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# **Tribalism and Radicalisation: A Critical Review on Marketing and Branding Practices in Developing Social Cohesion**

**B. S. S. U. Bandara<sup>1</sup>, D. M. R. Dissanayake<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1,2</sup>Faculty of Commerce and Management Studies, University of Kelaiya, Sri Lanka

saumya.uditha@kln.ac.lk<sup>1</sup>, ravi@kln.ac.lk<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract.** Branding is extendedly connected with consumers, and multiple engagements are found in the literature explaining how brands connect to human life. Brand community or tribalism is a vastly discussed phenomenon explaining how brands are engaged with consumers as a community moral. Brand community or similarly claimed brand tribalism was investigated with different consumer behavioural aspects to explain how tribalism leads to favourable brand relationship behaviours. The contemporary literature reveals the power of virtual brand communities as well. Meanwhile, the notion of radicalism signifies how consumers and brand become interconnected with exclusive bonds which sometimes exclude the commonalities in a given society. However, the tribalism and radicalism are found a fit with each other whilst arguments are reflected on radicalism against social cohesion. Alongside, this paper addresses this interesting explanation by reviewing the concept of tribalism supported by empirical evidence and theoretical associations. Additionally, the article reveals radicalisms and its influence on consumers based on cases to bridge practical evidence with empirical claims. The notion of social cohesion was discussed with its fundamentals against the explanations given on radicalism. Conclusively, paper contributed to review those concepts and organised an explanation of empirical arguments. Paper presents a discussion supported by theoretical models and conceptual models proposed by authors to synthesise the variable relationships. Finally, it concluded future research directions mentioning specific research scopes to be concerned.

**Keywords.** Brand Community, Brand Tribalism, Radicalism, Social Cohesion

## **1. Introduction**

A Community can be defined as a collection of people who interact with each other to achieve a common goal/interest (Dass, Sethi, Popli, & Saxena, 2019). Thus, communities' formation can be happened due to many social factors like sharing the same geographical area, peer influence, friendships, political influence, media influence, family, etc. However, existing literature has identified that marketing and branding strategy supports the formation of communities (McAlexander, Schouten, & H. F. Koenig, 2002; Stokburger-Sauer, 2010). Nevertheless, the arguments built-in literature relating to interpersonal relationship and the consumer-brand is still arguable. In contrary, (Fournier, 1998; Patwarden & Balasubramanian, 2011; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012; Carroll & Ahuvia, 2006; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park (2005), argues that the passion, romance and love the consumers display towards the brand as similar to interpersonal relationships. As a result, brand communities are considered one way

of developing loyalty (McAlexander, Schouten, & H. F. Koenig, 2002; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Thompson & Sinha, 2008). Apart from the loyalty, brand community derives consumer engagement, either positive or negative (Dass, Sethi, Popli, & Saxena, 2019; Constantin, Platon, & Orzan, 2014). Thus, it is evidence that a participative community can induce consumer-brand engagement, loyalty, love, trust (Cova & Pace, 2006; Vernuccio, Pagani, Barbarossa, & Pastore, 2015; Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001) while it can develop social cohesion (Yassim, 2019), tribalism and radical community mind-sets (Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005; Schau, Jr, & Arnould, 2009; Taute & Sierra, 2014) too. Psychologists' conception on this argues that individuals and societies' consumerism increase the negative impact and reduce social involvement (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). Meantime the discussions by psychologists, sociologists and criticisms of marketing focused more on the role of hedonic consumerism on social ills in academia (Yassim, 2019) while some have found radicalisation as a social and a public health issue (Rousseau, Hassan, & Oulhote, 2017). Therefore, this paper adopts the views on brand community and the positive and negative impacts while mobilising researchers and practitioners around the concept of brand community, brand tribalism, radicalisation, and social cohesion. They are finally proposing a conceptual framework to investigate in the future.

