the Outgroup.....	57
4.3.3 Denial.....	63
Chapter 5: Conclusion.....	68
5.1 Theoretical Implications.....	69
5.2 Managerial Implications.....	71
5.3 Limitations and Future Research.....	73
References.....	79

## List of Figures

Figure 1.....	52
Figure 2.....	67

## List of Tables

Table 1.....	25
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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Early marketing theory was strongly connected to economics-based supply and demand models (Kotler, 1972). The essence of the theory was founded on decision strategies that would allow the firm to target a market and attempt to maximize the profits attained from “noncontrollable demand variables” (Kotler, 1972; McCarthy, 1960, Kotler, 1967). Thus, marketers understood that it was their responsibility to use the classical marketing mix to present a product or service to a fixed target market, and that this offering would be either accepted or rejected by the group of consumers. This basic approach viewed marketing as a one-way process of development and embedment of meaning, giving little credence to the power of the consumer.

Recent literature suggests that the image of a brand is created between the consumer and the producer, not embedded unilaterally by the producer as was originally conceptualized (Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Merz, He and Vargo, 2009; Payne, Storbacka, Frow and Knox, 2008; Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel, 2006). The gravity of this theoretical shift is great, as it introduces the concept of non-producers being involved in the creation of the meaning that is attached to a brand. Vargo and Lusch (2004) and Payne et al. (2008) posit that it is the work of both the consumer and the producer to cultivate this meaning; the producer creates the product and its marketing techniques in order to target a certain image, while the consumption practices of the consumer exemplify the way in which and by whom the product will be used. While this logic is well-founded in its approach to brand creation, it does not sufficiently appreciate the range of actors in the brand image creation process. Specifically, it limits the parties involved to those who produce and those who consume the given product. However, within this model, there

must be consideration for those who do not directly consume the product, but are assumed to evaluate users: the brand outgroup. The brand outgroup alters the meaning of a brand due to its members' role as recipients of the brand's signal.

I address this oversight by introducing the concept of *looking glass identity value* to explain how consumers use the brand outgroup to reflexively consider the expressive abilities of their brand usage. Combining the looking glass theory of Charles Horton Cooley (1902) and Douglas Holt's identity value (2004), I develop this new construct to shed light on the importance individuals place in others' perceived opinions of them, as well as how they determine what these opinions are when they are not told explicitly. Cooley's looking glass concept (1902) refers to the process by which individuals reflexively consider themselves from the perspective of another, while Holt defines identity value as "the aspect of a brand's value that derives from the brand's contributions to self-expression" (Holt, 2004, p.11). By considering the interplay of these two concepts, this thesis provides a perspective that explores the internal processes of individuals as they consume publicly with the perception of attention from those around them. This looking glass identity value differs from Holt's identity value (2004) as it considers the individual realities of each consumer and strives to understand the processes by which this value is cultivated. As opposed to the general approach of identity value, wherein a brand possesses a singular value, looking glass identity value is designed to acknowledge the influence of one's own beliefs, and the assumed beliefs of those around them, on their personal evaluation of a brand's ability to self-express.

The perceived attention that will be focused upon in this thesis will be on those who do not own the brand, thus existing in a relative outgroup. While consumers may be

aware of the evaluations of fellow users of a given brand, this thesis argues that the consumer has a different perception of the evaluations from those who do not own the brand. For example, the owner of a Porsche Boxster will perceive different evaluations from a fellow Boxster owner and an individual without the sports car. While the fellow Porsche consumer may evoke feelings of community, the non-user of the brand, the outgroup member, can be perceived to be jealous of the car, or think that the owner is wealthy. It is this variation in perceived evaluations that highlights the necessity to consider the brand outgroup as a factor in brand co-creation; if the brand's expressive abilities are conditional on whether or not another person consumes the same brand, then the outgroup must be considered an intricate member of brand creation as it allows for a unique brand experience that is not found between consumers and producers. By illustrating this specific consideration for those who do not use the brand, the current understanding of brand co-creation between the consumer and the producer can be extended to the brand outgroup, since these individuals possess a perceived opinion regarding brands, which can influence the consumption experience of the consumer. In essence, this looking glass identity value refers to the facet of a brand's value that derives from its ability to self-express, as determined through a reflexive process whereby each individual consumer uses the brand outgroup to reflect back their own beliefs about the brand.

It is this concept of a reflexive self and brand outgroup that differentiates this research from its predecessors. As I will show in the following sections, the extant literature considers the signalling and identity usage of a brand, but does not delve into the reflexive behaviour of consumers nor their consideration for the brand outgroup. By

combining the classic psychological theory of the looking glass self with the emerging brand theory of identity value put forth by Holt (2004), as well as original data collection, this thesis demonstrates that consumers have an awareness of the perceived judgments of other individuals and these appraisals aid in the cultivation of a brand's identity value to them.

While this construct builds upon Holt's identity value (2004), its most important contribution is the suggestion that identity value is complex and can possess multiple perspectives. In other words, the concept of identity value is rooted in the expressive abilities of a brand and an essential portion of brand expression is the interpretation by the recipient. However, since the interpretation by the recipient is not always explicit, the expresser oftentimes must make assumptions about the opinions of the other. Thus, while a brand may be viewed one way by the general public and interpreted in that way, it is possible that the user of this brand is convinced that it is thought of differently. As such, it is important to acknowledge this second type of identity value, wherein consumers develop assumptions about what others think of their brand usage, allowing their own beliefs to be manifested into the perceived beliefs of those around them. This concept works complementarily with the original identity value construct to frame the multiple perspectives that exist when considering the identity value of a brand.

Using the Apple brand and its loyal consumers as the case study in this thesis, I explore the interplay of reflexively projected assumptions driven through looking glass identity value. In addition, I observe behavioural traits in individuals which suggest that they are involved in a dependent relationship with Apple, as defined by Fournier's brand relationship research (1998). I go on to argue that this dependent brand relationship acts

as a constraint for Apple users in which they feel obligated to behave within certain parameters relating to their brand choice and usage. For instance, if consumers are in a dependent relationship with Apple, they will not be able to interact with the brand with the same objectivity used towards other products, and are thus limited in their potential actions, such as abandoning the brand or supporting its competitors. Simultaneously, these individuals participate in a looking glass identity value process: they consider their own image reflexively, projecting their beliefs about the brand to others in order to reflect it back to themselves, allowing them to confirm their own evaluations of the brand. The outcome of this looking glass identity value process, existing within the parameters set forth by the dependent relationship, is behaviour on the consumers' part that attempts to manage the looking glass identity value in order to improve their own consumption experience.

These findings are valuable to both practitioners and academics, as this thesis considers both pragmatic and theoretical perspectives. For practitioners, by considering the concept of the looking glass identity value, the consumption experience of individuals is better understood. In demonstrating that individuals consider the perceived opinion of others when consuming a brand, practitioners can appreciate this value given to the brand outgroup and act accordingly. The marketing manager becomes better equipped to develop a successful identity brand by understanding the process through which consumers determine identity value. As well, using the interplay of this construct and a dependent brand relationship to explain the observable behaviour often seen from Apple users, practitioners can better understand why certain brands are able to maintain loyal behaviours in their consumer base.

From an academic perspective, my findings can help to develop and legitimize a new consumer culture construct: looking glass identity value. My theory complements Holt's introduction of the identity value construct (2004) by introducing the looking glass process and discussing the individual realities of consumers. In doing so, the complexities of brand meaning in a culture can be better understood from the perspective of the consumer. Furthermore, this combination of looking glass identity value and the dependent brand relationship provides an opportunity for future research to explore this construct within varying brand relationship types. For example, this particular case study of Apple presents an instance of dependency on the brand; however, other brands may cultivate differing types of relationships, which, when combined with the looking glass identity value construct, manifest behaviours that differ from those that are observed in this thesis. Further research can develop parameters for the construct and flesh out its ability to explain consumer behaviour. Additionally, by shedding light on the brand outgroup and its perceived evaluations, future researchers can appreciate the importance of the brand outgroup and consider it a vital player, alongside producers and consumers, in the study of consumption.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1 Theory of Identity Value and its Limitations

According to Holt (2004, p.11), identity value is “the aspect of a brand’s value that derives from the brand’s contributions to self-expression.” Furthermore, an identity brand is one that derives its value primarily from identity factors rather than perceived quality (Holt, 2004). For example, brands such as Chanel or Levi’s are often consumed based on an identity value, while more utilitarian products and services, such as Tide or Air Canada, are brands developed on a reputation of quality and reliability (Holt, 2004). Despite the importance of the construct to this study, identity value is unfortunately underdeveloped by the current supply of literature. Existing literature has used identity value as a singular entity with universal applicability; hereto, identity value has only been discussed as the goal of commercial mythmaking by developing a generally understood meaning of a brand (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Thompson and Tian, 2008). No current literature elaborates on the possibility of dynamic identity values that contrast perceptions of consumers with outsiders’ opinions of them. For instance, a fashion brand may have a certain identity value to particular consumers, as they believe that it expresses cool, cutting edge style to those around them. However, the more widely held understanding of this brand’s expressive meaning may be tacky and loud. With these differing thoughts regarding the brand’s message, what then is the identity value? Such an instance highlights the limitations of the current construct in the literature; a distinction of identity value types is necessary, as it is likely that this value changes from one individual to another.

The act of self-expression on the consumer’s part is of particular interest to this

study, as the current literature is lacking in its ability to fully explain the behaviour of a consumer when expressing oneself. This thesis further refines the concept of identity value by incorporating the ways in which consumers reflexively determine the value added to their self-expression through the public display of a brand, which I refer to as the *looking glass identity value*.

I build this theory on Cooley's looking glass identity (1902), which explains how people develop a reflexive self by making assumptions regarding the judgments made about them by others and experiencing the feelings associated with this imagined judgment. Solomon (1983) expands upon this concept by suggesting that individuals play roles in a culture and will often role-play from another's position to determine how they are seen by others. Thus, consumers possess their own looking glass identity value for a given brand and they determine this value based on their own assumptions about what others think of them when associating them with the given brand. By investigating the ability for a brand to express oneself, as well as the feelings of consumers regarding the presumed receipt of these expressions, the identity value construct is improved, creating a more complete understanding of the consumer experience. Before that, one needs a better understanding of how consumption is used in self-presentation and expression.

## **2.2 Consumption and Self-Presentation**

In addition to the theoretical basis of identity value, it is important to consider the propensity of individuals to present themselves to others. In other words, while the concept of identity value theoretically frames a portion of the consumption experience, it is necessary to investigate the psychological aspect of looking glass identity value by

testing the effect of the other on an individual's behaviour. Although previous empirical studies did not consider the concept of a brand, instead investigating the psychological impact of peer evaluations, these studies can support this thesis by scientifically proving the effects of peers on individuals. Such studies, in conjunction with the existing brand literature, further support the looking glass identity value construct and its prevalence in the consumer experience.

### *2.2.1 Self-Monitoring and the Social-Adjustive Function*

A necessary caveat to the influence of peers is the varying degree to which certain individuals seek the approval of others and the characteristics of a brand most likely to possess high identity value. DeBono (1987) investigates the concept of self-monitoring and how this personality trait affects the motivations of consumption. According to DeBono (1987), high self-monitoring individuals strive to fit into their social setting by tailoring their behaviour to each environment. These individuals have been found to often give greater value to objects that will achieve their social goals. Low self-monitoring persons, on the other hand, prefer to root their behaviour in their own values, feelings and dispositions (DeBono, 1987). Thus, the separation between the two types of individuals is that some react to perceived external pressures while others use internal feelings for their motivations.

DeBono (1987) continues on to align high self-monitoring with a social-adjustive function, which are attitudes based on how well an individual can fit into a social situation and "behave in ways appropriate to various reference groups" (DeBono, 1987, p. 279). These socially adjustive individuals have been shown to be more likely to

purchase counterfeit luxury products than value-expressive consumers, who are persons who behave with more internal, low self-monitoring motivations (Wilcox, Kim and Sen, 2009). Such findings suggest that there are certain individuals in the market with a greater propensity to base their motivations for behaviour on the perceived opinions of those around them. By purchasing these counterfeit products knowingly, they show that they are not consuming for the inherent quality of the object, but the assumed attention it will garner. Meanwhile, the lower self-monitoring, value-expressive individuals find little satisfaction in a fake product despite its comparable façade. This differentiation of consumption motivations suggests that the findings of this thesis study may explain the actions of one portion of the population better than another and can explain why certain participants in the study may have differing views on the use of their products, without challenging the strength of the argument. Furthermore, Holt (2004) suggests that there is a greater likelihood for high-involvement, non-technological, consumer products to become identity brands than others. Thus, while this literature may counter the generalizability of this thesis, it supports the notion that a certain portion of the consuming population, as well as a collection of the products in the market, is motivated by the perceived opinions of others.

