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Chinedu James Obiegbu

Constructing Loyalty in an Online Music Community

Abstract

The sustained centrality of brand loyalty in marketing theory and practice, the growing relevance of community in brand and marketing discourse, and the necessity of knowledge that is valid at the level of the consumers' lived experience have prompted the need for research that examines the relationship between loyalty and community especially as it relates to art and cultural brands broadly, and music in particular. This study set out to explore how loyalty is constructed and given meaning within the context of an online music community. In doing so the study engages with a range of literatures from marketing, sociology, fan studies and popular music studies. Drawing on the notion of fandom, an experiential view that highlights the symbolic and meaning-based aspects of brand loyalty is utilized along with the notion of the 'circuit of culture'. An online community, dedicated to music b(r)and, U2, served as the research context. The study adopts a broadly ethnographic approach while also employing methods and techniques drawn from discourse analysis. This enabled the merging of the systematic observation of discourses within the selected fan community, with direct contact with its social actors. Data was collected using participant observation, observation ethnography and interviews with fans. Three analysis chapters, respectively, deal with the discursive resources utilized by music fans in constructing loyalty; the collective negotiation of different ways of being loyal and of expressing loyalty within the group; and the role of loyal fan engagement within the context of community in constructing the brand's story. Taken together, the three analysis chapters present a picture of how music fans construct loyalty, and other associated meanings and tensions involved in the consumption of an artist brand. The implications of the findings for the theory of brand loyalty and music consumption are then drawn out. By situating the study of loyalty within the context of community, and taking a fine-grained discursive approach to loyalty, the study highlights the group construction of preferences, value systems and meanings that frame loyal behaviour. The meaning-based perspective taken also highlights the socio-cultural underpinnings of brand loyalty for music fans and consumers.

Constructing Loyalty in an Online Music Community

Chinedu James Obiegbu

Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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List of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Meaning	Page
CS	Cultural Studies	16
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis	120
CD	Compact Disc	97
CA	Conversation Analysis	120
DA	Discourse Analysis	120
DP	Discursive Psychology	120
EMI	A major music label	98
MTV	Music Television	98
PCM	The Psychological Continuum Model	48
PMS	Popular Music Studies	86
PO	Participant Observation	123
U2	Name of Irish Rock Band	18
VH1	Video Hits One	98

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an overview of the theoretical and personal motivations for the present inquiry. Specific research aims are discussed and the methodological stance taken is introduced. The research context for the study, rock band U2, is also introduced. The chapter concludes with an overview of the thesis structure.

1.2 THEORETICAL REASONS FOR RESEARCH IN BRAND LOYALTY

The concept of brand loyalty holds a central place in marketing, both in practice and as a theoretical focus (Uncles et al., 2003). Brand loyal consumers offer a range of benefits to a firm, from amplifying positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Ashley and Varki, 2009), to being more cost effective to retain than attracting new customers (Reichheld and Teal, 1996). Consumers derive some benefits from being brand loyal, as brands act as media for engagement with others who identify with a brand (Oliver, 1999), reduce the perceived risk in purchase decision making (Matzler et al., 2008), and possess symbolic and hedonic value for consumers independent of marketing action (Elliot and Wattanusuwan, 1998). Despite the extensive research that has been conducted on brand loyalty, most of this research has tended towards a supplier-oriented view that draws on logical positivist paradigms (Paavola, 2006). Some accounts of consumer-focused loyalty research can nonetheless be pointed to, including Solomon (1986), McCracken (1993), Schouten and McAlexander (1995), Fournier and Yao (1997) and Fournier (1998) but these have been few by comparison. Explanations of loyalty have been drawn primarily from cognitive psychology, with theories of attitude formation guiding most of the work. Focusing on the consumer, however, highlights the meanings and symbolic underpinnings of loyalty that affect behaviour, thus presenting opportunities to deepen our understanding of the concept. Fournier and Yao (1997:454) make the observation that "we have perhaps prematurely circumscribed the brand loyalty construct and our understanding of it, thereby precluding the accumulation of knowledge into a theory of brand loyalty that is valid at the level of lived experience". I would suggest that 20 years on from their seminal article this situation still persists. This, coupled with the growing relevance of community in brand and marketing discourse means that relevant and contemporary academic research that delves into the realities of consumers is required.

Consumers engage with brands, both online and offline, as individual customers and as part of consumption communities (Muniz et al., 2005). This connected landscape calls for research that addresses the socially constituted nature of loyalty. The research described in this thesis provides a grounded account of the social realities of consumers as they interact within the context of community with regards to loyalty.

Consumers' perceptions and behaviours are influenced by others as they interact in different social and cultural settings (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Research that focuses on these communities and settings to elucidate the effects these interactions produce with regards to loyalty have been rare. Various marketing terms capture the peer-to-peer dimension of consumer interactions including tribes, subcultures, brand communities, cults, etc. Greater insight and detail is needed as to how interacting within these sorts of consumer groupings shape the meanings, perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of consumers and underpin loyal behaviour. Interpretive research that sheds light on these group dynamics hold the possibility of moving the field of brand loyalty forward by adding depth and nuance of meaning to understanding of the concept.

1.3 PERSONAL REASONS FOR RESEARCHING BRAND LOYALTY

My interest in researching brand loyalty originated from my experiences as a close observer and fan of popular music. Besides an interest in the music itself I had always paid close attention to the industry, reading up on music industry business publications and following the careers of some of the industry's most successful current and formerly active artists. I was aware of the ongoing discussion at the time, of the impact that technology in general, and the internet in particular was having on the music industry. A trend that seemed to be all the rage was for the fans of some big name artists to be branded with nicknames to capture the zeitgeist appeal and popular culture reach of the artists and the passionate communities that were forming to celebrate them. From Bruce Springsteen's 'Tramps', to Lady Gaga's 'Little Monsters", these communities of fans seemed to be highly active online. Back in the 80's and 90's, it seemed concerts, small group meets and occasional letters from pen pals were the only communal fan experiences that could be pointed to. In the age of the internet and social media, however, every fan can be connected. Millions of fans engage their shared passion for artists on social media, and within dedicated communities. Besides the petty fan skirmishes that constantly arise on social media these communities raised a number of

questions in my mind. I wondered what, if any impact, these communities that seemed to proliferate online had on the artists themselves and their brands. What did engaging within these communities mean to these fans? How did their activities within these communities shape or alter their relationship with the artists brands, and their perceptions of loyalty towards them? Did fans even think of themselves as loyal? How did marketing theory apply to the experiences of these fans? These questions set me on a path towards exploring the relationship between loyalty and community, especially as it related to art and cultural brands in general, and music in particular.

1.4 RESEARCH AIMS

The aim of this research is to explore how brand loyalty is constructed within the context of community. A key aspect of this aim is related to the notion of meaning, particularly for a product like music that goes beyond functional use values, possesses the capacity to express and arouse emotions, and is essentially a social experience (Hargreaves and North, 1999). Meaning as highlighted here relates to the use of music as a space within which the struggle over the definition of social reality is fought (De Nora, 1986). Moving slightly away from the objective system of meaning that lies at the heart of mainstream marketing, the issue of meaning as examined in this thesis relates to the question of who defines or 'appropriates' those meanings, where, when, how and for what purpose. It relates to meanings around loyalty as they emerge in and through use for music consumers. Dedicated online communities provide a forum and a space for the 'work' of exploring, critiquing, constructing and practicing the notion of loyalty, both in relation to music in itself, and as a 'product' of the market. The research presented in this study represents a focus on one of these communities, or social worlds in order to capture the group production of meaning through interaction. It tells the 'local history' of how loyalty is realized through meaning production. It attempts to capture the meaning making process that contributes to embedding conceptualizations of loyal behaviour. The purpose of this is not to define or identify an objective stance on loyalty, but rather to examine how fans and consumers construct and manage the perception of loyalty.