## **1. Literature Review**

### **1. 1. Brand Community**

Many of the major brands contact their stakeholders through online and offline brand communities, fan clubs, and social media groups (Dass, Sethi, Popli, & Saxena, 2019). Further to them, and engaged community can generate consequences in ample areas of the business. Cova & Pace, (2006); Muniz & O'Guinn, (2001) says that the brand communities are similar to traditional communities where they share similar values like advocate people, assistance and care without no geographical boundaries. This has been immensely supported through the advancement of technology in the world where it created different platforms for people to engage and share similar values (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau, Jr, & Arnould, 2009).

Researchers have recognised the community as a crucial factor that can maximise customers' engagement with the product or brand (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005). Similarly, a community is reflected to have a positive impact in developing long-term relationships fitting to these communities which can pressurise the members to be loyal with the activities they do (like purchasing a brand) and can emerge through the relationships and interactions between each of the members in the community (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander, Schouten, & H. F. Koenig, 2002). Therefore, a brand community provides the space for its members to share experiences, emotions, feelings about the brand and gather more knowledge (Constantin, Platon, & Orzan, 2014). Due to the advancement of technology, communities can be seen in both physical places and virtual places. The virtual community concept can be dated back to 1983 when Anderson, (1983) discussed the 'Imagined Community'. However, many researchers were thereafter taken this concept to understand the brand communities in a digitalised environment and claimed that virtual media could form an 'Imagined Community' by exceeding the physical restrictions (Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011; Coles & West, 2016; Ozuem, Howell, & Lancaster, 2018).

However, this communal behaviour with a brand can also be explained using the social identity concept (Tuskej, Golob, & Podnar, 2013), which firstly emerged in 1972 (Hogg & Terry, 2000). According to Ashforth & Mael (1989), social identity can be defined as the groups that categorise themselves and others into distinct social categories in creating their place in society. As a consequence of this, these brand communities could able to develop within the communities (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Schau, Jr, & Arnould, 2009; Taute

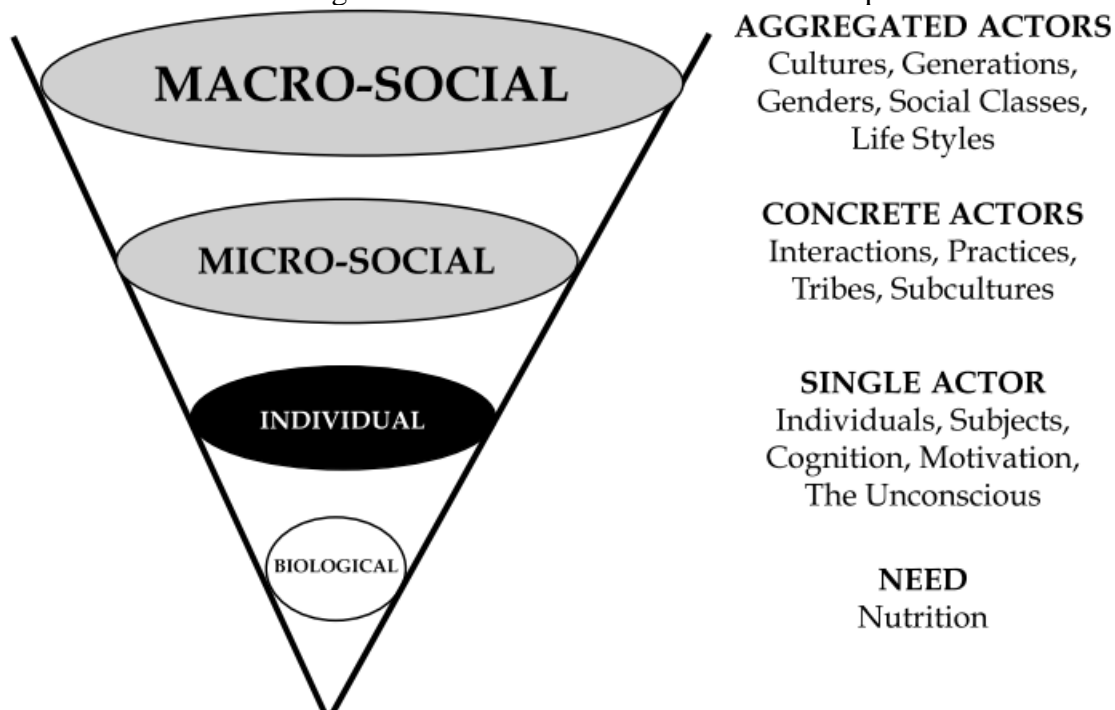
& Sierra, 2014) resulting in favourable and unfavourable behaviours within the general communities. Moreover, marketing from 2002 and beyond will admit and exploit consumers from their current individualisation, but the future of marketing will offer and support a transformed sense of community (Cova & Cova, 2002).