### *2.2.2 Self-Presentation and Public vs. Private Consumption*

In addition to the degree of self-monitoring within an individual, the differentiation between public and private consumption must also be made. More specifically, the varying degree of self-presentation between these two arenas of consumption can influence the behavioural decisions made by individuals. Self-presentation is an attempt

by a person to control the images of themselves in front of real or imagined audiences (Schlenker and Leary, 1982). The individual, or actor, in this situation attempts to create a desired image and the success of this creation is gauged by the perceived reactions of others (Schlenker and Leary, 1982). It is this self-presentation that acts as the primary tool for high self-monitors, as it allows them to regulate their own expressions for the sake of perceived audiences (Graeff, 1996). The high self-monitors use self-presentation most often, whether consciously or subconsciously, to manage the self-images they portray in social situations (Graeff, 1996). While the construct of self-monitoring will not be measured within this study, it is important to consider when understanding the differences between public and private consumption behaviour.

Graeff (1996) determines that when products are used privately, there is no image for one to portray, and thus self-monitoring is non-existent. Moreover, one's self-monitoring level, whether high or low, only affects consumer behaviour in public situations in which the individual perceives an audience (Graeff, 1996). In addition to the work of Graeff (1996), an empirical study found that individuals will change their consumption behaviour in public, to the point of using less preferable items in hopes of making a favourable impression on peers (Ratner and Kahn, 2002). Another study determined that some individuals will act as early adopters of publicly consumed products to differentiate themselves from less socially desirable groups (Fisher and Price, 1992). The combination of these findings suggests that a product's status as publicly or privately consumed significantly affects the behaviour of the consumer, even to the point of personal sacrifice in the Ratner and Kahn (2002) study. This thesis will build upon these findings by identifying the brand outgroup and showing the influences it can have

on the identity value of a brand.

### *2.2.3 The Spotlight Effect and Embarrassment*

The concept of the spotlight effect has been investigated in order to understand one's consciousness of others. Gilovich, Savitsky and Medvec (2000) develop an experiment to test the degree to which people assume they are being noticed, or under a "spotlight," and compare it to the actual level of attention they receive. This empirical study finds that individuals tend to perceive more attention received from others than they truly obtain, suggesting that consumers inherently believe that they are noticed by others (Gilovich et al., 2000). In essence, individuals are not only aware of others' opinions in public, but overestimate the amount of attention they receive. Additionally, it can be argued that this perception of attention can affect how an individual consumes in public, due to the fact that one generally assume he/she is being seen by others.

The authors discuss the concept of naïve realism, a case in which individuals assume that their perceptions of an object are not based on their subjective evaluations, but objective properties (Gilovich et al., 2000). That is, it appears that individuals often assume that their perception of the world is an objective reality (Gilovich et al., 2000). In the context of this thesis, this concept would then suggest that people assume that others notice their consumption practices because they themselves notice others' behaviour and that others' evaluations of their brand usage mirror their own opinions. Thus, for the consumers who indulge in this naïve realism, their reality is based on the assumption that all other individuals think, feel and act in the same way that they do. This approach complements the theories of Solomon (1983) and Cooley (1902) that humans extrapolate

their own perceptions in an attempt to predict the perspective of others, creating a reflexive self.

A 2001 study by Dahl, Manchanda and Argo builds upon these spotlight effect findings by specifically researching the concept of embarrassment. The notion of embarrassment is important to this thesis since a valued, perceived opinion from an external party is required for one to be embarrassed. This particular study finds that embarrassment is driven by a concern for what others think and the perception of being evaluated and that people are aware of, and care about, audiences whether they are real or perceived (Dahl et al., 2001). Finally, it determines that the actions of an individual are affected by social presence (Dahl et al., 2001). This collection of empirical findings regarding peer influences, spotlight effect and embarrassment support the notion that an individual's behaviour is a function of, among other things, the perceived opinions of others. This thesis goes beyond these findings to argue that due to this consciousness of others' evaluations, the products and brands that an individual uses in public are assumed to be judged and therefore the use of, and feelings towards, these items are somewhat dependent on the assumed notions of the brand outgroup.

### **2.3 Brand Outgroup and its Social Influence**

For the purpose of this study, it is important to define how the term “brand outgroup” will be used. In the discussion of looking glass identity value, the brand outgroup acts as the reflexive entity. That is, the brand outgroup is used by the consumer as a way of considering the evaluations of others regarding the public usage of a brand, which occurs by reflecting one’s own feelings about the brand off of this outgroup. This

reflexive process allows the consumer to perceive the thoughts of others with respect to their brand usage, letting them experience the expressive abilities of the brand.

The brand outgroup is conceptualized as those who are perceived by consumers to exist outside of the ingroup of the brand. Put simply, in the mind of the consumer, they are the individuals in a culture who do not own a certain brand and thus make assumptions about those who do. For example, if an individual owns a BMW vehicle and drives through the downtown area of a city, the driver is the consumer and all of those in other brands of cars and walking along the sidewalk are the brand outgroup. Within the reality of the driver, this outgroup evaluates her/him based on his association with the BMW brand. Since the driver is not actually hearing their evaluations, s/he is making assumptions based on her/his own beliefs. Thus, this outgroup becomes an entity that reflects back her/his own feelings about the BMW brand. It is this reflective quality that is the essence of the brand outgroup; they are a part of the consumer's reality used as an aid in experiencing the identity value of a brand.

It is important to clarify the perspectives involved in the concept of the brand outgroup. Since this outgroup is merely a reflexive entity used by consumers to confirm their own beliefs about the brand, they do not necessarily need to have an opinion regarding the brand or even notice the brand's usage. In essence, the brand outgroup is not required to provide actual feedback to the consumer. Rather, consumers assume certain individuals are evaluating them based on their brand choices, without any evidence suggesting that this is actually the case.

Returning to the BMW example, while the consumer is driving a BMW through the city core, s/he may assume that passersby notice and evaluate her/him based on

her/his automobile choice. However, this assumption exists only within the reality of the consumer; that is, the audience that is evaluating her/him is merely a manifestation of her/his perceptions. Although it is necessary for others to be present in order for consumers to presume they are evaluating them, it is not necessary that these people actually evaluate or notice the individual. Thus, the brand outgroup is a projection created within the individual consumer's personal reality in order to convert those around him/her into people who notice and care about brand choices.

### *2.3.1 Differentiating the In- and Outgroups*

The current supply of literature regarding the social influence involved with brand value and meaning is vast. Algesheimer, Dholakia and Herrman (2005) find that members of brand communities gain a sense of belonging in the group setting, as well as feelings of normative community pressure to conform to the group's actions, such as mocking a competing brand. McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig (2002) similarly determine that "brandfests" for the Jeep brand would result in an increased sense of integration for the consumer, while Schau, Muniz Jr. and Arnould (2009) specifically posit that these communities co-create value. Less formal collections of brand users influence fellow consumers as well, where findings show that individuals will purchase products in hopes of entering a group of fellow consumers (Beverland, Farrelly, and Quester, 2010). More specifically, superordinate social people, or the "cool" members of society, often influence subordinate social individuals to adopt certain products simply by using them (Fisher and Price, 1992). These findings support the theory of Vargo and Lusch (2004) that suggests one's consumption behaviour can be shaped by fellow consumers. However,

a commonality amongst these existing studies is the presence of an ingroup; that is, the behaviour of these consumers is motivated by the hopes of improving their status amongst other users of the brand. While these studies show significant support for this notion, they unfortunately omit the importance of vital players in this environment, the brand outgroup. To suggest that brands are co-created strictly between those who make and those who use is to ignore the possibility for external pressures on a consumer. This thesis argues that those who do not consume a given brand do indeed play a role in the cultivation of its expressive meaning and identity value by acting as reflexive properties for the consumer.

Kozinets' (2001) research investigates how members of the *Star Trek* fan community felt about the brand in their daily lives. He finds that *Star Trek* fans are comparable to "cellar Christians" due to their need to hide their passion from the masses in order to avoid ridicule. One woman in the study states that she is not only aware of the stigmas attached to her fandom, but that she is personally affected by what these people are perceived to think of her. Findings such as these suggest that the way a brand, such as *Star Trek*, is perceived by consumers is partly attributed to those who are perceived to judge individuals for their consumption behaviour. As such, the expressive meaning of the *Star Trek* brand is somewhat dependent on those who do not watch the show, but are perceived to have an opinion about those who do.

### 2.3.2 *Who is the Brand Outgroup?*

I define a brand outgroup as the group of individuals who do not own a given brand. This group is to be considered in contrast to those who do own a given brand, the ingroup. As

discussed earlier, there is a large supply of literature which has investigated the effects of this ingroup on fellow consumers, while the influences of this outgroup have been overlooked. As such, while investigating the presence of looking glass identity value, this thesis simultaneously considers the consumer's perceptions of the brand outgroup and how this collection of individuals influences those who consume a brand.

An instance in which this brand outgroup has been clearly overlooked is in a study by Berger and Heath (2008), which suggests that brands can be used by individuals to signal their otherwise undetectable personality traits. For example, a person may wear a Nirvana t-shirt to show that they enjoy grunge, less-mainstream music, which would otherwise be unknown to others. It is suggested by the authors that this signalling can allow for group developments, whereby members of similar groups, such as Nirvana fans, can signal to each other that they have a commonality between them. Berger and Heath (2008) go on to suggest that signal confusion is a concern for these brand users, as they are attempting to communicate a message to others via their brand affiliation, but factors outside of their control can affect the clarity of this message; one study finds that students adopt yellow Livestrong bracelets when given the opportunity, but abandon them when "geekier" students begin wearing them as well, in fear of being associated with this group.

A conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of Berger and Heath (2008) is the importance of the brand outgroup with respect to the meaning of a brand. In the study, students abandon their Livestrong bracelets upon discovering that the less socially desirable dormitory has also adopted the bracelets. The authors of the study suggest that this abandonment occurs as a result of the original dorm members wishing to avoid

message confusion, in fear that they will become associated with the “geekier” dormitory. According to White and Dahl (2006), this behaviour is considered within the realm of a dissociative reference group, whereby individuals do not want to belong to a particular group. In Berger and Heath’s (2008) experiment, the authors think that if an undesirable reference group adopts a brand, the message of this brand becomes confusing and potentially inaccurate for the original users, who are thus wishing to dissociate themselves with it. However, what the authors fail to discuss is to whom these signals may be confusing. While the use of brands as an ingroup symbol of membership has been discussed thoroughly within academic literature, little has been written on the importance of the brand outgroup. For instance, in this Livestrong example, the original dormitory members are afraid of being associated with the more geeky dormitory members. The attractiveness of the bracelet is seemingly lost when the geekier students become affiliated with it, as the message of its adornment may become confusing. This conclusion of message inaccuracy thus makes the assumption that there is a third party of individuals who do not wear the bracelet, but are perceived to interpret its use as a certain message, and that this third party’s interpretation is important to the wearers of the bracelet. Put simply, the original dormitory feels that other students on campus will associate them with the geekier students if they are all seen wearing the Livestrong bracelet, which is an undesired outcome. This concept of signalling can be drawn parallel to the expression construct at the heart of identity value. That is, the ability to signal a particular message is similar to the desire for one to express oneself, due to the dependence of both on a recipient of the communication. Thus, if this third party of students is considered in the meaning of the Livestrong bracelet to the original dormitory,

and the actions of Berger and Heath's (2008) study are being applied to the signalling of brands, then one cannot ignore the importance of the brand outgroup in the ability to self-express and a brand's identity value.

The concept of signalling has been investigated prior to Berger and Heath's (2008) research, developing from the fields of sociology and psychology. Cooley (1902) discussed the concept of a looking glass, suggesting that people create a reflexive self. This reflexive self is composed of an individual's imagined appearance to others, the assumed judgment of this imagined appearance, and a resultant feeling based on this perceived judgment (Cooley, 1902). This suggests that a certain level of consciousness of ourselves exists from an external perspective, such that we have feelings that are simply a manifestation of perceived judgments based on assumed appearances.

Solomon (1983) builds on this theory by arguing that individuals fill social roles on a daily basis, where products set the stage for these roles. Furthermore, Solomon (1983) suggests that individuals will empathize, or take another's role, in order to determine how others will perceive them. That is, people will regularly consider the view from another's perspective, or role, to determine how they appear to the other, or in this particular case, the brand outgroup. It is this process of role-playing that highlights the importance of the brand outgroup and is at the root of looking glass identity value. The consumer of a brand will empathize such that they feel they are viewing themselves from the perspective of another person. The result of this changed perspective is an assumption about how others are viewing oneself based upon brand usage. Thus, the reflexive self put forth by Cooley (1902) and the role-playing notion posited by Solomon (1983) today manifest themselves in consumption by causing the individual to use the brand outgroup

to reflexively determine the identity value of their brand usage.