Ancillary to the focus on meaning production is the desire to pull together the relevant academic discourses needed in order to understand the wider symbolic dimension of fans/consumers. It embodies an attempt to respect the realities and conventions of

music consumption as well as marketing theory itself. As O'Reilly rightly (2004) observes, neither mainstream managerial marketing, nor consumer behaviour research have paid sustained attention to popular music and music consumers. The lived experiences and perspectives of music consumers rarely factors into business and marketing discourse. This is surprising considering the commercial and cultural reach of popular music artists, the size of the popular music industry, and the intensity with which music fans approach their favorite bands. Marketing and consumer behaviour, or more specifically loyalty which this thesis focuses on, and popular music seem to lie on different sides of a language divide that rarely gets crossed. The traditional marketing perspective speaks a language that is dependent on the actions of the marketer. It views loyalty mainly in terms of economic transactions, and consumers as passive actors responding to marketing incentives in an inherited culture.

Popular music studies on the other hand, the field focused on the production and dissemination of commercially produced music, does not appear to have engaged systematically with the strategic marketing or consumer behaviour literature or discourse (O'Reilly, 2004). Given that marketing theory is concerned with commercial exchange relationships, the popular music business presents an opportunity for interdisciplinary research that takes advantage of the different perspectives offered by these fields in the understanding of consumer behaviour and loyalty.

The cultural studies perspective puts the meanings consumers of popular music give loyalty front and center. A cultural studies perspective allows for an appreciation of the "overlapping layers of cultural meaning that structure consumer actions in a given social context" (Thompson and Troester, 2002: 550). This thesis represents an attempt to draw from marketing theory and fan studies, or cultural studies in a broader sense, in understanding how loyalty is enacted within the context of community by consumers of popular music. It brings an interdisciplinary perspective that allows marketing theory and fan studies to converse with each other towards coming to an understanding of how loyalty is articulated by music consumers and fans.

The following research questions are highlighted:

1. What are the discursive resources which music fans use to construct loyalty?

2. What are some of the core tensions around being a loyal music fan, and how are these tensions negotiated within the context of community?

3. Why do fans negotiate the tensions that emerge from different ways of being loyal?

These are the research questions guiding this explorative study, and they will be revisited in, chapter 9, the discussion chapter.

1.5 METHODOLOGICAL STANCE

From a methodological perspective, a broadly interpretive approach is taken. Symbolic interaction serves as a theoretical platform for exploring how loyalty is constructed and given meaning in online platforms in relation to the artist brand. Symbolic interactionists support the idea of an inseparable connection between the individual and his environment (Mertzer, 1975). Following from the assumptions that underpin symbolic interactionism, it is imperative to understand what individuals, within the context of community, know about loyalty, how they interpret meanings related to it and how the online community context affects brand loyalty. The process of meaning attribution thus takes center stage. The basis for interaction among members of fan communities is a shared system of meaning. Over time, symbols evolve, and ways of thinking about loyalty condense. Group members look to each other for help in defining situations. Behaviours with regards to loyalty are based on perceptions, the use of language and symbols and the creation of shared meaning within the community. It is these symbols and meanings that this research aims to pinpoint. I am positioned as an interpretive bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011) attempting to piece together meaning and online culture with regards to loyalty. Interactions and communications within online communities are viewed as text which can be analyzed to create a composite picture of the operations of loyalty online. A combination of online ethnography and discourse analysis is used in approaching the data. This has enabled a merger of the systematic observation of discourses within the selected fan community, with direct contact with its social actors (Androtsoupouos, 2008). Ethnographic insights thus serve as a backdrop for the selection, analysis and interpretation of data in order to illuminate relations between the texts and their production as well as reception practices. I

collected data using 'observation ethnography' (Bainbridge, 2007) and 'participant observation' (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1994). The former is an unobtrusive form of content analysis of forum threads without focused interaction with participants. The second strategy, participant observation, used themes that were emerging from my initial content analysis to start new thread topics for participants to respond to. By observing these threads daily, I directed exchanges, and brought them back to focus when discussions had strayed off topic, and asked follow-up questions based on initial responses. As part of the informant ethnographic phase, I also conducted interviews with key informants in order to make sense of the kinds of descriptions and accounts possible, the sorts of judgements they are based on, how varying means of accounting construct varying versions of the subject matter or produce different kinds of truths, and the meanings these versions hold for participants (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). These will be covered in greater depth in chapter 5.

1.6 RESEARCH CONTEXT – U2

The present study explores in detail the interactions of an online community of U2 fans, as relates to loyalty. Considering the ease of access to online communities, and willingness of fans of major artists to coalesce online, there was no shortage of options when it came to the choice of which community to focus on. I conducted my research on U2 for a number reasons. Firstly, U2 are exemplary of a typical mainstream commercial artist b(r)and with active and engaged fans online. Secondly, as a band, U2 has been active for over thirty years. The bands' success and longevity, predating the emergence of the internet, meant that the band's fans consisted of a very diverse cohort in terms of age, status, income and online engagement. This presented the potential for interactions drawn from a breath of experiences, with different areas of alignment and divergence structuring fan's relationships with the band. The activity of fans before the dominance of the internet also provided a sense of perspective that would not have been possible with more recent artists. Additionally, U2 has been through highs and lows; periods of extended commercial success and underperformance, an early incarnation as a small Indie Irish band to global rock star status, and positive and negative media coverage that has both attracted, and tested the loyalty of fans through the length of its career. All of these suggest a wealth of loyalty experiences for fans that make the band an interesting choice as a research context. Finally, a lot has previously been written

about U2 across fields, both as part of empirical studies and as contained in books, allowing for the accrual of insights and comparison of findings.

1.6.1 Formation

U2 is an Irish rock band formed in Dublin in 1976 after Larry Mullen Jr put a note up on his high school bulletin board requesting musicians. From respondents, a 6-member band ensued consisting of Paul Hewson (Bono), Dave Evans (The Edge), Larry Mullen Jr, Dick Evans, Ivan McCormick and Adam Clayton. Dick Evans and McCormick would eventually depart from the group, leaving the band as a four piece. The new band held rehearsals together for almost two years, and went through a series of monikers, before settling on a name inspired by an American spy plane (Jobbing, 2014). Playing as many shows as possible in and around Dublin, U2 quickly attracted a strong local following. They recorded and released music independently within Ireland, before signing a worldwide recording contract with Island Records in 1980. Despite touring extensively in Ireland and the UK, and releasing an EP, they failed to attract mainstream commercial success prior to their record deal with Island Records (Kootnikof, 2010). The band also signed a manager, Paul McGuiness, around the same time. U2 therefore had the backing, resources and support of a major record label not too long (3 years) into their career. Even acknowledging their short stint as an active band without a record label and management, it would be difficult to describe U2 as an independent band currently, especially in an economic sense of owning its means of production. With regards to owning its message, aesthetic and commentary and having the ability to be reflective or political, U2 can be said to have retained some of that indie sensibility. In fact, U2 represents a not so common example of a rock band that has found massive commercial success, yet retained independence over its message. From the beginning of its career, the band was given total artistic control by Island Records (Calhoun, 2012). U2 was faced with minimal outside interference, and proceeded to re-claim the publishing rights to their music when they renegotiated their record contract with Island Records in 1984. For the most part however, the band can be seen as a mainstream commercial music band. U2 went from a short early period as an independent band to being part of a major record label, allowing the band to benefit from the power and financial support this provided in terms of promoting and

distributing the music product, thus increasing the band's chances of greater mainstream success.