### 1.2. Tribalism and Brand Tribes

Unlike traditional communities, brand communities are where their key motivation is on brands and the community members' interest (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2008). Thus, the brand tribes or tribalism can also derive from the brand communities (Cova & Cova, 2002) discussed above. Further to them, tribalism can be identified as a Latin approach to marketing. It talks about the view that products are consumed to develop links among community members for their use-value. This view further supports the ethnosociology, which describes the tribe behaviour as glue, sharing emotions and being-together with two or more individuals (Bergami

& Bagozzi, 2000). However, the individualistic way of looking at consumption has changed due to the holistic viewpoint that Latin approach brought into the discussion. Thus, the ethnocentric consumerism (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995) described the consumption patterns of social groups and cultural groups came into discussion. The levels of observation of consumption described by Desjeux (1996) further highlighted this micro-social level ignored from marketing-related research before 2000.

Figure 01: Levels of observation of consumption



Source: Adopted from Desjeux, 1996

This viewpoint was eye-opening to many social science researchers to research on the micro-social level, which helped develop consumer groups later on. So, it's evident that individuals build and maintain relationships with their members of the tribe (Dermody &

Scullion, 2001) through the practices and interactions. Thus, the ability to share and support members will lead to developing relationships among brand tribes. Further, it can spread the ties to a broader community through social networks (Especially online) while creating a self-identity to the trib's members. The key in developing relationships here is not only the passion for the brand but also the social connection, interactions, practices and the subcultures (Desjeux, 1996) the customers depicts in the society (Zaglia, 2013) which will ultimately cerates the social identity which arises when a person recognised as an in-group member of a society or a community (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Chu & Kim, 2011; Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005). This behavior depends on the sense of community which defined as the degree of customers sensation relate to their other members of the community (Bergkvist & Bech-Larsen, 2010).

This tribal behaviour in brand communities also depicts through the theory of Social Capital which defined as an asset, resource, or capability that arises from trust, mutuality, goodwill, and knowledge within a distinct network of relationships (Woolcock, 1998). Sharing a common language, dealing with a defined set of customs, and market exchange which are sometimes non-written help generate a greater level of trust and access to information across these ethnic communities is also a sociological perspective (Galbraith, Rodriguez, & Stiles, 2007). Further, this tribal behaviour relates to the club behaviour which describes the creation and characteristics of optimal production and consumption groups, and their sustainability under various competitive conditions (Hochman, Pines, & Thisse, 1995). Fandom affiliation is also another area directly linked with tribal behaviour (Dionisio, Leal, & Moutinho, 2008). According to Zillman, Bryant, & Sapolsky, 1989 feelings of companionship, community and cohesion, and enhanced social prestige and self-esteem are the emotions and behaviours depicted by the members of such affiliation has also described in tribal behaviour mentioned above. This group affiliation is inspired through aspiration of a positive uniqueness from other social groups (Madrigal, 2002) and one of the important aspects of this identification is the rituals members share like in pilgrimages, club behaviour and also the consumption of some brands become part of the integration (Dionisio, Leal, & Moutinho, 2008).