## **2.4 Summary**

Considering the above collection of literature, there is a gap within the current supply of research, as the concept of external pressures on brand co-creation has been overlooked. While there is a bevy of support for ingroup brand creation, little has been done to investigate or appreciate the outgroup of a brand. Given the psychological support for the tendency of individuals to present themselves to others, assuming that people will notice them more often than they actually do, and the naïve realist way in which individuals apply their subjective evaluations to a universal reality, there is a need for marketing literature to consider the influences of those who do not own the brand on the perceptions of those who do. Combining this research with the emerging concept of identity value, there is an opportunity to distinguish the multiple perspectives that exist within the expressive abilities of a brand. This thesis seizes this opportunity by developing looking glass identity value, combining the theories of the looking glass self and identity value to frame the consumers' experience of brand consumption.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Due to the emergent nature of the research questions, I employ a qualitative methodology in this thesis. Since the purpose of this research is to investigate and explore how consumers feel about their products and brands with respect to the brand outgroup, it is not yet possible to develop a confirmatory, quantifiable model. As such, a qualitative, interview-based approach has been taken in order to thoroughly understand each participant's consumption behaviour in hopes of uncovering a pattern amongst the group.

### 3.1 The Research Context

The context of this investigation is the Apple brand and its consumers. Apple is a strong fit for this study as it possesses a unique collection of traits that will assist in investigating the proposed factor of the brand outgroup. The Apple brand has become increasingly popular within the past decade and often garners media attention as a result of its product launch events. For instance, on June 7, 2010, *The New York Times* published an article about a new camera feature that would be available in the iPhone 4 product to be launched weeks later, on June 24, 2010 (Helft and Wortham, 2010). The importance of this article is not its specific content, but that *The New York Times* is a well-respected, non-technological publication. As such, the fact that this minute feature of a yet-to-be-released cellular phone is newsworthy to a media company as accomplished and widespread as *The New York Times* suggests that a large portion of the population is familiar with the Apple brand and its developments. This familiarity is important to this study due to its purpose of determining the influence of the brand outgroup on the identity value and feelings of the consumer. By using a brand that is well known amongst

all consumers, the likelihood for consumers to assume that others have an opinion increases due to the probability that these others are familiar with Apple.

A second trait of Apple that is conducive to this study is its public visibility. More specifically, due to the increasing portability of the company's products, their usage often takes place in the public sphere. This use of the product can range from a Macbook used for taking notes in a lecture hall, to a phone call made with the iPhone on a street corner, to switching songs on an iPod at the grocery store. Whatever the instance, the importance of the products' public nature is that they are often used while in the presence of others. In addition, the construction of Apple products makes the brand's logo visible to others, going so far as to glow on the back of Macbook products. As outlined previously, there are multiple studies that find that public consumption affects the behaviour of individuals (Graeff, 1996; Ratner and Kahn, 2002; Fisher and Price, 1992). These findings then suggest that a publicly used brand is the most likely to be influenced by the perceived opinions of others, making the public use of Apple an important facet of this study.

Third, Apple is a very strong "identity brand." Holt (2004) categorizes identity brands as those that derive value primarily from identity factors as opposed to perceived quality. While product quality is a consideration with Apple brand's value, its identity traits have allowed it to succeed in the market; that is, while the brand offers a utilitarian function, it provides an image for its users that allows them to be represented by their brand. Thus, Apple is conducive to this study because of the increased likelihood of finding identity value in the experiences of the consumer.

Finally, the Apple brand appeals to this study due to its common use and its penchant for consumer relationships. Studies find that individuals form bonds with their

personal technology products (Moon, 2000; Muniz Jr. and Schau, 2005; Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, and Iacobucci, 2010). Specifically, Muniz Jr. and Schau (2005) posit that the brand community surrounding the cancelled product line of the Apple Newton could be considered religious towards the company, and develops a feeling of responsibility to sustain the product and brand, while Park et al. (2010) show that Apple users exhibit signs of separation distress with the brand. Thus, both the technology sector and the Apple brand lend themselves to a study investigating the roots of brand relationships. Additionally, Apple's prevalence in the consumption market allows for a wider base of potential interviewees; such a wider base permits for increased ease in finding participants in addition to the ability to speak with a variety of individuals. More specifically, due to Apple's relatively low price threshold, starting at under \$100 in the iPod product line, the demographics and psychographics of the consumer community have fewer limitations than identity brands such as BMW or Chanel. As such, the potential for biased results stemming from the income levels of consumers is minimized.

Therefore, by choosing Apple as the brand of discussion, this study is founded upon a brand that is well known throughout the consumer market, used in public often, has a product line with increased potential for relationship development, is an identity brand, and is accessible enough to the general public that demographic and psychographic biases are limited. The combination of these traits resulted in the choice of Apple as the brand for the context of this research.

### **3.2 Selection of Participants**

The basis of this research is the importance of the brand outgroup in the shaping of

identity value for the consumer. Since this outgroup is a relative entity and the identity value perspective of interest in this thesis is that of the consumer, it was determined that only Apple users should be considered as participants. The actual feelings of a non-Apple user are not the concern of this theory; rather, it is what the Apple user perceives this non-user to feel about them that is to be researched. As such, the only individuals who are important to this particular study are those who own an Apple product, as they are the only people capable of using looking glass identity value with respect to Apple. Thus, the single criterion for the recruitment of participants for this study was that the individual must own an Apple product.

In order to prevent them from being influenced by the research question, the participants were not fully informed with the full extent of the purpose of the study. Throughout the recruitment process, as well as in the consent form and the introduction to the interview, participants were told that they were participating in a study to determine how consumers feel about Apple in order to understand why it is so popular. While this information is not wholly inaccurate, there was a purposeful omission of the concept of the brand outgroup and its place in the theory. The rationale behind this exclusion of information was the possibility of making the participant self-conscious about the value that s/he put in others' opinions. That is, once learning that I was researching how they were influenced by others' thoughts of them, it was possible that participants would consciously present themselves in a way such that they do not care what others think, potentially in an attempt to protect themselves from the perceived shame of an admission to the contrary. As a result, it was deemed unnecessary to produce this information, as its omission did not pose a risk to the participant and its inclusion

challenged the quality of the results.

A total of 13 participants were interviewed for data collection. The summary statistics of the sample is presented in table 1.

Table 1

Name	Location	Age	Occupation	Apple Products
Brandon	New York, USA	29	Graduate student	-Macbook -iPhone
Caroline	Lyons, France	40	Advertising graphic designer	-Mac Mini -iPod Touch
Charles	British Columbia, Canada	77	Retired pastor, software technician	-iMac -Macbook Pro -iPod Touch
Jason	California, USA	28	IT	-Macbook -iPad -iPod Touch
Katherine	California, USA	31	Online media producer	-Macbook -iPhone -iPod
Mario	Illinois, USA	27	Web design development	-iMac -iPad -iPhone -Magic Trackpad -Magic Mouse
Megan	Ontario, Canada	27	Graphic designer	-Macbook Pro -iPod Mini
Michael	Quebec, Canada	21	Student	-Macbook -iPod Mini -iPod Shuffle -iPod Nano -iPod Touch
Patrick	Ontario, Canada	24	Technical Support	-iPod Touch -iPhone
Roger	British Columbia, Canada	55	IT	-Macbook Pro -iPod Nano
Stacy	Quebec, Canada	21	Student	-Macbook -iPhone -iPod Nano -iPod Classic
Susan	Ontario, Canada	52	IT and educational support	-Macbook Pro -Mac Pro -Mac G5 -iPad -iPod Touch
William	California, USA	36	Security product customer support	-Macbook -iPad -iPhone -Magic Mouse -Apple TV -Time Capsule

The geographical flexibility of recruiting informants was made possible by an online

video conference software program. While some interviews took place in person, many of the interactions were facilitated through a video conference. The essential factors of the interview process, such as a visibility of each other and the ability to speak verbally instead of textually, were met using this software and experienced minimal drawbacks as compared to in-person interviews. As well, the added flexibility of the software allowed for a diverse sample of individuals from across the globe.

### **3.3 Interview Approach**

This thesis' methodology follows the hermeneutical framework developed by Thompson (1994, 1997). The aim of the hermeneutical framework is to understand the consumer's personal history, as well as the contextual meanings of the surrounding culture (Thompson, 1997) utilizing the phenomenological interview method (Thompson, 1989). This approach is appropriate for this particular thesis as it stresses the importance of the voice of the consumer and the development of an understanding of their history and behaviour. Complications arise from this strategy due to the propensity for variability amongst each participant; that is, with a lack of control over responses, it becomes a challenge to amalgamate the statements of multiple participants. However, the ability to fully understand consumers and comprehend the reasoning for their behaviour outweighs the shortcomings of this approach, thus justifying it for use in this project. According to Thompson (1997), human understanding is organized through narratives, such as stories and myths. As a result, by conversing with consumers about their own histories, it is possible to understand them and determine their motivations for certain behaviours.

The steps of this hermeneutical process begin with the researcher familiarizing

him/herself with the background of the particular field of study which is being investigated. According to Thompson (1997), by doing so, the researcher becomes more sensitive to textual nuances and cultivates a socio-historic perspective that can assist in the interview and its analysis. Furthermore, it is recommended that phenomenological interviews take place, in which few preplanned questions exist and the researcher immerses him/herself into the conversation and experiences of the participant (Thompson, 1997). Thus, the approach to the question style of this study is semi-structured, which allows the researcher to enter the interview with a premeditated schedule of discussion, but grants the freedom to discuss topics conversationally and improvise questions (Berg, 1998). The long interview method was adopted for this research, as it was most conducive to developing a rapport with the participant and fully understanding his/her own story, as opposed to quickly attaining basic consumption data from a shorter interview (Berg, 1998). Combining the semi-structural approach with this long interview style, the resulting data conforms to the vision of Thompson's (1997) hermeneutical approach; that is, a long interview with planned, yet flexible, questions allows for the participant to illustrate his/her lifestyle within the interview and enhance the understanding of his/her consumption behaviour.

### **3.4 Other Data Sources**

In order to follow Thompson's (1997) suggestion to become familiar with the background of the topic, I make a point to research multiple online communities to better understand the Apple culture. Kozinets (2002) presents netnography as an efficient substitute for ethnography, where time is spent within online communities to better understand

symbols, meanings and consumption practices of consumer groups. A portion of this investigation takes place within online forums dedicated to the Apple brand. For instance, “Mac Rumors” (macrumors.com) and “Mac Forums” (mac-forums.com) both involve an online community of Apple users who discuss Apple topics in multiple threads. By studying these discussions and the opinions of the users, I am more capable of entering interview situations with a deeper knowledge of the current affairs related to the brand.

In addition to these forum communities, I investigate more formal blogs such as “The Unofficial Apple Weblog” (tuaw.com) and “CNET” (cnet.com). The former is dedicated to posting news related to Apple developments, and the latter is a technology news site which reports regularly on Apple product releases and news. Each site offers unique information to this background study of the brand, as “The Unofficial Apple Weblog” provides a more biased, fan-related perspective, which is congruent with the participants in the study. Conversely, “CNET”’s journalistic approach offers a more bipartisan narrative of the Apple brand, including user comments from non-Apple users that temper the otherwise skewed opinions of users in the aforementioned communities and blogs.

This preliminary research allows for the in-depth interviews to become more effective. By familiarizing myself with Apple products, news and popular opinions, it becomes simpler to understand the references made by the study participants. As well, it appears as though, due to my knowledge of the brand, participants become more comfortable sharing their personal consumption stories with a fellow Apple user. That is, by seeming to have a comparable familiarity with the brand and its products, the participants seem to view me as a fellow user as opposed to a potentially judgmental

outgroup member. The result of this rapport is a level of candor that can be seen in the quotations within the following findings section, giving credence to the use of these secondary data sources to become familiar with the topic of discussion prior to interviews.

### **3.5 Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The analysis and interpretation of the resultant data follows the traditional Consumer Culture Theory methodology. Specifically, following Fournier's (1998) approach to analyzing in-depth interviews, this thesis utilizes two levels of analysis to best capture the effects in the data. The first level considers the idiographic narratives of each individual. Reading through the transcripts of each interview makes it possible to fully understand and appreciate the individual's consumption experience. For instance, if a participant makes two conflicting statements at separate portions of the interview, a conclusion can be drawn from the fact that s/he contradicts her/himself. Conversely, a repetitive use of a certain phrase or term sheds light on the consumer's feelings about the subject. As such, by reading through each transcript ideographically, I am able to codify the statements of each individual and clarify their narratives.

The second level of analysis takes place across participants, comparing the narratives of each individual in hopes of determining commonalities amongst their consumption experiences. As individual transcripts are revisited and compared, certain trends begin to appear that allow for a coding process to begin. As trends are identified, transcripts are again looked over to find other instances of this pattern. The result of this two-level process is a constantly refining approach to the data analysis; it is necessary to

consistently refine both ideographically and across participants in order to identify all of the trends, while collecting the appropriate support for each. The back-and-forth iterative analysis is continued until a theoretical saturation is reached.

## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS**

The findings in this section will outline the ways in which consumers use reflexive thinking to make assumptions about others' perception of their own brand, followed by an investigation into the ways in which consumers consider and evaluate these perceived assumptions. In addition, throughout the data there is an emergence of support that suggests that these Apple users have entered into a dependent relationship with the brand; the findings of this study will be compared to the defined traits of a dependent brand relationship to determine whether or not this relationship is present. Following these investigations, this section will discuss the manifestations of looking glass identity value and dependent brand relationships with respect to the behaviour of Apple consumers. In other words, this portion of the thesis will highlight the existence of looking glass identity value and dependent brand relationships with Apple, while using these concepts to explain certain behavioural trends observed amongst Apple users.

### **4.1 Looking Glass Identity Value**

In his work, Holt does little to thoroughly define the concept of identity value by stating simply that the construct is “the aspect of a brand’s value that derives from the brand’s contributions to self-expression” (Holt, 2004, p. 11). While his encapsulation of the portion of brand value is clear and important to this study, it requires further development to explain the uses of a brand as a vessel for self-expression. More specifically, some consumers determine the identity value of their own brand by projecting their own opinions onto others. For this reason, the definition of identity value must consider this process of reflexive thinking.

The reflexive, naïve realism fallacy takes the subjectivity of an individual and applies it as a reality to the rest of a culture. One instance of reflexive thinking with respect to the Apple brand comes from Brandon, a 29-year-old graduate student. When asked to describe how his Apple use is viewed by others, he says:

I know that sometimes the way I saw Apple users before I was an Apple user was really obsessed with the product, they are really stuck on themselves for using it, so even though I think I'd like people to think of me as Justin Long, I also worry that they think of me as a pompous asshole, "Look at me I have these Apple products for everyone to see and thinks he is better than everyone because he has them."

Brandon's desire to be thought of as Justin Long is in reference to Apple's commercials in which a young, casually dressed actor (Justin Long) claims to be a Mac. However, he simultaneously worries that these observers view him negatively because he himself viewed Apple users negatively prior to purchasing their products. When asked if he has ever heard about these assumptions from others, Brandon responds, "Nobody ever says it to me, but because I thought that about other people I assume people think that about me." These statements from Brandon clearly illustrate the methodology by which he determines what others think of him. He recounts his experience as an outgroup member with respect to Apple and his feelings towards the brand and its users at the time, and then applies those sentiments to the current brand outgroup that views him as an Apple user. While he wishes to be seen as the cool, laid back, confident Justin Long character, which is an image created by the producer, he worries that in reality he is seen with the same assumptions he made prior to becoming an Apple consumer. He is using the looking

glass to help determine the identity value of using his Apple products in front of others.

At another point in his interview, Brandon states, “I noticed whenever anyone is on an iPhone or an iPod Touch, in the subway; I notice, and I think I like to think that people notice me as well.” Again, he is viewing his own behaviour as an objective commonality amongst all individuals, linking his noticing of others to their noticing of him. With respect to identity value, his use of the Apple brand is done within an individual reality that assumes others notice his actions. This is an example of Gilovich et al.’s (2000) spotlight effect theory, as Brandon assumes that he is garnering more attention than he actually is.

Roger, a 55-year-old IT specialist and software developer, thinks more negatively of the Apple brand symbolism than Brandon. Roger has been an Apple user since 1990 and is asked about his thoughts on the Apple stereotype:

**Interviewer: What is the stereotypical Apple user?**

Roger: Well I don’t think I’m a typical Apple user actually. It is a little disappointing in a way, how people kind of follow Apple blindly.

Whenever Apple comes out with the latest thing, then people are lined up around the corner all over the world to buy the latest thing. And I think that doesn’t show a lot of critical judgment.

When discussing the Apple stereotype, Roger sees it in a more negative light than Brandon, worrying that fellow users of the brand are “blindly” following Apple, devoid of critical judgment. In a follow-up, he is asked if he is ever assumed by others to belong to this group of Apple followers:

**Interview: Have you ever had people make that assumption about**

**you?**

Roger: Yeah, for sure. If they see me using a Mac, people will make a quick judgment. So if they don't know me, then people will make that assumption. Doesn't happen that often, but if anyone makes a judgment, then that's pretty much what they assume; that's the demographic that everyone knows from the news and things like that. So I think that's just what they figure everyone is.

**Interviewer: How do you feel about it when you're lumped in like that?**

Roger: Well, I kind of feel that I would like to set the record straight.

While Roger has more evidence than Brandon, insofar that he has heard these comments from others, he appears to be sensitive to these judgments and wishes to correct others' perceptions. His statements suggest that he has a negative notion of the stereotypical Apple user and this opinion is assumed to apply to other individuals who notice his use of the brand. While his outlook towards the brand is different, he is having a similar experience as Brandon by having certain internal emotions evoked by the thought of others judging him. That is, each individual is participating in the same signaling behaviour by using Apple products publicly, but their assumptions about what others think of them differ because their own opinions of the brand differ; their identity value for the brand is influenced by their own beliefs. Additionally, Roger would like to "set the record straight" with individuals whom he assumes judge him negatively, suggesting that he values their opinions in some way. The testimonials of both Brandon and Roger support the notion that consumers will reflexively determine the identity value of the

brand by projecting their own beliefs onto others, and that they value these opinions when consuming the brand in public.

#### *4.1.1 Consciousness of the Brand Outgroup*

In order to explain the method by which consumers project their assumptions onto the brand outgroup and reflexively develop a looking glass identity value, a consideration of this outgroup must be demonstrated. That is, for looking glass identity value to exist, the consumer must attribute value to the opinions of members of the brand outgroup and assume that they are noticing and interpreting the messages the consumer is communicating with the usage of a brand. Katherine, a 31-year-old online media producer, says the following about her public usage of her Apple laptop:

I do feel cool when I have it. You know, I notice that if I'm at the airport, and I've got to get some work done, and I pull out my Mac and put it on my lap, I feel like everybody here knows I'm cool.

Katherine, an avid traveller, describes how she feels when everyone notices her consumption behaviour. Not only does she assume that she is being observed, but she goes so far as to say that they “know” that she is cool. This internalized feeling and consciousness of others suggests that she is aware that consuming Apple publicly is conveying a particular message to others, and in return, this influences her experience with Apple. The account of Katherine's airport experiences, though, does not necessarily suggest that it is the brand outgroup she is silently communicating with; this feeling of coolness could derive from her desire to belong to the collection of fellow Apple users within the building. When discussing the use of her iPhone in public, Katherine states,

“You know what? I think that they notice it when they don’t have iPhones. I don’t think people who have iPhones are like ‘Hey, check that out; you have an iPhone and I have an iPhone.’” Katherine rejects the idea of an Apple community in which she feels included. Rather, she explicitly states that it is those who do not own the iPhone that she feels notice, and understand, the message she is communicating with its use. Her response helps to clarify her personal consumption experience: she assumes other people, who do not own the product themselves, notice her usage and take it to mean that she is a “cool” person.

This communication to others without the brand is further elaborated by Katherine as a social role more than an independent message:

**Interviewer: With that logo being there, do you think it says something about you?**

Katherine: Yeah, it does. Well, it represents the “me” that I would like to present to everyone.

**Interviewer: Okay. So what is that “me” that you’d like to present?**

Katherine: You know, the whole youthfulness, and attractive and current.

Katherine reference to a “me” that she “would like to present to everyone” is very telling of her mentality when consuming in public. Her reference to “the me” suggests that she feels that she has a myriad of roles that she can present to the audience of public consumption, yet she has one in particular that she prefers to express. She is discussing this “me” almost as if it is an outfit she enjoys wearing and showing off to others. The presentation of this “me,” for Katherine, appears to occur with the use of the Apple logo, as she points out in the following exchange regarding her iPhone:

**Interviewer: So would you ever put a [protective] case on it?**

Katherine: No, I've seen those. You know what? If I had a friend of mine design one for me, I would still request that they leave the Apple hole.

Create the Apple spot so that it was apparent and glowing.

Katherine explicitly states that she values the visibility of her Apple logo, requiring it to be “apparent” to those around her. In conjunction with her discussion of “the me,” it appears as if Katherine is using the Apple brand to communicate her own desired identity to her brand outgroup; by using the product publicly and ensuring people can see that it is Apple, she believes that they will become convinced that she is “cool,” “attractive and current” and possesses “youthfulness.” In doing so, her consumption experience of Apple products becomes connected to the perceived opinions of others.

Furthermore, Katherine discusses an instance in which she presents the “me” as if it were a tool with which to communicate to another person:

If somebody who's sitting next to you on the airplane, like there's an attractive young man sitting next to you on an airplane, at one point when it's safe to use your electronics, you pull out your Mac and you start working on editing or something, and it's like, “I'm a very interesting person. I have a Mac and I'm editing.”

Katherine recounts how she would overtly use an Apple product in an attempt to communicate to a specific individual that she is an “interesting” person. This is yet another instance in which the individual uses a reflexive method to enhance his/her perceived appearance to others. Believing in Apple's positive image, Katherine projects

an action towards this attractive man and as a result assumes that he sees her as an interesting person. The actual thoughts of the man are unimportant in this scenario, as Katherine's consumption experience has been altered merely by the assumption that an attractive man thinks that she is interesting due to her usage of an Apple product. Katherine highlights the notion that Apple products are more than utilitarian, and reach beyond the ingroups of the brand communities, as they are being consciously used with the consideration of those who do not own the product. Thus, the Apple experience, as well as its ability to express on behalf of the user, is partially influenced by the assumed notions of the brand outgroup.

Other participants discuss more subtle, potentially less self-aware instances of consciousness regarding others noticing and evaluating their products. Michael, a 21-year-old student, makes the following comments about using his Apple products in public: "Oh I flaunt it. I flaunt it. I'm so proud to pull out my Mac and turn it on," "It's always, just flaunt it, and I flaunt it; I'm very proud to have my Mac," and "I'm not ashamed of my computer." Throughout his discussion, Michael repeatedly mentions pride in his product, as well as how he actively flaunts its usage. Additionally, he feels the need to note that he is not ashamed of his computer, suggesting that the ideas of pride and shame are factors he considers when using his Mac. This language used by Michael is showing that he has a consideration for others during his usage experience with his Macbook; the words "proud," "flaunt" and "shame" all necessitate an audience that observes and evaluates the particular behaviours of the individual. As such, by consistently using these terms throughout his interview, Michael is highlighting that he assumes others are making assumptions about how impressive his computer is, while

simultaneously showing a bond to his computer, which is so strong that he feels that the brand outgroup attaches any positive notions towards the brand to him as well.

Other participant comments reflect a similar approach to the consumption experience. The abovementioned participant Brandon states, “My way of bragging is not talking about it, but to publicly display it, use it in public all the time,” while Caroline, a 40-year-old advertising graphic designer, mentions, “So yeah, it’s kind of trendy and you can brag about it and feel proud and say ‘Hey, you see I’ve got a Mac.’” Finally, Megan, a 27-year-old graphic designer, observes, “I am still proud of my Apple, my laptop. I like it because the knowledge, and because what people perceive me [as], and what I know about myself.” These comments exemplify consumers considering other people in the usage of their Apple products. Caroline, similarly to Katherine, states that her Mac actually communicates a message to those who notice it and she brags about it and feels proud, which are both reactions that require a recipient who does not own that particular product. Brandon touches on this notion of bragging as well, saying that he shows off his products simply by using them publicly, without the requirement of talking about his usage. Bragging is thus built upon the assumption that other individuals do not own the product or brand that the particular consumer has, and that others are impressed when they notice the consumer with the product. Megan explicitly discusses this, saying that her pride from her Apple laptop is partially derived from knowing how people perceive her; her user experience with Apple products has changed based upon the assumptions that brand outgroup members not only notice the use of the brand, but create positive perceptions of the individual as a result. The above examples highlight the ways in which consumers are conscious of the brand outgroup within the marketplace and derive certain

positive feelings based on their ability to use the brand as a self-expressive means.

#### **4.2 Dependency Relationships**

In addition to the looking glass identity value that is observed in the findings, participants also exhibited behaviours which suggest that they are involved in a relationship with the Apple brand. Fournier (1998) discusses the relationships that individuals develop with their brands, drawing parallels between human and brand relationships. For instance, consumers have different levels of relationships with different brands, such as love, flings and biological life cycles (Fournier, 1998). Payne et al. (2008) build upon this relationship perspective by suggesting that these relationships assist in co-creating the brand within the marketplace

Fournier (1998) goes beyond her comparison of brand relationships to those of humans by categorizing a series of relationship types based on certain characteristics. For example, she discusses a childhood friendship typology, which is defined as an “infrequently engaged, affectively laden reminiscent of earlier times” (Fournier, 1998, p. 362). This type of relationship is said to yield comfort for the consumer, as shown by one interviewee who uses Estée Lauder because it evokes memories of her mother (Fournier, 1998, p. 362). Throughout the interviews for this thesis, one relationship type that consistently emerges is that of dependency. According to Fournier (1998), a dependent relationship exhibits the following three characteristics: obsessive, highly emotional attractions cemented by the feeling that the other is irreplaceable, separation from other yields anxiety, and a high tolerance for the other's transgressions.