1.6.2 Music

According to the band's webpages, in the space of over 30 years U2 has released 13 studio albums. The band has also put out a wide range of miscellaneous material, including live albums, compilation albums and EPs. U2's music has enjoyed commercial success. Estimates of U2's sales are somewhere in the range of 170 million records worldwide (Erlewine, 2010). Sales represent a variable mix of marketing action, perceived quality and timing, and does not necessarily indicate the actual quality of a piece of music. The band's commercial clout, however, highlights the fact that U2 and their music has been marketed and commodified as a product in contemporary consumer society, similar to other popular music artists/ brands.

If pressed, U2 might be described as a rock band, although they have dabbled in a range of styles. Punk rock, with its aggressive stylings served as a template for much of the band's early work, and was an ideal match for the limited technical proficiency of the band's members at the start of their career, although they would go on to explore hard rock, experimental, pop, country, gospel, and alternative music (McCormick, 2006). The band's influences include The Clash, Led Zeppelin, Bob Dylan, The Ramones and The Sex Pistols, among others. U2 has been described as having a unique musical sound built around Bono's earnest and expressive vocals, and the Edge's unique chording style on the guitar (Jobling, 2014). An exploration of musical form and style is however not the objective of this thesis. Contrary to a structuralist view of musical meaning which focuses on the structure of a musical text, or a political economic approach which draws attention to economic power and its role in shaping audiences, the culturalist view guiding the current enquiry frames musical meaning as linked to both the consumer and the artist as active agents in the construction of meaning (Middleton, 1990). In this sense, the meanings that consumers and fans read into a musical text is important, to the extent that it serves as the basis and foundation for the nature of their engagement and practices related to the artist.

U2 has demonstrated a hesitance to be tied down to any one musical genre. Bono admits as much, as he is quoted as saying that the band "chose the name U2 to be ambiguous, to stay away from categorization". Similarly, fans are rarely ever able to agree on the boundaries of U2's musical production. Nonetheless, the allocation of musical categories represents a negotiation between the artist, the music industry within which they operate, and their fans, and these cultural categories have bearings on the interpretations fans give to their behaviours.

1.6.3 Lyrics and Themes

The lyrics of a song embody meaning. Popular music lyrics play a role in the process by which fans and consumers comprehend their social and cultural world. Fans use popular music to embark on the project of symbolic creativity, through which they interpret and reinterpret social reality, while defining their place in it and constructing their identities (Shanker, 2000). Any study that seeks to understand the lived experiences of music consumers must therefore account for the role of music lyrics, in serving as a symbolic anchor for the behaviours and perceptions of consumers. U2's music and lyrics explore a wide range of themes, but the band are particularly known for engaging with political and social issues (Jobling, 2014). Their lyrics also feature Christian and spiritual inspiration or narratives. Love is also a theme of U2's music, not just in a romantic sense, but that stems from a need to make a difference for good in the world (Calhoun, 2014). Although each new album or project allowed the band to explore new ideas, these themes appear to run through most of the band's music. Due to the limitations of space it is not possible to undertake a detailed analysis of the themes and lyrics explored by U2. The aim here is to give an overall sense of their body of work using a few examples.

The band's first studio album, Boy, focused on themes of adolescent hopes and fears, as well death and adulthood (McCormick, 2006). On their second album, October, they openly embrace their faith with lyrical themes centered on God, spirituality and the relationship between Christian values and the rock and roll lifestyle. One song in particular, Gloria, features a chorus sang in Latin ("Gloria, in te domine"): *Oh, Lord, if I had anything, anything at all, I'd give it to you. War*, the band's third album, allowed the band to address the long-standing troubles in Northern Ireland with the song

"Sunday, Bloody Sunday." (McGee, 2008). The social and political commentary can also be seen on the follow up to *War*, *The Unforgettable Fire*, which contains the song, Pride (In the Name of Love), a song written for Martin Luther King, Jr. *The Joshua Tree*, mostly written by Bono, and considered to be U2's magnum opus, tackles contradictory feelings of antipathy towards the 'real' America and fascination with the ideal of America as a promised land on songs like 'Bullet the Blue Sky' and 'In God's Country' (McGee, 2008). Political and social concerns drive several tracks, with biblical themes drawn on throughout the record. On *Rattle and Hum*, U2 explores American roots music and the lyrics pay tribute to some of the American music legends that have inspired the band's music. On *Achtung Baby*, the band deviates from themes of love, spirituality and political awareness, focusing instead on darker themes of betrayal, jealousy and irony (Endrinal, 2008).

While acknowledging the fact that any song's lyrics remain open to as many interpretations as they are listeners, for the most part U2's music catalogue highlights overall themes of hope, spirituality and political awareness.

1.7 THESIS STRUCTURE

This introductory chapter has set out the context of this study by discussing the motivations, background and rationale for looking at loyalty as it takes shape within the context of community. The chapter has also highlighted specific research questions, and introduced the methodological approach being taken to the study. U2, the case band being focused on has also been introduced. Following this introductory chapter, chapters two to four present a critical review of relevant academic literature covering the key theoretical areas encountered over the course of the thesis. Chapter 2 looks at the evolution of research on brand loyalty, identifying the contributions and limitations of the major approaches, with particular emphasis paid to highly engaged forms of loyalty, and the symbolic dimension. The aim is to provide a foundation for what is essentially the core theoretical field of focus for the current study. While engaging with the traditional, logical empiricist perspective on brand loyalty that remains dominant in marketing parlance, this chapter also points to the need for alternative perspectives to extend and broaden the understanding of brand loyalty.

Chapter 3 situates loyalty within the context of community by reviewing the relevant literature on community within the field of marketing and sociology where the term has its roots. The aim is to become acquainted with some of the key characteristics of community. This then informs the consideration of the ways in which groups of consumers have been represented within the field of marketing.

Chapter 4 considers debates on popular music, and pays particular attention to the culturalist perspective guiding the enquiry. The intersection of marketing and the art based context within which the study is being conducted is also of prime concern in this chapter. The nature of music as a product, and the popular music industry is also discussed.

Chapter 5 presents the overall methodology guiding the inquiry, and the methods of data collection and analysis. Details on how the ontological and epistemological approach taken translated to the research field are also presented in this chapter.

Chapters 6 to 8 represent the main empirical chapters of the thesis. Chapter 6 focuses on particular discursive resources that are used by fans of U2 to articulate loyalty to the band. Specifically, the time spent as a fan of the band; the notion of obsession as related to purchase and collecting behaviour; the opposing views of 'loyalty as an obligation' tied to emotions toward the band and 'loyalty as an economic choice' that can be exercised at will; and, finally, loyalty ties that stem from fan's and U2's shared Irish heritage will be considered.

Chapter 7 pays particular attention to the tensions produced by different understandings of what it means to be a loyal fan of U2 and how to express that loyalty as part of a collective. While chapter six is concerned with discursive resources for loyalty at a unitary level, this chapter is more concerned with the interaction between these repertoires within the group and how attempts by fans to come to a collective notion of loyalty to U2 is managed.

Chapter 8 examines why fans negotiate the tensions that emerge from different ways of being loyal. The focus is on the construct of fan loyalty, and how it gives fans the means and legitimacy to be authors of U2's brand stories. With regards to U2 these stories

tend to evoke strong themes of religiosity and sacredness, utopianism and authenticity. These are explored in this chapter.

Chapter 9, the discussion and conclusion chapter, seeks to pull together the core issues raised as informed by the empirical findings. Theoretical implications of the study are considered, as well as the contributions and limitations. The potential for future research, in light of the limitations of the study are also discussed.