From now on a bigger part of our lives may be played by these tribes, gangs, crews, groups cocoons and all other segments in these communities (Jones, 2002). Further, these connected communities or tribes share information about brands in their native (own) language which will definitely a plus point for marketers if they use it correctly. However, a bias behaviour is also depicted by the members of the tribes when a threat is identified on one's self-identity through the tribe (Wann, 2005). Elaborating this further Cova & Pace 2005, have mentioned that, one of the critical aspects in tribal marketing is that companies' risk to lose control over the brand that is somehow expropriated by group members. The main problem usually encountered with tribal brands is that they constitute a force of opposition to the company. When it comes to fandom behaviour in sport science, fans tribes do not like to have the logo of the sponsoring brand in the t-shirts of the team player bigger and they always prefer the smallest (Dionisio, Leal, & Moutinho, 2008). Further to them, these tribal fans can sometimes show aggressive behavior when supporting the team.

Nevertheless, Cova (1997), mentioned an indigenous feel of association, religiosity, syncretism, group narcissism and power of attraction are some of the critical behavioural patterns of these tribes. Therefore, when handling these brand tribes need a high level of attention since belonging becomes a fundamental and an essential human need (Griskevicius & Kenrick, 2013; Maslow, 1943) and thus a social exclusion can easily withdraw humans of belonging which will ultimately result in evoking a variety of negative emotions such as sorrow and hopelessness (Leary, 1990); results in the physiological provocation of bodily pain (Eisenberger, Lieberman, & Williams, 2003). Social exclusion also encourages negative social

magnitude such as violence, aggression, radical behaviour and a decreased motivation to help each other (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007).

### **1.3. Radicalisation**

Radicalisation is one of the great slogans in the current social context (Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013). According to them, many researchers have investigated this concept related to political violence, and many more other terms. Thus, academics have considered the term to research where many have seen it as greatest threats to social cohesion and security. They further emphasised that the interest in radicalisation has heightened after 2001, but it is unclear that how this term translated into higher academic standards by taking the term away from the field of terrorism studies where radicalisation literature can be found usually. This is clearer when analysing the definitions of the radicalisation like, “the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs, and the term action pathways (or action scripts) to describe the process of being involved in terrorism or engaging in violent extremist actions (Borum, 2011). Extremist ideologists can also be two kinds as “violent extremists” and “non-violent extremists” (Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013) where non-violent extremists can showcase charm behaviours in disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others. However, many early researchers have rather unsuccessfully tried to investigate individuals committing terrorists acts or violence acts like criminal offence (Rousseau, Hassan, & Oulhote, 2017).

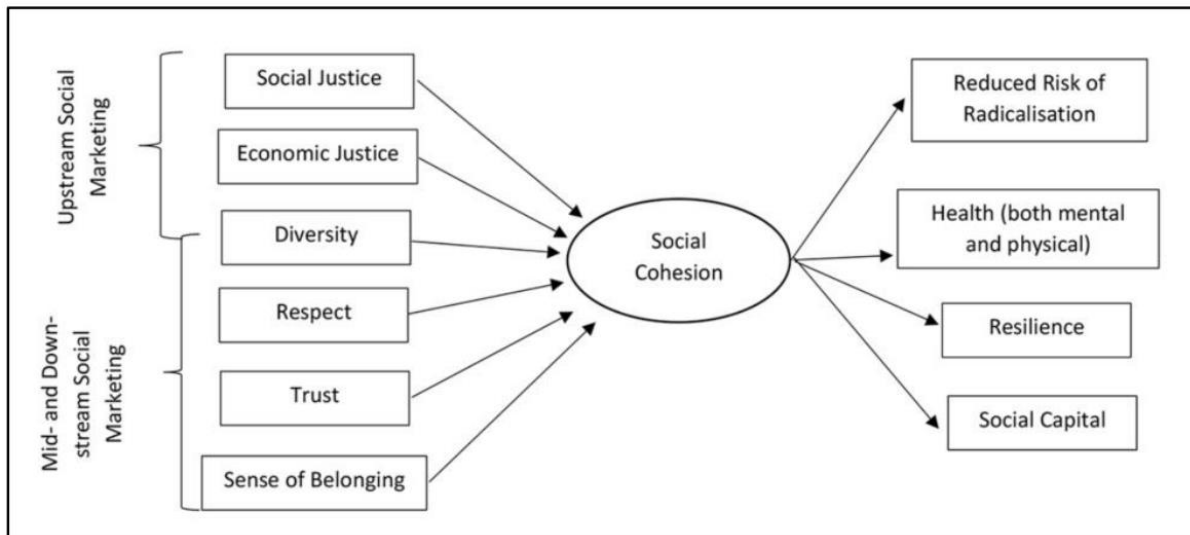
Stating more on radicalisation Kruglanski, et al., 2014, recognised that the goals of a member of a specific group or an individual play a key role in making a person psychologically ready for radical behaviour. Thus they can show this behaviour in society to be someone or to be respected, which is one of the behavioural aspects of a brands’ outcome (Aaker, 1997; Keller, 1993). This may happen due to the meaning-making process among the tribe/group/community members, a category of culture and imagination (De Graaf, Dimitriu, and Ringsmose 2015) which creates their social identity. Histories of an individual, cluster, or tribal accomplishment and disappointment; pasts of crises, conflicts, or reestablishments are related matters that confirm a group’s collective identity, which can lead to radical behaviour. The extreme radical behaviour can disturb and harm people’s most important goal like a living and living peacefully.