While brand relationships may seem to have little connection to identity value,

looking glass identity value consists of the manifestations of the consumer's own feelings towards a brand, and a relationship with the brand could influence these internal feelings. That is, whether it is a fling, love, a biological lifecycle, dependency or any other type, these relationships act as a setting in which the brand exists for consumers, potentially altering their ability to view the brand objectively. As such, since looking glass identity value is based upon the manifestations of internal feelings towards a brand, and these feelings can develop within a relationship with the brand, brand relationships are of interest to this study as they can help to explain the feelings of the consumers towards their brands of choice. This section focuses on instances of dependent relationships in order to highlight the dependency that these consumers have developed towards Apple.

#### *4.2.1 Obsessive, Highly Emotional Attractions Cemented by the Feeling that the Other is Irreplaceable*

The first condition of Fournier's dependency relationship (1998) is that the person feels that the brand is irreplaceable, resulting in an obsessive, highly emotional relationship with the brand. Within the context of this study, that would suggest that a person is convinced that there is no substitute for their Apple product, creating a very emotional bond to the brand. For example, Michael, a 21-year-old student who was discussed earlier, summarizes his feelings towards Apple, "I can take a bullet for them, yeah. It is a very strong loyalty." When asked if he considers himself a fan of the Mac, Michael replies, "Yes, huge. A diehard fan, actually," and adds, "[The] iPod is the gateway drug; it's the one that gets you in." In his comments, the use of the word "diehard" as well as the, albeit hyperbolic, willingness to "take a bullet" for the company suggests a certain

level of stubbornness and martyrdom that Michael has for Apple; that is, his commitment to the brand is no longer based on an objective usage of a company's product, but rather a lifestyle commitment to the brand, integrating it as a part of himself. For Michael to say that he is diehard and would take a bullet for Apple is, by definition, an overt example of an obsessive, highly emotional devotion. In addition, his allusion to drug use poses an appropriate parallel of a dependent relationship. While, again, Michael is utilizing hyperbole in his comments, his use of drugs as a metaphor for Apple frames the relationship as almost non-voluntary on his part. He is saying that the iPod, his first foray into the brand and generally the most affordable Apple product on the market, acts as a "gateway drug" that causes the user to become "addicted" to Apple, unable to escape the relationship they have created. These comments from Michael highlight his dependence on the brand, to the point that his own analogies categorize his relationship to the brand as a dependent addiction.

Patrick, a 24-year-old technical support product specialist, characterizes his relationship with Apple, "There was never really a point where I thought that the iPhone wasn't for me or Apple wasn't for me." Patrick mentions that he has always been convinced that the iPhone and the Apple brand are "for [him]." This perspective on the brand is neither objective nor utilitarian, as Patrick's suggestion that the brand is for him is as if Apple is a partner of his; he has entered into a committed relationship with the brand and feels that there is congruence between Apple and his own identity. This identity congruence parallels Swaminathan, Page and Gurhan-Canli's (2007) discussion of brand relationships, where the authors argue that identity congruence is a core factor in a consumer's relationship with a brand. Thus, this statement highlights the highly

emotional approach Patrick has towards the brand while simultaneously supporting the relationship literature by both Fournier (1998) and Swaminathan et al. (2007).

Furthermore, Patrick discusses the effect of his relationship with Apple on his shopping behaviour, “When it’s time to buy a new phone, I just look at what the next iPhone is. Then I don’t even do any research into any other phone or what they’re doing.” Patrick outlines his methodology for new phone purchases, saying that when he needs to purchase a new phone, he does not consider any company other than Apple, and simply compares the multiple versions of the iPhone to determine which one best suits him. This ostensibly irrational behaviour on the part of Patrick highlights the obsession that he has with Apple and the iPhone, fuelled by his thought that the product is irreplaceable.

Notice that Patrick’s voluntary obliviousness towards the competition could be a type of protective tool to defend the brand in his reality. That is, he could be wilfully ignoring other phone options in fear that he may find one that outperforms the iPhone, or as he states, the phone that is “for [him].” Similar potential identity value management strategies are discussed following this section in an attempt to understand the behavioural manifestations of these dependency relationships. At this point, however, it is important to consider the statements of both Michael and Patrick and their display of obsessive, highly emotional attractions that are cemented by the feeling that Apple is irreplaceable.

#### *4.2.2 Separation from the Other Yields Anxiety*

In addition to obsessive, highly emotional attractions to a brand, Fournier (1998) posits that a dependent relationship requires that persons experience anxiety when they are separated from their brand. For example, Katherine, the 31-year-old online media

producer who was introduced earlier, has the following to say about her feelings towards non-Apple products:

I couldn't do my job without a Mac. I use Final Cut Pro and I use it on my Macbook Pro. There's no way that I could be doing the kind of editing that I need to do on a PC effectively. I've only been using Macs for three years now, and before that I only used PCs. When I got my first Macbook, I was upset, I didn't want it. It was a Christmas gift from my then-husband. I'd been building PC towers and working on PCs all my life and he told me within a week I would fall in love with the [Macbook], and I didn't believe him. But quite honestly, after that it got to the point that I sleep with my computer. I feel like every time I try to use a PC now, I feel completely lost and pissed off.

Katherine introduces multiple interesting points about her usage of Apple and Windows products. When forced by circumstance to use a Windows PC, she says she feels "lost and pissed off." However, her history with PCs until three years ago suggests that this frustrating feeling does not stem from any confusion with the software. By asserting that she could not do her job without a Mac and that she sleeps with her computer, it appears that she has formed a very strong bond with the product. Thus, her frustration most likely stems from a separation from the Macbook, not an encounter with the Windows PC. This frustration illustrates the separation anxiety portion of her relationship with the brand; when faced with a situation in which she cannot use her beloved Macbook, she becomes anxious, and in this case, confused and angry.

A 2010 study by Park et al. empirically investigates the separation anxiety

experienced by users of Apple's music player, the iPod. The results of this research determine that individuals will experience separation distress, comparable to anxiety, when they are not with their product. In the comments section of an online article discussing these findings, several readers took the opportunity to discuss the importance they have placed on Apple products within their own lives (Elgan, 2010). One commenter named Donnie shares the following:

I have an iPhone and it's like the umbilical cord in my mother's womb. I also have an iPod classic that I'm equally attached to. I simply use these two devices for different things. There is no music on my iPhone. All the music (and I do mean ALL the music) is on the iPod classic ripped from CDs in glorious Apple Lossless format (however you define glorious, but it sounds better than AAC), which I use mostly in my car. But when I get the feeling that I don't know where either of these two devices are...you know that feeling that parents get when they turn their back for two seconds and their kid disappears? It's kind of like that.

Donnie's discussion of his usage habits of his iPhone and his iPod reveals his thoughts on his relationship to the Apple brand. The comparison of his iPhone to the umbilical cord in his mother's womb suggests that he thinks of the iPhone as a lifeline that helps him survive on a daily basis; it is the channel through which he obtains daily sustenance. By drawing this parallel to a life-sustaining mechanism, Donnie graphically illustrates his dependence on the Apple product. Furthermore, the term "umbilical cord" is often used to describe a situation in which an individual refuses to separate oneself from another person and engages in dependent behaviour. Thus, not only does this statement highlight

Donnie's avoidance of separation from the iPhone but also his overall dependence on the brand.

Donnie draws another parallel to a life situation by comparing his phone to his own children. He suggests that the moment where he is unsure of his iPhone and iPod's location is comparable to the feeling experienced by a parent who cannot find their child. This analogy makes Donnie's separation anxiety clear, as a comparison of one's children to a telephone or music player highlights the fact that the product is no longer seen as an objective tool, but rather an important piece of the individual's life. Combining Donnie's analogies to an umbilical cord and a lost child demonstrates Donnie's dependence on his Apple products and displays instances of separation anxiety in him when confronted with the possibility of losing his iPhone or iPod.

Barbara also responds to the online article in the comment section. Similarly to Donnie, Barbara outlines the stress she experiences when she is unaware of her Apple product's location:

I have an unfortunate attachment to Ford. My dad managed a Ford tech shop for more than twenty years and we always drove the latest Mustang. So despite the waning quality of the product, I'm still buying them. And don't get me started on my iPod. I was almost in tears when my Mom cleaned my house and put it in a "safe" spot where I couldn't find it. I was shocked at my own Gollum-like reaction, but now I have a specific iPod space on my desk so that she can't get lost again.

Barbara recalls an instance in which she could not locate her iPod and likens herself to Gollum, the *Lord of the Rings* series character who is extremely defensive of his ring and

becomes very irritated with any person who attempts to take it. Barbara admits to being close to tears and having an aggressive reaction towards her mother simply because she could not immediately locate her iPod. Furthermore, following the shock of her own reaction to the loss of her iPod, rather than re-evaluate her bond to the music player, she opts to alter her behaviour so that she does not lose the iPod again, setting aside a specific location for it. Thus, Barbara is showing signs of separation anxiety both in her immediate, emotional reaction to the perceived loss of the iPod as well as the development of a habit to prevent such a loss from happening again.

#### *4.2.3 A High Tolerance for the Other's Transgressions*

Fournier's (1998) third and final characteristic of dependency is perhaps of the most interest to marketing managers, as it illustrates scenarios in which consumers are willing to overlook a company's quality issues. My participants recount experiences with the Apple brand that involve failure, or transgressions, on the part of the computer company, yet result in acceptance and forgiveness by the consumer. Stacy, a 21-year-old student, owns a Macbook and recounts the experience that led to the purchase of her most recent computer:

I got a Mac in my first year [of university], and it was the white plastic one. And then, literally a month after my warranty ran out, it just exploded. It actually, my motherboard or something happened with it, and I went to Apple, and they were as nice as they could have been but there was nothing they could do. And I still don't know what the problem was, but I needed a new computer. And it was lucky that I had some

money set aside because I was like ‘I need to get a Mac again.’ And I definitely had the decision to get the same one that I had or to get the new one. And then I don’t know whether it was because the one that I had had been defective or not, which pushed me to get the new one, or if it was because it was the newer one and I had the option to get a new one. But I think it was definitely a mix of both. And then I got Apple Care right away, which I get on all my products now.

Stacy recounts how her Macbook failed completely, only a month after her warranty expired. However, rather than being frustrated with the malfunction of the relatively high-priced computer, she considers herself lucky for having the funds available to purchase a newer version of the same computer that just ceased to function. Moreover, she purchases Apple Care, which is the company's extended warranty, on the new Macbook as well as all of the products she purchases afterwards in order to protect herself from this experience again. The result of Apple's hardware malfunction is not only the purchase of a new product, but the commitment to buying expensive extended warranties in the future due to the fact that Apple has shown that they are capable of a complete product failure. This experience of Stacy's demonstrates her high tolerance of transgressions as a consumer of the brand. Her willingness to forgive the company, as well as continue to buy more products and services from Apple, shows that her relationship with the brand is so strong that she does not consider any options other than Apple. Stacy outlines her thought process wherein she is deciding between which Macbook to purchase. Similarly to Patrick and his iPhone, Stacy no longer considers any competitor to Apple and does not allow product failure to sully her relationship with the

brand.

William, a 36-year-old customer support worker, likewise overlooks the malfunction of his Apple products in order to stay loyal to the brand. At first, he testifies to the excellence of the company's products:

An Apple user, an Apple fan, they understand that they're paying more, but they know they're paying more not just for nothing, not just because it has an Apple logo on it. They're paying more for the quality. They're paying more for form and for function.

But, shortly thereafter, he admits that one of his own Apple products has malfunctioned:

My [Apple] Time Capsule literally just stopped working. I figured the hard drive crashed or some electronic failure. And this was probably about a year and a half after I had it. And it wasn't surprising because I knew they had some liability issues. Again, no company's perfect. Apple has made products periodically that have liability issues.

William begins by stating that an Apple user/fan is aware of, and understands, a superior quality that is found in Apple products, justifying the relatively high price within the computer market. William, in a way, attaches the superiority of the brand to the user him/herself; stating that Apple users understand that they are purchasing better quality products, and gaining value as a result, suggests that those who do not use Apple do not understand these technological products properly. Thus, William is using his allegiance to the Apple brand to develop a feeling of identity superiority within the marketplace.