CHAPTER 2

BRAND LOYALTY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The first of the literature review chapters is aimed at examining the concept of brand loyalty from a range of perspectives, while also drawing particular attention to its experiential aspects. Most conceptualisations of brand loyalty in mainstream marketing theory have tended to take a view of the topic that is more focused on logical positivist paradigms and the supplier's angle (Paavola, 2006), than with the consumer's perspective and experience. These accounts tend to privilege a managerial focus, to the detriment of the experiential and symbolic aspects (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) of brand loyalty. The position taken in this thesis is that this dominant orientation has contributed to limiting the understanding that is possible on the topic, and thus highlights the need for alternative perspectives that may improve our grasp of brand loyalty. As such, while prevailing positions on brand loyalty are important and are engaged with in the chapter, these positions are supplemented by highlighting the experiential aspects of brand loyal relationships that remain relatively neglected within the core brand loyalty literature, towards developing an expanded conceptualization of the concept. Towards this end, the review of the brand loyalty literature identifies the contributions and limitations of the major approaches, with particular emphasis paid to highly engaged forms of loyalty, and the symbolic dimension. The review is then related to the frame of the "fan" as a means of understanding highly engaged consumers and the dimension of meaning.

Some degree of disambiguation is necessary with regards to the variant of brand loyalty with which this study is concerned. It is possible for consumers to be loyal to more than one brand. In this case, consumers might avail themselves of a repertoire of brands in the marketplace with regards to a specific product or service. This is referred to as multi-brand loyalty (Felix, 2014). It is also possible to differentiate loyalty by category. In this case the consumer purchases a range of products across multiple product categories from the same brand (Mundt et al., 2006). The relationship with the brand with regards to a particular product is thus extended to other products. The loyalty concept is also important for industrial goods (vendor loyalty) (Jarvis & Wilcox, 1977), services (often referred to as services loyalty in marketing literature) (Kandampully, 1998) and retail establishments (store loyalty) (Bloemer & Odekerken-Schroder, 2002). The nature of brand loyalty in focus in this study however is the one-on-one loyalty relationship between the consumer and a specific brand. The reason for focusing on this

singular relationship is to simplify the process of exploring how meaning takes shape in relation to loyalty within a definable cultural space (i.e. a music brand). Reference might nonetheless be made to multi-brand loyalty relationships to the extent that it is necessary to highlight any aspect of the singular consumer-brand loyalty relationship.

2.2 THE NATURE OF BRAND LOYALTY

Current brand loyalty research defines loyalty in either behavioural terms, or as a two-dimensional model consisting of both behavioural and attitudinal elements (Rundle-Thiele and Bennet, 2001). In behavioural terms, loyalty is mainly defined with reference to "the pattern of past purchases with only secondary regard to underlying consumer motivations or commitment to the brand" (Uncles et al., 2002:7). The repeat act of purchase in relation to the branded product is considered sufficient evidence of loyalty. As Tucker (1964:32) puts it "no consideration should be given to what the subject thinks or what goes on in his central nervous system; his behaviour is the full statement of what brand loyalty is".

From an attitudinal perspective, brand loyalty is focused on attitudinal commitment, or a combination of attitudinal and behavioural elements (Day, 1976; Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978). In attitudinal terms, brand loyalty is defined in relation to whether or not expressed behaviour is a manifestation of loyalty or an act devoid of choice with respect to a specific brand. An oft referenced proponent of this view is Oliver (1999), who defines loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product/service consistently in the future, thereby causing repetitive same-brand or same brand-set purchasing despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behaviour" (p. 34). To keep track of attitudes, proponents of the two-dimensional model focus on positive feelings, beliefs and commitment toward the brand, relative to available alternatives.

Taking the affective element a step further, it is possible to identify bonds between the consumer and the brand that are so strong, they have been compared to relationships. Fournier (1998) subscribes to this perspective, describing consumer-brand relationships as "committed and affect-laden". Relationships provide meaning, and a key requirement in understanding this meaning is making sense of the relationship from the psychological and sociocultural context of the consumer (Fournier, 1998). A meaning-

based view of loyalty that is abreast with the lived experiences of consumers is not one that has typically been taken within traditional brand loyalty theory. The experience of consumers has received minimal attention within the core brand loyalty literature, although consumer research more broadly has captured these strong consumer-brand bonds in its handling of related concepts such as brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

From the perspective of the consumer, the notion of the 'fan' is often evoked by those claiming a position of loyalty especially in relation to cultural products like films, sports and music (e.g. Kozinets, 2001), but also as relates to consumption more broadly. The concept of the fan is also well established in literature associated with sports sociology (Funk and James, 2001), fan cultures (Jenkins, 1992) and cultural studies. In the context of this study, 'fan' is used to describe the occasion of intense loyalty and commitment towards the brand in any context, and is employed as a means of capturing the experiential and meaning-based aspects of brand loyalty. In the words of Grossberg (1992:63)

> *"what we today describe as the fan is the contemporary articulation of a necessary relationship which has historically constituted the popular, involving relationship to such diverse things as labor, religion, morality and politics…..It is certainly the case that for the vast majority of people in advanced capitalist societies, this is increasingly the only space where the fan relationship can take place. It is in consumer culture that the transition from consumer to fan is accomplished. It is here, increasingly that we seek actively to construct our identities, partly because there seems to be no other terrain on which we can construct our mattering maps"*

Mattering maps direct our investment of affect. Mattering maps "define different forms, quantities and places of energy". They tell us how to "navigate our way through various moods", and how to "live within emotional and ideological histories" (Grossberg, 1992 :58). Consumption thus serves as a way for the consumer to locate themselves, and their identities in today's society, hence the investment of affect/loyalty in certain brands. This section will continue by further exploring the literature within these different dimensions of loyalty.

2.2.1 Behavioural Loyalty

Behavioural brand loyalty researchers typically take a market focused approach. Also described as the stochastic approach to brand loyalty, it focuses on metrics that can immediately be observed and measured. By definition, the stochastic approach is viewed as "the sequence of purchases and/or the proportion of purchases, in the event that the customer is satisfied with the brand purchase and repeats it in a relatively short period of time" (Uslu and Cam, 2014:586). Repeat purchasing behaviour is assumed under this model to reflect a direct response to repeat satisfaction. Brand share, purchase frequency and repeat buying within a given period are all measures of behavioural loyalty that the stochastic approach has adopted (Uncles et al., 2002). Similarly, Jacoby and Chestnut (1978) identify 33 measures of behavioural loyalty, captured within five main groups - those that focus on proportion of purchases of a given brand, those that highlight the sequence in which brands are purchased, those concerned with probability of purchase, those that integrate two or more of these behavioural measures, and finally a number of miscellaneous measures.

Other notable subscribers to the behavioural view include Colombo and Morrison (1989) who differentiate between 'hard-core loyals' who buy the same brand at every single purchase occasion, and 'potential switchers' who at each purchase, make a choice out of the range of available brands based on a probability distribution (e.g. a probability of 0.4 that the consumer will select brand A and a probability of 0.6 that they will select brand B). The quantity of hard-core loyals is thought to represent the strength of the brand's loyalty base. Alternatively, Cunningham's (1956) measure calculates the market share of brands within a household. The consumer is considered to be loyal to the brand if the brand purchased most frequently from within a product category exceeds a set value (e.g. forty percent). Tucker (1964) focuses on the sequence of purchase patterns. A steady bias towards a particular brand in a purchase sequence is taken as evidence of brand loyalty. A purchase sequence of AAABAAABAAA, for instance, would suggest that the consumer is loyal to brand A.