Relating to the case of Harley Davidson (Corey & Millage, 2014) mentioned that the “Harley Davidson represents one of the biggest and most successful “cult level” followings, and has created an outlet for individuals from all walks of life to escape the realities of life, and to fit into an exclusive club that represents the very essence of freedom”. Nevertheless, they identified Harley Davidson's users as rebels by mentioning that these “rebels without a cause” think they are a part of something bigger than themselves and interpret that the social status by owning a Harley Davidson allows them to act so. Rebellion has defined as “action against those in authority, against the rules, or against normal and accepted ways of behaving” and “violent action organised by a group of people who are trying to change the political system in their country” (Cambridge, 2020). This defined behaviour is more similar to the above definitions of radicalisation which were highlighted by many of the researchers. Further (Corey & Millage, 2014) mentioned that the rebellion behaviour by those who use Harley Davidson reflects through the tattoos, wild and untamed appeal, long hair, a leather decorated outfit which allows them to liberate from the ordinary routines life and enjoy the community they are in. thus they go an extra mile to achieve those statuses even by paying any amount of money. So as (Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013) highlighted, these behaviours are a risk and a threat to the social cohesion and the security. It is said that social cohesion needs the moral of developing shared values and communities of interoperation ( Kearns & Forrest,2000; Schiefer, David & Van der

Noll, Jolanda. 2017). But extreme radicalism even in brand communities may challenge for such share values in a given society which may boomerang to the brand image.

Researching more on the social cohesion (Yassim, 2019) proposed a conceptual framework which shows the relationship between social cohesion and radicalisation as depicts in figure 2. According to Yassim, social cohesion can reduce the risk of radicalisation, which mean the radicalisation can reduce social cohesion as well.

Figure 02: Proposed conceptualization of social cohesion by Yassim, 2019



Source: (Yassim, 2019)

Even though many researchers as specified about done research work regarding radicalisation the lack of “consistency and coherence, which means that the kind of mutual learning and careful honing of methodologies and fieldwork that takes place in other disciplines is largely absent from radicalisation research (Neumann & Kleinmann, 2013). Thus, it opens many doors to research on radicalisation further to establish the term “radicalisation”. Since the radicalisation has related with terrorism by many researchers to break the continuing misunderstanding about the concept Silke (2001), stated that “[T]errorism research is not in a healthy state. It exists on a diet of fast-food research: quick, cheap, ready-to-hand and nutritionally dubious”.