However, William's propensity to overlook product failure is the more pertinent

statement to this study. William's Time Capsule, an external hard drive that backs up the computer in case of any accidental data loss, stopped working in a way similarly to Stacy's Macbook. However, rather than feel any animosity towards the brand, William disregards the failure by saying that he expected it and that Apple cannot be perfect. While it is true that no company can be “perfect” in the sense that all companies are prone to product failures, William appears very accepting of this shortcoming on Apple's part, entirely contradicting his previous statement about Apple's inherent quality. William's continued positive characterization of the brand and its products suggests that he possesses a high tolerance for Apple's transgressions. Not only has he forgiven the brand enough to continue purchasing their products, but he maintains the belief that Apple creates higher quality products than the competition.

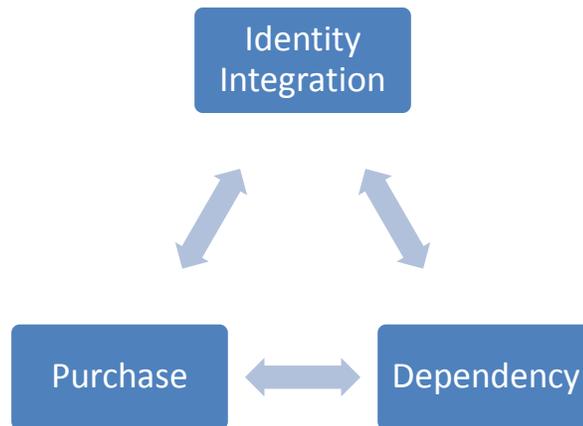
Patrick, the 24-year-old technical support product specialist discussed earlier, shares William's favourable opinion of Apple: “When you buy an Apple computer you're getting the Apple hardware, which from firsthand experience is very good. It's not something that generally has a lot of failures.” Yet, he too has had firsthand experience with Apple product malfunction: “I've had a few different hardware problems with my iPhone 3GS. I'm on my third one in the last year and a half.” Similarly to William's earlier conflicting statements about product quality and failure experiences, Patrick boasts about the superiority of the Apple brand before recounting multiple product transgressions he has encountered with Apple products. In this case, rather than the complete failure of an external hard drive, Patrick faced multiple hardware issues with his iPhone, which caused him to send back two different versions of the phone within a year and a half. Nevertheless, despite the difficulties he has faced with the product, he

maintains that his firsthand experience has proven that Apple's hardware is "very good" and is "not something that generally has a lot of failures." In addition, Patrick is the same person who stated earlier that "there was never really a point where I thought that the iPhone wasn't for me," despite the fact that the very product he expresses his loyalty towards is the same one that caused him so many technical difficulties.

This collection of experiences from multiple participants within the study highlights the numerous instances of dependency relationship traits in their dealings with Apple. Based upon Fournier's (1998) definition of a dependency relationship, these participants appear to be contained within this dependence on the brand, which can make it difficult for them to view Apple as they would other companies. As such, it appears that consumers can become locked into their relationship with a brand when they become dependent on it, cyclically increasing this dependence as they feel obliged to purchase more products. Michael's statement deeming the Apple iPod as a "gateway drug" properly frames this phenomenon, as consumers in these dependent brand relationships develop a cycle in which their bond to the brand continually increases as they are increasingly exposed to it. In addition, the looking glass identity value of a consumer adds to this cyclical process by ensuring that the individual becomes more dependent on the brand as its identity becomes more integrated with their own, acting as an indicator to the brand outgroup. Thus, the combination of a dependent brand relationship and a consideration of the brand outgroup results in a closed-cycle nature to consumers' interactions with Apple. This relationship must then be managed by the individual, such that they can enhance their identity value when abandoning the brand is no longer an alternative. Figure 1 below illustrates this closed cycle scenario, wherein the individual

becomes trapped within a cycle of increasing dependency, identity integration and purchase behaviour.

Figure 1



#### **4.3 Identity Value Management Strategies in Dependency Relationships**

As I demonstrate above, Apple users are aware of others noticing their public usage of the company's products and feel that certain assumptions are made about their own identity as a result of being seen with an Apple product. Additionally, I posit that these individuals are locked into the Apple brand due to their dependent relationship with the company's products, such that they cannot easily switch to buying their products from another company. Assuming that individuals wish to optimize the identity value of their products, consumers are left with few options other than attempting to alter the identity value themselves. This alteration of the identity value is done by using looking glass identity value; if the individual can convince her/himself that the Apple brand is enviable and valuable, s/he can reflexively experience this highly touted brand by assuming that others view it as they do. Alternatively, consumers can also attempt to prove to others that Apple possesses positive traits, in which case the consumer convinces her/himself that

others have a high opinion of them for using it, regardless of the outgroup's actual beliefs towards the brand.

In essence, the Apple user can manipulate the looking glass process, either in the projection, the interpretation, or both, in order to increase the looking glass identity value of the brand and garner greater enjoyment from its consumption, despite the closed cycle nature of the brand relationship. My analysis reveals three identity value management strategies: actively selling Apple products to the brand outgroup, defending the brand from negative comments from the outgroup, as well as a denial towards both the performance issues of the products as well as the interpretations of others' opinions. These strategies are discussed in-depth below.

#### *4.3.1 Active Selling to the Brand Outgroup*

Throughout the interview process, an unexpected trend arose wherein several participants admitted to, and often bragged about, their propensity to sell Apple products to their friends. The term "selling" in this case does not refer to the actual financial sale of an Apple product to another individual, but rather the individual assuming a role similar to a salesman in that they boast about the Apple product and attempt to convince the other individual that they should purchase one. While considering the above findings regarding the closed cycle nature of a consumer's brand relationship with Apple, it became apparent that this selling behaviour consisted of more than an interest in improving another's technology experiences. Rather, this behaviour is a tool used by these Apple users to alter the identity value of the brand and further convince themselves that Apple is desired by all others.

Michael, a 21-year-old student, relates how he encourages others to begin using Apple products:

I must say, without being too cocky, I've converted half my friends to Apple actually. I have been directly responsible for the conversion of at least thirty people. Anything from iPod Touches to Macs, I have six friends that I can think of off the top that I've gotten to buy Macbooks, actual laptop products.

Michael boasts about converting his friends to Apple. His reservations about being seen as "cocky" suggests that he is proud of these conversions he has caused; he feels it is a skill on his part to attain new customers for the company with which he identifies. Moreover, the fact that he recalls the numbers of friends who have switched brands following his recommendation shows that he views these conversions as accomplishments. Michael continues outlining the way in which he generally initiates this selling process:

If they ever have a problem with a PC, I will throw in the, "that doesn't happen with a Mac" kind of thing. Honestly, I have to say Macs just don't have those day-to-day problems. And it's very easy then, when a PC does have that day-to-day problem, because you know it's going to have that day-to-day problem, it's very easy to throw in that little jab, "Get a Mac."

Michael states that his usual approach to convincing others of Apple's strengths is to capitalize on the weaknesses of the competition. In doing so, he is able to compare Apple to its competition at a time when the friend is most likely frustrated with the non-Apple

product they own, and thus more likely to be considering alternatives. Yet the intriguing element is not *how* Michael is able to successfully convince others to follow in his consumption footsteps, but *why* he does it. While he may be enamoured with his own Apple products, there appears to be no obvious reason for him to use his own effort and time to benevolently convince others to enhance their computing experiences. However, considering the closed cycle nature of his relationship with Apple, there are certain selfish motivations that may be at the root of this behaviour.

Primarily, the adoption of a product is the ultimate endorsement of quality and value. Whenever Michael successfully convinces a friend to purchase an Apple product, his/her action is reaffirming Michael's belief that Apple is the leading name in the computing market. While this purchase has no effect on his actual computer experience, it can be used as evidence to convince himself that Apple is superior to the competition and that anyone who does not own an Apple product ultimately wishes to have one when given the opportunity. As well, the process of selling these products to friends is an opportunity to outwardly boast about the Apple brand as an attempt to ensure others view it in a positive light, regardless of their ultimate purchase.

Finally, by increasing the consumer base of Apple, the ingroup, Michael is actively decreasing the outgroup of Apple, limiting the number of people who could potentially judge him negatively for his brand choice. Thus, by selling these products to friends and convincing them to follow his lead, Michael is indirectly improving his own evaluation of the brand. In doing so, he ultimately improves his looking glass identity value of the brand, as his own opinion of the brand will be reflected back to him, and/or he can convince himself that others think better of the brand following his presentation

while minimizing the amount of people who may dislike the brand. By selling the product to others, Michael has developed a way to manage and increase his own looking glass identity value for the brand, which is necessary due to his inability to abandon Apple.

In addition to Michael, other participants discuss their selling of the Apple brand to members of the outgroup. When asked if she ever encourages people to buy Apple, Katherine answers:

Yes, yes. [When a PC fails] I'll kind of be, "Hey, you know what, it's your own damn fault, because you don't have a Mac." I have a friend whose PC just died recently and he's been anti-Mac for a long time. And I'm like "Yeah, well have you ever seen my Mac die? No."

While Susan, a retired educator, enthusiastically claims, "I have found, probably over the years, I've likely been responsible for two or three hundred people making conscious decisions to become Mac users." Like Michael, Katherine and Susan are making an unnecessary effort to get others to purchase Apple products. Katherine expresses a certain level of passion in her discussion, bordering on anger towards the other computer user; she appears to be almost mad at the other person simply because he chose to purchase a non-Mac computer. One explanation of such selling is given above to justify Michael's similar behaviour; Katherine's perception of Apple's quality is reinforced when others purchase the company's products. The byproduct of this feeling is perhaps anger towards those who do not buy Apple products because their reluctance to use the brand is seen as a sort of insult towards the brand. Furthermore, because

these Apple users link the brand to their own identity, this perceived insult towards the brand indirectly offends them as well. Thus, in Katherine's case, she is almost revelling in the moment that this detractor of the Apple brand has a product failure, suggesting that the malfunction is his own doing because he refused to accept Apple as the superior product. Susan's description of her selling experience possesses less passion than Katherine's, but echoes the pride introduced by Michael. By claiming to be responsible for two to three hundred conversions to Apple, she similarly shows that she is keeping track of her successful campaigning practices.

These instances of selling show that Apple users are actively making an effort to improve the brand within their own reality. In attempting to have others spend money on the brand, they are seeking the ultimate form of confirmation that their brand choice, and, by extension, their own identity, is valuable. Therefore, since they reflexively determine the identity value of their brand by projecting their own beliefs, through improving these beliefs via selling they are able to indirectly improve the looking glass identity value of the brand.

#### *4.3.2 Defending the Brand from Negative Comments from the Outgroup*

In addition to actively convincing others to buy Apple products, study participants overtly exhibit defensive behaviour about the Apple brand. Such defensive behaviour often results in reaction to comments from the brand outgroup that challenge the quality of the company's products. This parallels the selling behaviour of users in the sense that these comments have no actual effect on the utilitarian consumption experience of the brand;

whether or not another person buys an Apple product or insults the brand should not influence the way an individual uses and enjoys a computer, music player, or cell phone. Nevertheless, as will be shown below, several individuals state that they feel the need to defend the brand when it is attacked by others.

Katherine continues her passionate identity value management by offering the following explanation of her feelings about others' comments regarding the brand:

One thing that's really notable to me is that I'm not a patriotic person at all; I don't favour any sports teams, and I find it greatly annoying when people get into these big arguments over sports teams, like "ours is better than yours, our boys will do great this year." But if anybody says anything bad about Apple, I freak out. Like somebody recently said to me, "Oh, you know, the iPhone's a really good computer, but it's not a good phone." And that's true, but it really upset me. I'm like, "It's a great phone. Don't say anything wrong about my iPhone. It's perfect."

Several conclusions can be drawn from this statement regarding Katherine's relationship with Apple and her personal identity value management strategies used to influence its looking glass identity value. Firstly, she highlights that she has never experienced this passion towards another entity in the past, going as far as to make Apple analogous to a sports team. As such, she is showing that this relationship with Apple is unique and not a personality trait of hers and that she has developed an emotional bond with the company, similar to the emotional bond of sports fans towards their favourite teams. Beyond this, she exemplifies passion in defending Apple, saying that she will "freak out" if someone says something bad about the brand. Furthermore, she internally acquiesces to their

argument after the fact, acknowledging that they are correct, yet maintains a defensive stance towards the individual in their conversation. This behaviour has two possible motivations from Katherine's standpoint: she is attempting to convince the other person that Apple is a superior company or she is attempting to convince *herself* of this opinion.

In the case of the former, Katherine could be attempting to create a façade of quality so that this other individual will be convinced that Apple is a superior brand. This line of thinking is fitting with the idea of the brand outgroup, as Katherine is convinced that other people evaluate her based on her association with Apple, thus she has to work to ensure that these people think that it is a good brand. While she generally assumes that others think positively of Apple, as she demonstrates with her earlier anecdotes of airport experiences, she may feel the need to quell any dissenting opinions and ensure that others become aware of Apple's high value.