The literature on behavioural and stochastic loyalty is vast, but in essence the aim is to make sense of patterns of repeat purchase of consumer brands. The benefit of this approach to brand loyalty is that it is based on actual purchases, which are directly

related to the performance of an organization (Mellens et al., 1995). Conversely however, it lacks explanatory power for the action of purchase. Also, it assumes that purchase is a manifestation of loyalty. These models are insufficient in providing an understanding of the underlying factors that drive repeat purchase behaviour (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978). High repeat purchase may simply be due to convenience, or situational factors such as brands stocked by a particular retailer. Loyalty under behavioural measures is presented as a for or against quality. Consumers are categorised as loyal or disloyal based on purchase alone, thereby masking the full range of possibilities and value that might exist in relationships categorised as either loyal or disloyal. From a managerial perspective it provides minimal cues for influencing purchases, and from an interpretive standpoint it masks nuances that could elucidate on the action of purchase or the meanings consumers attach to brands with which they are aligned. In recognizing the limitations of depending solely on behaviour as a measure of loyalty, there has been a move towards attitudinal or combined attitudinal and behavioural characteristics in attempting to understand loyalty.

2.2.2 Attitudinal Loyalty

The attitudinal approach highlights the psychological commitment of the consumer in the action of purchase, without necessarily taking the effective purchase behaviour into account (Odin et al., 2001:76). Jacoby and Chestnut (1978:80) define it as "the consumers' predisposition towards a brand as a function of psychological processes, which include attitudinal preference and commitment towards the brand". Attitudinal loyalty captures the cognitive, emotional and mental attachment of the consumer to the brand (Bennett and Rundle-Thiele, 2002). These attitudes may be measured by enquiring into how much people express a liking for the brand in words, feel committed to it, will recommend it to others, and have positive beliefs and feelings about it – relative to competing brands (Uncles et al., 2002). From this perspective, understanding the attitude of the consumer towards the brand is considered a pre-requisite for predicting purchase and repeat patronage.

Day (1969) challenged the notion that purchase behaviour is the sole determinant of brand loyalty noting that "spuriously loyal customers" lack attachments to brand attributes and so can easily be attracted by opposing brands offering better deals. He

concludes that both attitudinal and behavioural elements need to be considered in defining brand loyalty and conceived of a multiple regression model for measuring loyalty to a specific brand (p. 30). He also deduced that loyalty is based on a rational decision on the part of the consumer, made after an evaluation of the benefits of competing brands. As time passes, this evaluative process develops into a habitual purchase behaviour or builds a strong affective disposition towards the brand, making the consumer less susceptible to competitive action. Day (1969) is important for its emphasis on separating 'spurious' or random purchases from purposeful choices made by committed and loyal consumers.

Jacoby's (1971) model sought to put multiple brands in an order of preference. In his view the consumer's preferred brand choice retains dominant loyalty. In the event of that brand not being available however, secondary and tertiary choices enjoy patronage in the order of preference, from satisfactory to neutral to outright rejection. While consumers may have specific loyalty preferences therefore, similar brands within the same category also enjoy loyalty in varying degrees of preference. Jacoby (1971) in keeping with Day (1969) was also of the position that measurable behaviours did not exclude the need to understand the underlying reasons for loyalty.

Similarly, Jacoby and Kyner (1973) suggest that a "single unidimensional measure" is not enough for understanding a complex phenomenon like loyalty. In conceptualizing brand loyalty, they identified six necessary conditions that ought to exist. These are "that brand loyalty is (1) the biased (i.e., nonrandom), (2) behavioural response (i.e., purchase), (3) expressed overtime, (4) by some decision-making unit, (5) with respect to one or more alternative brands out of a set of such brands, and (6) is a function of psychological (decision making, evaluative) processes" (p.2). This definition eliminated random purchases from consideration, and provides a conception of loyalty which accounts for the underlying cognitive and emotional dynamics of loyalty as against purchase alone. They also presented the notion of commitment as an essential basis for distinguishing brand loyalty from other forms of repeat purchase behaviour and, further, as a means to assess the relative degree of brand loyalty. They do not, however, expand on how the relative degree of loyalty is to be applied in making sense of brand - consumer relationships.

Dick and Basu (1994) elaborated further on the notion of relative attitude. Relative attitudes describe attributes of a brand which provide a stronger indication of repeat patronage. Relative attitudes are constituted of two dimensions: attitude strength, representing the evaluative assessment of brand characteristics, and the attitudinal differentiation towards the brand relative to other brands. The greater the difference between alternative brands, the higher the relative attitude (Zins, 2001). Dick and Basu (1994) use relative attitude to replace the attitudinal component for the development of a composite index of loyalty. High relative attitudes matched with a high repeat patronage suggests true loyalty, whereas the same patronage ratio together with a low relative attitude would indicate spurious loyalty. Relative attitude measures the strength of favor the brand enjoys in the mind of the consumer. Dick and Basu (1994) posit that accounting for the nature of relative attitude in relation to other brands, as against attitude toward the brand determined in isolation is likely to be a more indicative guide of repeat patronage. Dick and Basu (1994) identify four categories of loyalty: sustainable loyalty (when there is a favorable correspondence between relative attitude and repeat patronage), latent loyalty (a high relative attitude, with low repeat patronage), spurious loyalty (a low relative attitude accompanied by high repeat patronage), and no loyalty. While Dick and Basu (1994) provide an elegant and easily applicable conceptualization of the loyalty construct, they do not operationalize it or provide empirical evidence of its predictive ability, and, later attempts at conceptualizing their model (East et al., 2000; Garland and Gendall, 2004) have found limited evidence of its application in real life situations. Also, the continued attempts at measuring and quantifying liking or preference, which is the crux of the attitudinal component of the brand loyalty literature (Baldinger and Rubinson, 1996; Mellens et al., 1996; Pritchard et al., 1999) have not gone far enough in capturing the symbolic and meaning based dimensions of loyalty. No attempts are made to delve into the types and sources of affect that may constitute or differentiate loyalty responses. Though held as advancing the ‘soft side’ of brand loyalty, attitudinal loyalty does not account for the dimensions of meaning and experience which are central to contemporary consumption.

In attempting to correct this limitation, Oliver (1997) advanced brand loyalty theory by proposing a multidimensional construct which emerges in a continuum of phases. First is the cognitive phase, in which information about a brand is assessed in relation to

available alternatives and a preference identified based on performance. Cognition could be through recent familiarity with the brand based on price or past knowledge. Loyalty at this stage is of a superficial nature. If use of the brand repeatedly produces feelings of satisfaction, then loyalty begins to take on an affective nature. The affective phase indicates positive emotions towards the brand. The loyalty towards a brand at this stage depends on the degree of affect toward the brand and remains susceptible to switching on the part of the consumer. At the conative phase, there is a strong intention to purchase the brand, and finally at the action phase, these good intentions towards the brand are converted into action by way of purchase. Although Oliver's (1997) sequential view of loyalty has gained wide acceptance (Evanschitzky & Wunderlich, 2006) it has met with criticism for being too restrictive in its assumption of a consistently linear process of loyalty formation which might not always translate accordingly in different consumer contexts (Hinson et al., 2016). This is probably why empirical validation of the model has been difficult (Curran, Varki, & Rosen, 2010).