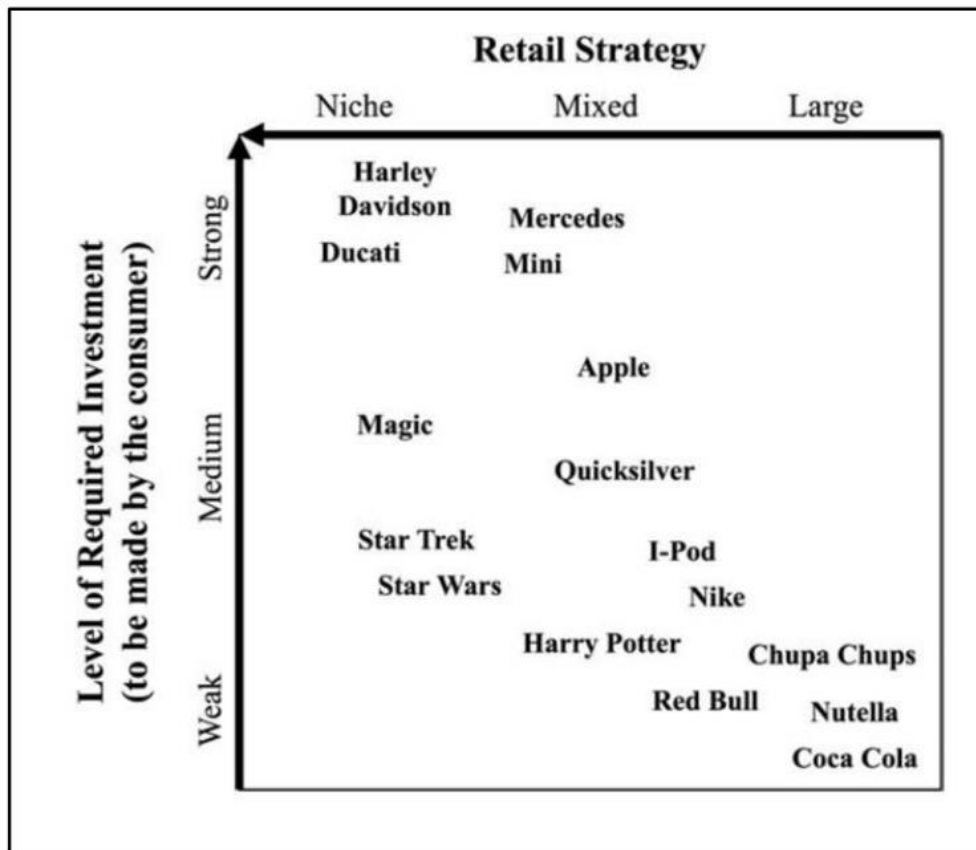
## 2. Discussion

In reality, people love a brand since the brand allows them to express themselves and can easily communicate their identity within the community (Wallace, Buil, & Chernatony, 2014). Therefore, the formation of brand love is an area that researchers need to focus on especially in different contexts. People start creating relationships through various membership groups in virtual platforms without even seeing each other. So, in a context like this, the trust build within everyone can be problematic and confusing. However, it seems to be a trustworthy relationship as these members share some of the very personal data/information with these unknown individuals. So, concepts like love/brand love again need to be investigated by researchers as it becomes a major element in creating membership groups/ communities and tribes.

The next problem is how much these concepts relate to the product or the brand they promote. The level of sharing may vary with the product nature. Because many of the prior

researches have focused on the benefits of brand community (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Kleiman & Keinan, 2010; Manchanda, Packard, & Pattabhiramaiah, 2015) while few have focused on finding the negative aspect of these based on some cases (Zhang & Iyengar, 2015). Further, it found that creating a community for a luxury brand is critical to maintaining the prestige. But for mass brands, having a poor customer base is enough (Cova & Pace, 2006).