The alternative explanation is that this defensiveness is an instinctive reaction to negative comments because it can challenge the personal beliefs Katherine has regarding the brand. That is, if she hears these judgments and begins to consider them, she may think less of the brand and thus enjoy the consumption experience less as her looking glass identity value decreases. Rather, she would prefer to immediately defend the brand against these attacks by "freaking out," acting as if the negative statements towards Apple are completely erroneous. By doing so, she can continue to convince herself of its superiority and maintain her looking glass identity value. Katherine's eventual admission that this Apple detractor is correct in his judgment of the iPhone further clouds the reasoning behind her outbursts, as this could suggest that she knows Apple is not superior but feels the need to convince others that it is. However, this admission could also be an

instance in which she has not successfully defended a negative comment for the sake of her own beliefs and she has convinced herself that the iPhone is, in fact, not a very good phone. While it is difficult to determine which of these is at the core of Katherine's behaviour, it is clear that she is behaving in a way that allows her to manage the looking glass identity value of Apple.

William is another participant who spends time defending the Apple brand from negative comments. However, rather than discussing experiences in which he defends it to others, his passion for the brand shines through in the interview as he defends the brand:

They talk about the Apple tax. And the Apple tax is one that's a thorn in my side. Because sure, okay, Apple's products are more expensive, although they're getting a lot better about that, they're becoming a lot more competitive cost-wise. But the thing that people don't realize is there's another whole side to that equation that people do not pay attention to, which is, you take an Apple product, you buy it for X number of dollars. The question is, how much can you sell that product for, say for example on eBay when you're done with it?

In this statement, William goes on a small rant when discussing the "Apple tax" and the people who use the term. "Apple tax" is used by critics of the brand who suggest that Apple's high price level exists because certain individuals simply want to have an Apple product; these individuals pay a theoretical "tax" on top of the usual price for a computing product to attain the Apple logo. Yet, rather than consider the merits of the Apple tax argument, the core question to ask at this juncture is: why does William care?

He goes as far as to say that the Apple tax concept is a “thorn in [his] side,” suggesting that it is constantly bothering him. He continues on to list a reason why he does not believe that the Apple tax is a legitimate concern for the brand, as if he is attempting to convince me, the interviewer, of his opinion. Yet, whether or not he is correct in his dispute is moot, as the fact that he feels the need to make this argument is very telling of his relationship with the brand. By expressing the negative effect of the Apple tax concept on him, rather than simply ignoring it, it seems as though William may fear that the Apple tax does exist. As well, his way of presenting the argument to me as the unbiased interviewer appears to be a way of convincing himself of his own argument. Similarly to Katherine, William seems to be attempting to convince himself of Apple’s superiority by defending it to himself. As a result, he can continue believing that the brand is better than the competition and that any arguments to the contrary are faulty.

William makes another defensive comment regarding Apple when discussing how others consider the pricing of Apple’s competitors:

People look at an Apple laptop like, “Oh, why should I pay \$1500 for a MacBook Air when I can get a Toshiba laptop for \$500?” Well that’s some plastic piece of junk that weighs twice as much, doesn’t get the same battery life, doesn’t look nice, doesn’t have the same great function, doesn’t have the Mac OS, etcetera.

This statement echoes the anger William feels towards individuals who do not share his belief in the Apple brand. In this particular case, the other individual does not even attack the Apple brand. Rather, the individual simply asks for a justification of the price differences between Apple and Toshiba laptops. His immediate response claiming that the

Toshiba is “some plastic piece of junk” highlights the stance he has taken in this discussion. Rather than discuss the objective abilities of the Apple product he finds superior, his initial response is to insult the competition. Yet again, William becomes defensive when comments are made that may suggest to him that Apple is not as valuable as he believes. Instead of listen to this individual and consider the option to purchase the lower-priced Toshiba product, he refuses to listen to arguments regarding the Apple tax or competitive products, rather opting to defend his brand choice. This behaviour is suggestive of a closed cycle scenario wherein William must manage his own beliefs regarding Apple in order to maintain his high looking glass identity value for the brand he is reluctant to abandon.

A recurring theme amongst these defensive responses is a certain level of passion within the individual. In the cases of both William and Katherine, when confronted with opinions that challenge their own view of the brand, they bypass any reasonable discussion with the individual and became very defensive of the brand, going as far as to “freak out” or insult the competition. This behaviour reflects the identity value management strategy of defense, as mentioned above, while simultaneously supporting the notion that Apple has become engrained in their identities. The ways in which they passionately defended the Apple brand are similar to the ways they would defend themselves, friends or family against judgments from others. Thus, this behaviour further supports the argument that these individuals have entered a relationship with the brand and become so attached that they protect the Apple name as they would their own.

### *4.3.3 Denial*

The final coping mechanism used by Apple users differs from the above two in the sense that it is a more implicit and interpretative behaviour than explicit and outward towards others. This mechanism is based in the denial of information, such that the user interprets external information in a way that will ultimately shed favourable light on the Apple brand. Throughout the interviews, this denial manifests itself in two distinct ways: a denial of product failures and a denial of others' judgments.

The behaviour regarding the denial of product failures parallels that of the high tolerance for transgressions discussed in the dependency portion of the findings. Recalling the testimonies of Stacy, William and Patrick, there are several instances in which Apple consumers face major product failures from the brand, yet convince themselves that the company maintains a high standard of quality. Whether it is William's faulty external hard drive, Patrick's repetitively dysfunctional iPhone, or Stacy's Macbook failure, each user continues to be convinced that Apple produces products that are of higher quality than the competition. These instances of tolerance can also be considered denial behaviour for each individual, as they are choosing to overlook, or deny, the objective truth that their valued Apple product has quality limitations. By denying these facts, each individual is able to maintain their reality wherein the brand with which they have strongly connected continues to outperform the competition.

The second form of denial observed in Apple users relates to the social aspect of the brand. While Katherine and William adamantly defend their brand against any negative comments from others, some individuals exhibit more passive behaviour which involves interpreting others' judgments such that the Apple brand is protected. By doing

so, these individuals can maintain their personal belief that their brand choice is revered and envied by those around them, enhancing its looking glass identity value.

Patrick, whose denial of product failure is discussed above, also shares an interpretation of friends' comments that highlights his denial of judgment:

People will joke and say that you've drunk the Kool-Aid. You've joined the cult, you've got your Apple phone, you won't go back. They've got you, they've got you where they want you. But it's generally more in a joking sense, it's not anything where they're trying to be mean or discriminate that I'm an Apple person.

In this statement, Patrick says that people have told him that he's joined a cult and is being controlled by Apple, and that "they've got [him] where they want [him]." His reference to drinking Kool-Aid is a phrase used to suggest that someone is blindly following another without any independent thought. Yet, despite hearing negative comments about his critical thinking abilities, Patrick remains convinced that these individuals are simply "joking." In this instance, he is hearing the judgments of others regarding the Apple brand, but choosing to interpret them as harmless attempts at humour. In doing so, it becomes unnecessary for Patrick to consider these comments seriously due to their supposed joking nature, allowing him to discount them and continue believing that Apple is a superior brand.

Brandon presents an intriguing instance of denial, as his commentary shows a level of conflict within his own personal reality:

Brandon: You know where you push the button and you talk and it searches? I use that a lot and people just think that's really obnoxious.

**Interviewer: How do you feel about that?**

Brandon: I think it's coupled with envy, so I don't worry about it too much. I try not to use my phone as much if those kinds of comments come out. I will use it less.

In this exchange, Brandon explains a feature on his iPhone that allows him to verbally search for information, which evokes annoyed responses from those around him who think he is being "obnoxious." He initially dismisses these judgments by suggesting that others are simply envious of his product, meaning their negative comments are rooted in jealousy instead of a legitimate critique of his valued product. However, he also states that he will use his phone less if he encounters these negative comments from others. This behaviour is of interest to this study because it seems that his conclusion of envy from others is an attempt to deny the shortcomings of the brand by interpreting others' comments in a light positive to the brand image. Yet, this interpretation is weak in its resolve, as Brandon's behaviour shows that these remarks bother him enough to curb his public usage of the phone. This behaviour mirrors a statement by Brandon discussed earlier in this thesis. Recall that when describing his image when using the brand, Brandon says:

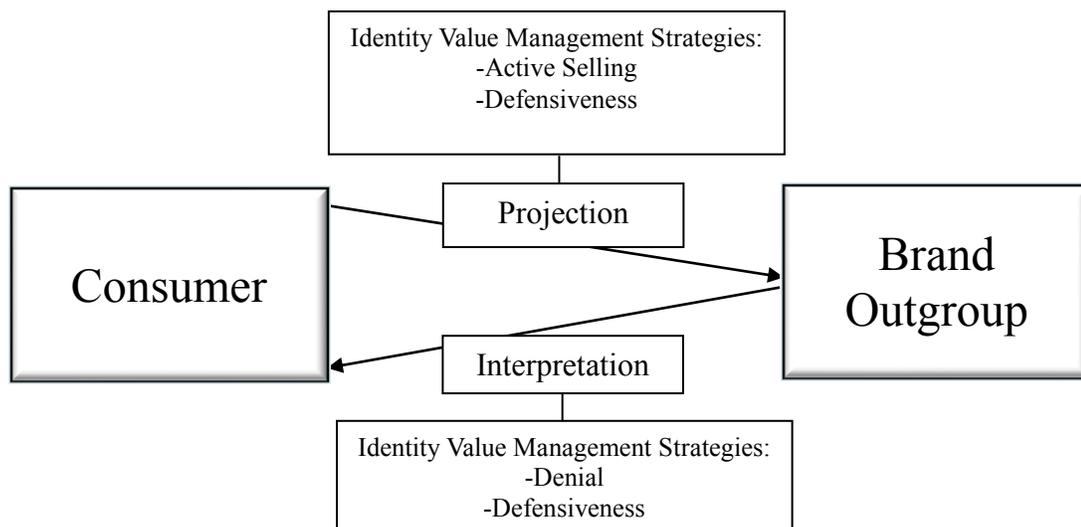
I know that sometimes the way I saw Apple users before I was an Apple user was really obsessed with the product, they are really stuck on themselves for using it, so even though I think I'd like people to think of me as Justin Long I also worry that they think of me as a pompous asshole, "Look at me I have these Apple products for everyone to see and thinks he is better than everyone because he has them."

Brandon appears to be conflicted; he has developed an ideal of how he would like to be seen: compared to Justin Long as a cool, savvy consumer and have his products envied by those around him. Meanwhile, he battles with a concern of a different consideration by others: a “pompous asshole” who obnoxiously uses an unnecessary voice function on his iPhone. This internal conflict between the two identities highlights the management that occurs in these Apple users.

While Brandon seems to be more aware of this internal struggle, he reflects the concerns many of the other participants have shown. In essence, each individual discussed has an ideal image in mind of what they would like the Apple experience to be, including its product quality and social status. Yet, each individual also entertains ideas of Apple’s shortcomings, which challenge this ideal reality that they have created. Since the brand has become so closely engrained with their identity and they have developed a dependent relationship with the company, it is difficult for these individuals to abandon Apple once considering the possibility that it is not the ideal brand. The outcome of this scenario is one in which individuals feel the need to manage their own looking glass identity value by convincing others that they must buy Apple products, emotionally defending the brand against any criticisms that might challenge its integrity, and contorting product failure and negative social attention into acceptance and praise. These observable behaviours from Apple users are the manifestation of a closed cycle, dependent relationship with the brand as well as the looking glass identity value approach used by individuals when consuming their brand.

Figure 2 below illustrates the looking glass identity value process as well as the interplay of the identity value management strategies. Consumers project an action regarding their brand, such as pulling out a Macbook on an airplane or flaunting a new iPhone, and this projection is reflected off of the brand outgroup and back to the consumer. This reflection is then interpreted by the consumer as a perceived evaluation by the outgroup member, allowing the consumer to determine the looking glass identity value of the brand. Identity value management strategies exist in both the projection and interpretation stages of this process, as individuals use active selling and defensiveness to project their beliefs to others in hopes of enhancing the brand's identity value, while denial and defensiveness can then be used as tools that allow the consumer to interpret the perceived evaluations of the brand outgroup. Defensiveness is present in both the projection and interpretation stages of the process due to its ability to be used as a way of seemingly convincing the brand outgroup of the brand's quality, as well as allowing the consumer to assure him/herself of the brand's identity value.

Figure 2



## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The present research introduces an addendum to the current identity value construct while also investigating the behavioural outcomes of this altered identity value within the Apple brand. Looking glass identity value is presented as an addition to Holt's (2004) identity value; it considers the personal reality of the consumer, wherein an individual uses the brand outgroup to reflexively determine the identity value of her/his brand choice by projecting his/her own beliefs onto those around them who do not use the brand. This construct is supported by in-depth interviews with Apple users, which also reveal that these individuals are involved in a dependent relationship with the Apple brand.