Overall, despite drilling deeper into the dynamics of loyalty by revealing layers of nuance and brand-consumer engagement previously unaccounted for under behavioural conceptualizations, attitudinal loyalty has not evaded criticism for its reliance on consumer declarations, rather than on observed behaviour (Odin et al., 2001). Also, the focus on measuring liking or preference, does not go far enough in capturing the full emotional character implied by the notion of loyalty (Fournier and Yao, 1997). Contextual peculiarities which could potentially shape the tone and tenor of loyalty are largely ignored, in favour of comparison with available alternatives. The dynamic and evolutionary aspects of loyalty, as well as its manifestation within an interactive landscape, are barely captured under attitudinal conceptions. As a result, the meaning dimension, which is likely to increase in relevance with proximity to contextually bound consumers is glossed over. Through interpretive consumer research, mostly in areas outside of the core research purview of brand loyalty however, greater depth and insight into the nature of the relationships that exist between individuals and the brands with which they engage have nonetheless been brought to light.

2.2.3 Fan Loyalty

Fan loyalty represents an attempt to capture and integrate the meaning-based dimension, into the core brand loyalty canon. Fan loyalty is different from the focus on repeat purchases highlighted in the behavioural literature. It is also different from attitudinal loyalty which tends to emphasise preference or liking. Fan loyalty highlights the sort of consumer-brand engagement that is driven by intense emotions as noted by Fournier (1998) and Oliver (1999). The nature of the relationships that consumers experience with certain brands to which they are loyal, exceed the behavioural and attitudinal, to encompass the symbolic and affective. Furthermore, there is an intersection between fandom and loyalty. The strong, and sometimes intense, levels of passion and emotional attachment with the brand can be brought into focus through the concept of fandom. These bonds that consumers form with brands have attracted research as examples of unique forms of loyalty, where meaning and sensation are important (Chung et al., 2005; Redden and Steiner, 2000; McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig 2002). Duffet (2013) presents fandom as "the recognition of a positive, personal, relatively deep emotional connection with a mediated element of popular culture" (p.2), in this case with a branded good or market offering. Most attempts at conceptualizing the term echo the same sentiment of intense levels of commitment, passion, emotional attachment and involvement (Ferris and Harris, 2011; Hills, 2002; Jenkins, 1992; Sandvoss et al., 2007). Other scholars have focused on the way fans interpret and identify with their objects of interest. Batra, Ahuva and Bagozzi (2012), for example, compare this state to the concept of love. The use of love in this context is less about the sensual component than on aspects of adoration and unfailing commitment. Describing love of consumables as "object love" They note that brands that are loved go beyond the satisfaction of needs and wants to evoke excitement, thrills and passion, or to embody a sense of who the consumers believe they are, or want to be – i.e. engaging with their sense of identity. Expressions of object love could also include engrossing, transcendent experiences with the object; sacrifices for the love object, for instance the cost of acquisition; spirituality, i.e. the love object is connected to significant existential meanings, personal values, and a sense of being situated in the grand scheme of things; or is understood within the context of a relationship (Fournier, 1998).

Although the focus of the work on fandom has typically been on cultural brands such as arts, sports, and musicians, branded goods can also be understood as mediated elements of popular culture (Holt, 2004), and thus, can attract the same kind of connections with fans. Similar to cultural brands, the moods and attitudes of consumers are influenced by messages and marketing communications delivered through mass mediated channels. Different groups of consumers also construct meanings around brands that may be different from what their sponsors intend (Kates, 2004; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). It is not far-fetched to suggest that consumers can make similar associations with brands as fans do with artists, musicians or sports teams. Fans are set apart from other consumers by the intensity with which they engage with the objects of their admiration (O'Reilly et al., 2013). Fans are 'close readers', finding meaning in cultural texts, drawing on these texts as resources for expressing the self, finding communion with others who share their passions and repurposing and reworking these texts in fulfilment of their personal identity projects (Fiske, 1992). It is these sorts of displays of passion that traditionally served as fodder for critiques of mass culture that presented fans as "passive consumers separated from cultural production: a tribe of infantilized, alienated, celebrity-following individuals who could assemble in unstable crowds to pursue their emotional interest in simplistic cultural forms" (Duffet 2013:1). According to Gray et al (2007) this contemptuous way of understanding popular culture gradually gave way to a celebration of fans' mainstream credentials, and thanks to transformative texts (Jenkins, 1992: Lewis, 1992) there has been a repositioning of fans as creatively and politically active. Traditional market brands, similar to cultural brands, serve as resources for consumers to direct their investment of affect and reveal their 'mattering maps' through their consumption choices (Grossberg, 1992). Grossberg (1992:57) conceives of fan texts in an affective sense to be mattering maps. Mattering maps are like "investment portfolios marked out by different practices, pleasures, meanings, fantasies, desires, relations and so on……. For the fan, certain forms of popular culture (or brands and consumption activities) become taken for granted investments that are saturated with affect. Popular culture (or consumption) is a field on which the fan can construct affective mattering maps (through the mobilisation of brands and consumption resources as mediated texts). Fans give these texts authority to speak on their behalf. Fans let these things on which affect have been invested organise their emotional and narrative lives and identities."

2.3 MANIFESTATIONS OF FAN LOYALTY

There is no single definition that encompasses all that a fan is. However, it is possible to conceptualize fan loyalty by identifying certain themes that establish fans as different from other consumers. There is general academic consensus that 'fan' describes a person who has a special relationship with the object of their affection, characterized by a high level of engagement. O'Reilly et al. (2013) suggest that being a fan far exceeds the act of purchasing a brand. A fan displays broad knowledge about the object of their consumption, exhibits strong emotional attachment to it and celebrate their obsession with the brand even in social situations. Fans weave their passion for the consumption activity into their daily lives in a much stronger and highly visible way than is the case in ordinary purchase occasions (O'Reilly et al., 2013; Lobert, 2012). Fans express their passion and attachment to a brand even in banal, everyday situations, not as a fleeting consumption activity, but as a consistent, religious-like allegiance (Lobert, 2012). Fiske (1992) notes that fans are similar to other types of consumers and engage in similar activities to other types of (behavioural and attitudinally) loyal consumers. However, what sets fans apart from other consumers is the degree of their engagement. Loyal fans engage with a brand to the point of obsession. Fiske (1992) calls fans excessive readers, who are not content to simply consume a brand. Fans are highly active and engaged with the brands on which they focus. "Fans are consumers who also produce, readers who also write, and spectators who also participate" (Jenkins, 1992:214).

Although fans can and do enjoy the consumption activity of their choice individually, fandom takes on a more powerful form when it is engaged in as a collective experience (Harris and Alexander, 1998). Loyal fans typically seek out other similarly highly engaged and passionate fans and congregate within communities online and offline where they share their consumption experiences (O'Reilly et al., 2013). As they engage within interpretive communities the meanings of texts are negotiated and constructed. Fan communities provide structures for collectiveness, centred around the object of their shared admiration.

Another factor that makes fandom an elevated expression of loyalty is the semiotic and material productivity of fans (O'Reilly et al., 2013). Fans do not simply receive and consume cultural texts as handed down in a producer-consumer exchange relationship.

The intensity of their engagement plays out in the form of their co-creative endeavours (Alvermann and Hagood, 2000). Depending on the intensity of their engagement, fans are materially productive, reworking and repurposing cultural texts which they share with other fans, thus contributing to the pool of symbolic resources available.

Jenkins (1992:209) proposes four different levels of fandom.

1. Fans adopt a distinctive mode of reception: Fans use of cultural texts is a social process that goes beyond consumption or purchase, as with ordinary consumers. Fans join organisations and communities off and online and engage with other fans. This social and cultural dimension of fandom provides an opportunity for fans to negotiate and draw their own meanings from the text.
2. Fandom constitutes a particular interpretive community: The meanings of cultural texts are negotiated, contested, and debated among fans interacting in interpretive communities.
3. Fandom constitutes a particular Art world: Jenkins uses Howard Becker's (1982) notion of Art worlds which consist of a network of collaborators – producers, consumers who interpret, evaluate and distribute cultural texts.
4. Fandom constitutes an alternative community: Differences among communities of fans such as age, gender or physical location are secondary to the shared interests which bring fans together in the first place.