Figure 2: A typology of brand communities

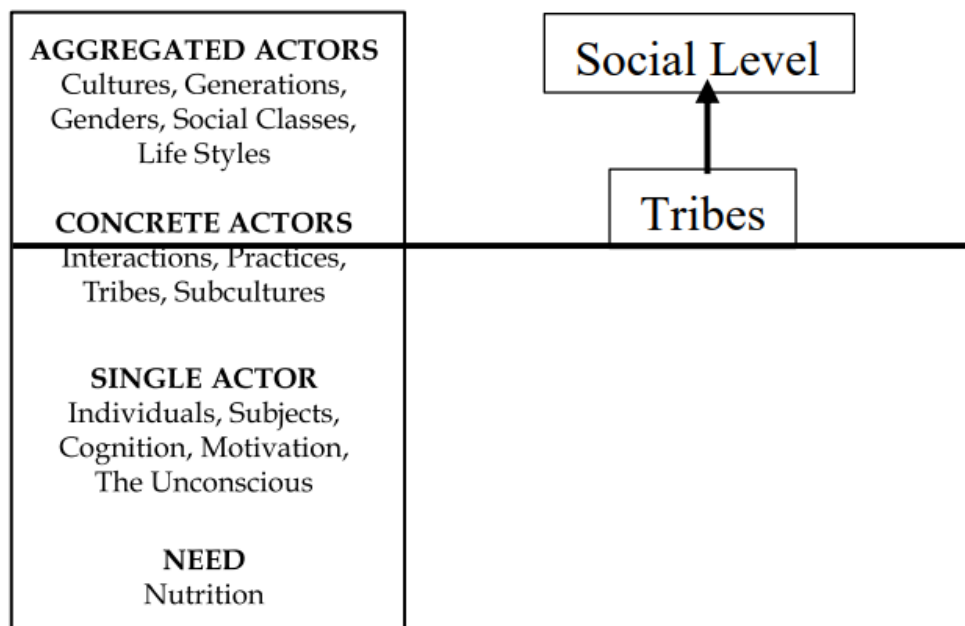


Source: (Cova & Pace, 2006)

According to Cova & Pace argument, stronger the consumer involvement the retail strategy needs to be a niche one, and further community involvement in sharing is highly benefited. Conversely, mass brands like Coca Cola might not need community involvement. However, marketers are now trying to focus on developing communities without considering the nature of the brands and the products, which can ultimately create unnecessary consumption and sharing issues. The reason is that the 'social exclusion from a community' can make unforeseen issues in the market. If a marketer creates a community and excludes members for any related reason, that exclusion can direct the member to act adversely to the brand. This was highlighted by Mzoughi, Ahmed, & Ayed (2010), saying that social exclusion also harms brands. Moreover, social exclusion prevents relational cohesion and decreases consumers' sense of belonging and negatively affects brand attitude. The fundamental of social cohesion supports this since it refers to a nation or society needs to be built as one group with attached feelings (Healy & McDonagh, 2013). In brief, social cohesion admires the notion of think about belonging at a border level. As identified in the literature, inside a brand tribe, these kinds of

community exclusions can distort their identity within the community and lead to psychological torture. The result would be an aggressive counterattack or a nonviolence act against the brand or the product. Therefore, an assumption can be made as the social exclusion from a tribe can lead to aggressive behaviour (radical) based on the statement of Silke (2001) that “Terrorism research is not in a healthy state. It exists on a diet of fast-food research: quick, cheap, ready-to-hand and nutritionally dubious”. Investigating further on radicalisation (Rousseau, Hassan & Oulhote, 2017) found that radicalisation leading to violence is a socio-political phenomenon, the increasing nature of the impact of radicalisation lead to consider the phenomenon as a public health issue too. Thus, it can impact on the public as a mass issue. Nevertheless, some researchers claim that the concept of radicalisation is problematic and need further investigations (Coolsaet, 2019; Malthaner, 2017; Kundnani, 2012). One of the main arguments is that the radicalisation has been discussed mainly in a micro-level process (Ahmad & Monaghan, 2019; Crone, 2016) and thus disregarded the macro-level process and the impact of it at the macro level as a social context. Therefore, the effect of this micro-level to the macro-level needs to be further investigated.