Furthermore, the explicit behaviour of these individuals is connected to the combination of looking glass identity value and dependency on the brand, as consumers are required to partake in identity value management strategies due to their dependence and inability to abandon the brand. This collection of findings improves the current understanding of consumer behaviour as it highlights a process by which consumers determine the value of their products and brands, while also offering an explanation for the behaviour observed in many users of the Apple brand.

These findings carry both theoretical and managerial implications. From a theoretical perspective, Holt's (2004) identity value concept can now properly account for the sources of identity value creation in the consumption experience. As well, the introduction of the brand outgroup provides a perspective that has not yet been considered in marketing literature and can be used in the future to better understand the complexity of communication via consumption. Finally, I provide further support for Fournier's relationship literature (1998) by using primary, qualitative research to

demonstrate instances of her dependency brand relationships. Managerially, these findings provide practitioners with a better understanding of the consumption experience for the individual. By considering the brand outgroup and the looking glass identity value process, marketers can more accurately and efficiently strategize their campaigns to maximize the identity value of their brand.

The nature of this research creates a limitation in its ability to determine causality and present widely generalizable findings. Due to the emergent approach of the theory, this thesis' methodology requires a qualitative rather than quantitative approach, eliminating its ability to find causal explanations for certain behaviours. Moreover, the use of only one brand in the interviews limits the applicability of the findings to all other brands. These limitations, in addition to the implications and future research opportunities, are discussed below.

### **5.1 Theoretical Implications**

Building upon Holt's (2004) identity value, this research contributes to existing literature as it further refines the term and uses it to establish the looking glass identity value construct. In doing so, I offer a new perspective on the consumer experience by considering the looking glass process in the creation of a brand's identity value. Not only does this new construct improve upon the current identity value definition, but the consideration of the brand outgroup sheds light on a necessary entity that has hereto been overlooked. For instance, recalling Berger and Heath's (2008) study which uses Livestrong bracelets across dormitories to investigate identity signalling and divergence, the concept of the brand outgroup can be used to properly consider all of the possible

factors in the given scenario. In the case of Berger and Heath (2008), little theoretical attention is paid to the concept of those individuals who belong to neither of the dormitories that received bracelets, yet are assumed to be evaluating the use of the Livestrong product. In essence, the current study of brand signalling in the extant literature overlooks the perceived recipient of any signaled messages and how the message sender acts with this recipient in mind. By introducing the looking glass identity value construct and discussing the brand outgroup, this research shows theorists that consumers consider other non-consuming individuals when choosing a brand and this consideration of a third-party must be studied in the future to better understand its effects on consumption practices.

Beyond showing the existence of this construct, the identity value management strategies in which consumers participate are of interest to the theoretical field. The strategies discussed in the findings show that consumers are capable of feeling obligated to actively manage their behaviour and beliefs to continue feeling positively towards a brand. While this behaviour is only supported regarding the Apple brand, the suggestion of its existence is important to future theory. These findings also shed light on the complexity of the looking glass identity value construct, as it is not only a process of using others reflexively to determine a brand's identity value; rather, it appears as though there is a certain level of management of several factors by the consumer in order to enhance the identity of a given brand. As such, the looking glass identity value construct gains credence as a way of explaining several different consumer behaviours, such as active selling, defensiveness against negative comments and denial.

In addition to the establishment of a construct, this research provides findings that

can assist in future investigations regarding brand relationships, while simultaneously supporting past research. For instance, by using Apple as a case study in this research, the relationship literature of Fournier (1998) gains more pragmatic credibility, as the author's description of a dependent relationship is supported by primary data. Thus, in addition to providing the academic field with the construct of looking glass identity value and the concept of the brand outgroup, the findings in the data are also able to support the existing literature about consumers' brand relationships.

## **5.2 Managerial Implications**

In addition to its academic contributions, my research provides valuable findings to practicing marketers. While a major contribution of this research is the development of a theoretical construct, it is nevertheless possible to capitalize on this information in the pragmatic field. Essentially, my findings show that looking glass identity value exists: consumers are aware of those around them when they are using a brand and they consider the perceived opinions of the brand outgroup. While this thesis does not conclude the causality of its constructs, by proving the existence of this mental process within the consumer's mind, marketers are better informed about consumption behaviour. As such, they can use the knowledge that consumers will reflexively use others to determine the identity value of their brand by projecting and interpreting their own beliefs about the brand.

Possessing this understanding of consumption behaviour, marketers have the ability to position their products with an awareness of how the consumer will ultimately determine its identity value. Moreover, by knowing that consumers possess individual

looking glass identity values as opposed to subscribing to the general public's overall identity value, managers can market their products to capitalize on the existence of this individual reality. That is, rather than use resources to attempt to convince the entire public of a certain identity value, it can be more efficient to enhance the looking glass identity value of the target market, such that they are convinced that all others see the brand as they do. In doing so, the brand develops a core basis of consumers before tackling a larger portion of the population, taking steps to define its identity value to the wider consuming public.

If a brand is wishing to develop its identity value, it could advertise broadly to a population of individuals so that the brand's message is understood by all. The ideal result of this action would be that users of the brand possess a product that communicates meaning to others and that others understand it due to its pervasiveness, thus providing an identity value for the brand. While this approach can be effective, it requires large levels of resources, specifically capital, for the necessary expenditures on advertising to reach such a wide audience.

My research presents an alternative to this strategy: marketers can leverage the looking glass identity value construct and realize that the actual opinions of those who do not own the product can be of little importance. This could be undertaken by communicating strongly with a smaller segment of the market so that they are convinced of the brand's identity value. If done properly, these consumers could then use the brand publicly assuming that others are as familiar with it as they are, using the looking glass to determine its identity value. The core of consumers who believe in the identity of the brand allows the company to grow its marketing practices to a wider audience while

possessing a strong base of buyers who are communicating the brand's message. In essence, this looking glass approach uses the brand outgroup as a reflexive entity rather than one that actively provides feedback regarding brand choices. In doing so, the marketer can minimize the number of people who need to be contacted through advertising. From a managerial perspective, it is more affordable to inform a smaller number of people regarding brand identity due to advertising costs. Thus, by showing that looking glass identity value exists, managers are given a way to develop a brand's identity more efficiently, avoiding the use of resources on parties who will not purchase the product or affect the decision of those who would. While the practice of marketing to a large population is still an effective strategy that boasts advantages when compared to this looking glass identity value approach, the findings of this thesis provide practitioners with a useful alternative in the field of identity value cultivation.

### **5.3 Limitations and Future Research**

The research resulting from this study should strive to further develop the looking glass identity value construct, as well as consider the concept of the brand outgroup in consumer experiences. In addition, it will be important to use alternate research approaches to better understand the links between looking glass identity value and brand relationships and attachment.

A specific research endeavour that could result from this thesis would stem from the lack of generalizability in the methodological model. While using Apple as the topical brand in this study helps to highlight the presence of looking glass identity value, the brand outgroup, and brand relationships, the data is limited by the use of a singular brand.

As such, it is important for future research to compensate for this shortcoming by recreating similar studies that investigate different brands. These alternate brands could vary in price range, popularity, public usage, involvement levels, industry type, and likelihood to be considered an identity brand, among other potential factors. In doing so, parameters for this phenomenon could be distinguished such that it is better understood in what market circumstances this influence exists.

Another limitation and opportunity for future research comes from a piece of discussion in the theoretical background section of this thesis regarding high and low self-monitors. While differing levels of self-monitoring have been shown to affect how individuals behave in the presence of others, the construct is not used in the findings of this thesis. Furthermore, since I posited that the behaviour observed in this thesis research may only apply to high self-monitors, these findings lack generalizability until research can determine how one's degree of self-monitoring moderates the use looking glass identity value. By using a survey methodology in future research, participants could be classified based on their degree of self-monitoring in order to determine whether or not this construct has any effect on the prevalence of looking glass identity value in an individual.

Perhaps the most glaring limitation, and resultant opportunity for future research, stems from the emergent nature of this research and its necessary methodological approach. While the methodology of this thesis is fitting for this particular study, it is unable to determine causality between its constructs. Rather, it can only observe the existence of dependent brand relationships and looking glass identity value, and theorize about the behaviour that manifests as a result of the presence of these constructs. A future

study of interest would determine how exactly these constructs interact. For instance, does the looking glass identity value process cause one to develop a brand relationship because the individual feels represented by the brand's symbol? According to Swaminathan et al.'s (2007) relationship research, this direction of causality is accurate; they suggest that brand relationships stem from congruence between the individual's and the brand's identity. However, this direction could be reversed, wherein consumers use the looking glass identity value only once they have developed a strong relationship with the brand. At this point in the research, it is impossible to conclude which of these relationships is an accurate description, or if either is correct. Thus, while this thesis is able to demonstrate the existence of looking glass identity value and describe the behaviour that manifests itself within the parameters of a dependent relationship, the constructs must be developed further so as to not only appreciate their existence, but understand their causes.

To be able to determine such causality, a quantitative methodological approach is necessary going forward. While the qualitative approach to my thesis is appropriate in this case, it will be difficult to develop this research further without a quantitative approach. By studying this consumer behaviour quantitatively and with a larger sample, the findings would become more generalizable and possess the validity associated with large sample research. As well, by using either experimental or survey-based research methods, quantitative data analysis tools can begin to develop a model for the factors involved in this phenomenon, helping to understand the variables that contribute to looking glass identity value.

In addition to researching the intricate details of this phenomenon, future studies

could consider this self-expression via brands within the overall realm of self-expression; that is, investigate how important brands, and looking glass identity value, are to the complete process of self-expression and presentation in an individual. In doing so, the relative value of brands within an individual's life is better understood, revealing the power of identity value to theorists and practitioners alike. Further research could also be undertaken to better understand the motivations for some of the behaviours observed in this study, specifically the defensiveness of Apple users wherein they emotionally respond to any criticisms of the brand. While this thesis argues that this defensiveness is a reaction meant to convince oneself and/or others of Apple's superiority and maintain a high looking glass identity value for the brand, it is possible that other motivations exist. One such alternative could be a feeling of obligation to protect an entity's name from slander; that is, the defender of Apple could be completely convinced of its superiority and come to its defense simply because s/he does not wish to hear others speak poorly of a product that s/he values. My research data suggests that defensiveness most often stems from the former explanation, wherein consumers are not fully convinced of the brand's superiority and work to convince themselves and others. Nevertheless, future research could investigate defensive behaviour further to determine other possible motivations.

Hoch (1987) investigates the predictive abilities of individuals with regards to others; specifically, he attempts to determine the accuracy of projections made by individuals on others. Revisiting this theory of measure of accuracy presents an intriguing future research endeavour for looking glass identity value as it introduces the concept of comparing the perceived opinion to the actual opinion. This thesis focuses upon the internal realities of consumers based on their assumptions about others' evaluations, but

does not investigate the accuracy of these perceptions. While the identity value management strategies consider the behaviour of Apple users who are attempting to manipulate their own looking glass identity value, this thesis does not investigate the accuracy of these beliefs when compared to the general public's opinion. For example, participants in this study feel that Apple tells others that they are "youthful", "cool", "interesting" and that ownership of an Apple product warrants "bragging" and "flaunting." However, due to my methodological focus on Apple users as participants, there is no way to corroborate or refute these claims with the brand outgroup. As such, future research could consider the predictive literature of Hoch (1987) to investigate the accuracy of looking glass identity value and study the interplay between this construct and the actual identity value opinions of the culture.

One final possibility for theoretical development stems from the paradoxical behaviour of looking glass identity value. In this research, the concept of looking glass identity value is based upon the assumed evaluations of the brand outgroup; that is, what people who do not own the brand think of people who do own it. As this looking glass identity value develops, so too does the identity value of the brand and thus the overall brand value. However, this formula of brand value is paradoxical in the sense that an oversaturation of a product could ultimately decrease its brand value. If a high looking glass identity value leads to a greater brand value and increased sales, the ultimate outcome could be a lower looking glass identity value as a result of the brand's commonality in the market and inability to communicate the proper message. For example, an "indie" musical band could have fans who enjoy the music partly because it identifies them as separate from the mainstream; they have a positive looking glass

identity value of the band because they feel it signals attractive character traits to others who are perceived to notice them following a relatively unheard of band. However, if this looking glass identity value makes the band more attractive to outgroup members wishing to join the ingroup, then the looking glass identity value can become negative because it is no longer perceived to be able to signal the original meaning to those still in the brand outgroup. In essence, this potential paradox mirrors the divergence of identity signalling studied by Berger and Heath (2008) with an additional consideration for the brand outgroup. My research reveals looking glass identity value as an inherent part of the brand consumption process but is unable to wholly explain the ways in which this construct functions in the marketplace. Future research that investigates this phenomenon would allow marketers to further understand looking glass identity value as it is a very complex, dynamic and sensitive construct.

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