Typically, fan related associations have been made in relation to cultural brands and consumption activities (O'Reilly, 2005), and sports (Funk, 1998), but there is no reason why it cannot be extended to capture the more symbolic and meaning-based aspects of consumption in a broader marketing context especially since, like cultural brands, traditional brands are cultural artefacts and mediated elements of culture (Holt, 2002). Fan loyalty is therefore a highly engaged and intense form of consumption, embodying the more social and cultural dimensions of consumer-brand interactions, and the symbolic and meaning-based aspects of consumption.

2.3.1 Fandom and Obsession

The use of the frame of the fan in understanding brand loyalty, however, is not without its issues. Despite its nature as, for the most part a harmless, highly engaged relationship

with popular culture and mediated artefact, fandom has often been described and represented in pathological terms. Jenson (1992) highlighted the characterisation of the fan in academic circles as an individual engaged in excessive and deranged behaviour. She identified two common characterisations of fans – the fan as an obsessed loner and the frenzied crowd. She notes that critiques of fandom are usually couched in a critique of modern life, and the role of the mass media and popular culture in perpetuating social decay. These accounts view the influence of the media as responsible for the irrationality and obsession of fans. From this perspective, fans seek out artificial relations with media products as compensation for the lack of real social connections in their lives. The pathological fan is thus framed as an obsessed loner, engaged in imagined relations with celebrities and mediated elements of popular culture, and unable to forge genuine social ties. Images of frenzied mobs at sporting events and music concerts also play into characterizations of fans as depraved, unable to get a handle on their emotions. In both the narratives of the fan as an obsessed loner or member of a frenzied crowd, fans are presented as victims of their fandom, irrational and obsessed as a result of the corrupting influence of the media and modern society. Jenson (1992) notes that although accounts of fandom as a normal, everyday activity are rare, highly engaged individuals in other fields, academia for instance, are characterised as rational, professional, aficionados, and collectors. She traces this differentiation back to elitist depictions of fans as engaging with low cultural forms, in contrast to intellectually engaging 'high culture'.

According to Grey et al, (2017) where "critics had previously assumed fans to be uncritical, fawning and reverential, fan studies scholarship argued and illustrated that fans were active, and regularly responded, retorted, poached" (p. 3). The pathological narrative of the obsessed fan has been roundly debunked as a representation of "what we want to believe about modern society and our connection to it, rather than about actual fan relations" (Jensen, 1992: 18). Although fan studies has moved past this characterisation of fans, the notion of the fan as obsessed still persists in other circles, including the tabloid press and in popular discussions, and frames the views and perceptions of some fans on fandom.

An aspect of the discomfort with fandom relates to the one-sided intimate relationship with popular figures, which has been described as a form of parasocial interaction

(Horton and Wohl, 1956). It is argued that relationships with mediated personalities can fool fans into thinking they really do know the character or celebrity in question. As fans follow the object of their admiration closely on television or in magazines, the illusion emerges of familiarity. The constant access now provided through social media channels also potentially amplifies the illusion of familiarity. As Duffet (2013) points out however, while all fans respond to media personalities, and some evidently fantasize about them, most can tell the difference between fantasy and reality. There nonetheless exists a tendency to use parasocial stereotypes that "label ordinary fans as psychotic and, more importantly, somehow position psychotics who also happen to be fans as typical representatives of fandom" (p. 91). For the most part, extremely obsessive, or parasocial fans constitute a very small faction of the overall group of fans. Parasocial inclinations, rather than being seen as a part of fandom should instead be seen as it relates to particular individuals, who in some cases happen to be fans.

The remainder of this review proceeds by exploring the central features of fan loyalty that distinguish it from other kinds of loyalty. Researchers have previously highlighted the social and cultural underpinnings of brand loyal consumption which we argue, collectively comprise fan loyalty. These features are: (1) the centrality of identity (2) the community/socialization dimension of interaction (3) exploring deeper bonds through religious discursive metaphors and (4) utilizing the relationship construct.

2.3.2 The Centrality of Identity

Consumer culture theory - the examination of consumers from a social and cultural rather than a commercial or psychological perspective (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) - has been particularly adept at revealing how brands can serve as a storehouse of meaning with which consumers can engage in their personal identity projects (McCracken, 1986, 1993; Belk, 1988, 2004). The marketplace serves as a field of symbolic resources from which consumers, in collaboration with marketers, can shape meaning, and constitute and reconstitute their identity narratives through their consumption activities (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Belk, 1988; Kozinets, 2001). McCracken (1986) explicitly highlights a link between identity and brand loyalty, noting that brands with appealing and powerful cultural meanings tend to attract loyalty

from consumers who wish to avail themselves of those meanings. In contrast, weak brands give off meanings that are inconsistent, unexciting or ineffective.

Consumers have been shown to be identity seekers (Gabriel and Lang, 2015). From this perspective, identity work entails the utilization of brands and the meanings they exude, in order to be seen to draw on the right resources and discourses in the construction of individual identities (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998). These meanings may be consistent with the intentions of marketers, but individuals can also rework and reconstitute meanings so that they are more in line with their personal identity goals. In keeping with this logic, the greater the extent to which the consumer's self-identity aligns with symbolic brand meanings, the greater the likelihood of the consumer inferring that using the brand will improve their perceived identity, and, by extension, the greater the depth and extent of their loyalty towards the brand. In line with this, Kozinets (2001) shows how Star Trek fans co-opt meanings and practices related to the show to construct a utopian refuge for the alienated and disenfranchised, and invest themselves into this social world in particular ways; Belk (2004) looks at how men with extreme levels of identification with automobiles read meaning into these possessions that allow them to function as extensions of the self; while Oliver (1999:40) suggests that the brand can be "embedded inextricably within some portion of the consumer's psyche, as well as his or her lifestyle". The brand is, therefore, part and parcel of the consumer's self-identity and his or her social identity: that is, the individual cannot conceive of himself as whole without it.

The notion that everybody is suitably positioned to engage in identity projects in this way has, however, been criticized for overlooking class distinctions and the relative limits to accessing said resources (Skeggs, 2014), as well as the inability of individuals in some cases to effectively participate in aesthetic performance (Francombe-Webb and Silk, 2016). Consumer identity projects can also be pathological (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Hirschman, 1992; Larsen and Nasir, 2009), and identity goals might at times be conflicting and antithetical, necessitating the use of negotiatory mechanisms. In relation to music consumption for instance, Hesmondhalgh (2008) claims that there is a dominant conception of the relationship between music and personal identity as a primarily positive association wherein music is framed as a resource that allows people construct and enrich their personal identity, while ignoring

various ways in which music might become implicated in some less pleasant and even disturbing features of modern life. He argues for a more balanced appraisal of music-identity relations that acknowledges the constraints and limits on the self-making aspects of music.

Current conceptualizations of brand loyalty focus either on the act of purchase itself (Tucker 1964), or on the consistent expression of liking and psychological commitment towards the brand (Jacoby and Kyner, 1973). Fan loyalty, however, embodies a deeper level of engagement that is anchored in the centrality of identity in the mind of the consumer in relation to the brand. In this sense, brands and consumption constitute a symbolic resource for the construction of identity and the consumers' sense of self. Rather than consuming a brand simply to satisfy an identified need, the loyal fan weaves the brand into their daily lives in highly visible ways. Fan loyalty taps into the social and cultural field of resources which brands constitute as a separate loyalty dimension.