Figure 03: Levels of observation of consumption and future research direction

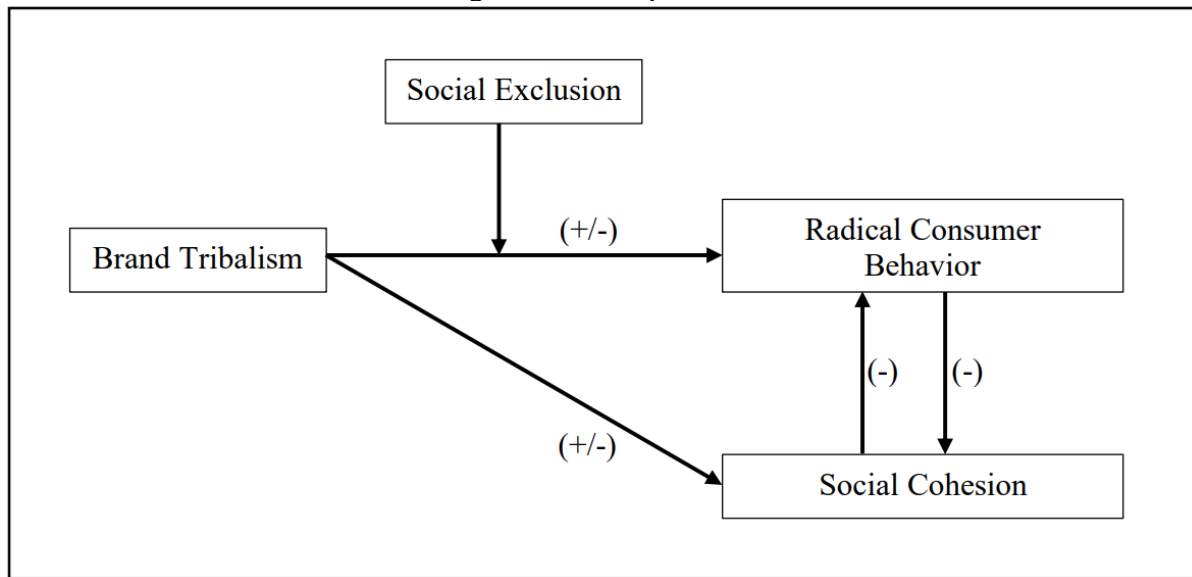


Source: Adopted from Desjeux (1996)

Bouchet (2018), argues that marketing has taken advantage of consumers and focused to almost religiously convert citizens into consumers at the expense of social cohesion. He promotes it as the true violence of marketing. Meantime, psychologists and sociologists have identified that this consumerism in individuals and societies could negatively impact and diminish social involvement (Bauer, Wilkie, Kim, & Bodenhausen, 2012).

Therefore, it can be identified a relationship between tribal behaviour and radicalisation which will ultimately impact social cohesion. Further, social exclusion can moderate the impact of radicalisation (radical behaviour in a market). Thus, a conceptual framework can also be developed as follows.

Figure 3: Conceptual framework



Source: Authors Developed (2021)

More and more critiques on marketing over the role of hedonic consumerism on social illnesses and social issues increases day by day in academia by sociologist and psychologists (Yassim, 2019). Commenting further Yassim shows that whichever the side a person selects in the debate of marketing and consumerism, especially social marketing, has to play a prominent role in addressing and investigating these society's wicked problems.

### 3. Conclusion

Brands are connected with the consumers via different engagement drives resulting consumer to feel brand as a part of their life. Commercially, brands create propositions including social connection to consumers to feel they become a member of a relevant group provided a particular brand is consumed or associated. This paper discusses the theoretical and empirical explanations of how brand tribalism is depicted in many studies emphasising how it connects to consumers as a community phenomenon. Additionally, the notion of radicalism was explained with connective evidence highlighting some leading cases and applications to reveal how radicalism links to consumers' specific behavioural dynamics. Paper examines some arguments on radicalism in relation to social cohesion with the association of social capital theory. It revealed how empirical insights explain the radicalism and social cohesion emphasising future research directions. Accordingly, we attempted to present a critical review on brand tribalism and radicalism supported by theoretical explanations added to empirical justifications. The practice related perspectives on brand tribalism and radicalism were emphasised with cases and some empirical thoughts shared by different authors. Finally, we postulate future research to focus on how brand tribalism and radicalism influence consumers' behavioural impacts regarding difference products scopes. Meanwhile, specific attention should be made when examining the significance of brand tribalism and radicalism for the online or digital contexts on par with the fast-growing virtual presence of brands and consumer engagements.

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