2.3.3 Community/Socialisation Dimension of Interaction

As consumption emerges as a dominant cultural organizing force, with consumers forging bonds that, though originating in the market, are as potent as those that harken to traditional conceptualizations of community; a particular stream of interpretive research has delved into the implications of this process for consumers and for brand loyalty. This research stream has looked at how consumers consolidate around their shared pursuit of particular consumption activities, creating communities that amount to unique, self-sustaining and self-selected cultural worlds (Belk and Tumbat, 2005; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). These communities, grounded in collective identification, share values, meanings, beliefs, practices and rituals that have implications for the theoretical underpinnings of loyalty and for the brands that surround and facilitate them (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). An important aspect of loyalty that is driven by socialization is that the primary motivation to become or remain loyal is to enjoy the benefits of being one with the group (Oliver, 1999). The consumer is thus a willing participant in the consumption activity because of the support, association or attention provided by the socializing agent. In these situations, the product or service plays a secondary role to the camaraderie enjoyed by the consumer

as part of the community (Oliver 1999). This echoes some of the literature on subcultures, tribes and brand communities and introduces other metaphors for consumer collectives including brand cults and devotees.

McAlexander and Schouten in their (1995) ethnographic account of the Harley Davidson motorcycle subculture of consumption show how shared meanings allow values and codes to form around brands. The Harley-Davidson 'consumption community' (Boorstin, 1973) serves as a harbour of meaning (outlaw, non-conformist, anti-establishment) that becomes articulated as a unique style or ideology that can only be maintained through continuous consumption of the same brand or product. The sociality of the group necessitates loyalty to the brand, and ensures its perpetuity through traditions and rituals. The Harley Davidson brand thus functions in the background, acting as a tool for group members to negotiate meaning in relation to other groups in society and enjoy the communion of consumption. As Oliver (1999:40) describes it, "in the social consumption village, the consumer submits to the judgment and recommendations of the group collective voluntarily and willingly. This subjugation is performed for the rewards of membership and to reap the friendships and protectiveness of the collective."

In a later study of Jeep owners McAlexander, Schouten and Koening (2002) identify and expand on the nature of relationships and avenues for socialization that can exist between the consumer and the brand. They conceptualize loyalty as integration within a community that is bound together on the basis of identification and commonality. They further map the set of social relationships among customers and other entities (i.e. marketers, product) that stitch together to form communities that allow for loyal bonds, and in so doing expand the notion of community to encompass other relationships that supply brand community members with their commonality and cultural capital. This is an expansion of Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) earlier work on brand communities, in which they advance brand-consumer relationships to include the role of other consumers. They suggest that a strong brand community can lead to "socially embedded and entrenched loyalty, brand commitment and even hyper loyalty." Brand communities, therefore, exert pressure on their members to remain loyal to the collective and to the brand.

Highly engaged relationships centred on the brand have also been described as cults (Belk and Tumbat, 2005). Cult brands are brands "for which a group of customers exhibit a great devotion or dedication. Its ideology is distinctive and it has a well-defined and committed community. It enjoys exclusive devotion (that is, not shared with another brand in the same category) and its members often become voluntary advocates." (Atkins, 2004: xix). Dionisio et al. (2008) note that one of the main reasons why people join cults and become devoted to brands is because these groups make them feel at ease among "like others" (18). Belk and Tumbat (2005:208) use the notion of the brand cult to describe the extreme brand focused devotion of Macintosh computer users. They compare Mac fans to a religious-like cult where members employ narratives of Apple Computers and the technologies that accompany them as liberating forces, delivering its users from the 'evil empire' of Microsoft, and confer on its then CEO, Steve Jobs, Christ like qualities on account of his charisma and vision. Belk and Tumbat (2005) point to the importance of appreciating the meanings consumers attach to brands, and how these meanings feed into behaviours, loyal or otherwise.

The link between socialization, loyalty and groups that coalesce around brands can also be explored using the tribes construct (Cova and Cova, 2002). Representations of tribes in the consumer literature rely on the postmodern notion of fragmented consumer experiences focused on momentary enjoyment (Firat, 1992; Cova and Cova, 2002). From this perspective, members are united through shared passions, emotions and social experiences, with the brand providing 'linking value' for shared experiences. Cova (1997) notes that the word "tribes" highlights the re-emergence of traditional values of togetherness and a local sense of identification. Moutinho et al. (2007) suggest that tribes are "a network of heterogeneous persons, in terms of gender, age, sex and income, who are linked by a shared passion or emotion. Its members are not just consumers but also advocates." Thus, brand or consumer tribes embody shared cultures, common languages, social conventions, and shared experiences similar to those that traditional tribes were known for (Cova and Cova, 2002). Brands that hold people together as enthusiasts or devotees, therefore, benefit from a loyal body of fans. Cova and Cova (2002) identified the existence of four different roles amongst consumer tribe members. These range from low participation (the Sympathizer), to active Members, to Practitioners and lastly Devotees, who possess high levels of involvement and

emotional attachment (Cova and Cova, 2002). It follows then, that brands that link people together as enthusiasts or devotees, benefit from a loyal body of fans.

Other literature further examines the relationship between consumer socialization and loyalty. For example, Olsen (1993) allows for a deeper understanding of the intergenerational transfer of meaning invested in brands, and highlights the roles that brands play as symbols of the socialization process. Studies by Celsi, Rose and Leigh (1993), Kates (2002), and; Kozinets (2001) underscore how shared experiential consumption activities promote collective identification grounded in specific brands.

The body of work on community points to their role as a locus for the consumer to situate identity. It also highlights the peer-to-peer dimension of interaction, and the effect this has on the relationship between the consumer and the brand. As has been noted already, one of the hallmarks of fan loyalty is the need for the fan to share the enjoyment of the brand with likeminded others. The community thus amplifies existing loyal behaviours and provides avenues and structures through which fans can read their own meanings into mediated texts and engage in their shared passions.

2.3.4 Exploring Deeper Bonds Through Religious Discursive Metaphors

Moving progressively towards what might be seen as deeper consumer brand bonds, another strand of loyalty related interpretive consumer research makes use of religious narratives to capture the reverential relationships some brands enjoy with consumers (Belk and Tumbat, 2005; Muniz and Schau, 2005; Pichler and Hemetsberger, 2008). Research in this category also sheds light on the process by which meaning is invested and divested; how everyday consumer goods and brands get elevated into sacred objects; the sacralisation rituals consumers engage in; and how these affect consumer behaviour and loyalty (Belk et al., 1989; Rook, 1985).

In this branch of work, Belk et al. (1989) introduce the concept of sacralisation, which they describe as the elevation of mundane, everyday activities, objects and experiences to the status of transcendent religious experiences. From this perspective, the profane act of consumption exceeds a functional meeting of needs to encompass the sacred, or to facilitate the transformative process of experiencing the transcendent in

contemporary consumer society. They also note that the nature and experience of what they describe as sacred consumption may be antithetical to the dominant, more traditional, mono-disciplinary systemic approaches to marketing and loyalty. "Positivist methods are not sympathetic to the mystical and experiential nature of sacredness, but instead are oriented to a different universe of discourse" (p. 30). By engaging in naturalistic qualitative fieldwork, however, Belk et al. (1989) succeed in highlighting the talismanic relationship consumers form with the brands, and also point to the personal meaningfulness, and the cultural matrix from which consumption and loyalty emerges.

Strong emotional bonds with brands have also been described in terms of devotion. Extending the work of Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989), Pimentel and Reynolds (2004:1) describe consumer devotion as "religious fervour…..a level of loyalty so intense that the loyalty survives poor product performance, scandal, bad publicity, high prices, and absence of promotional efforts. It is loyalty that is expressed when consumers will go to their own expense to provide exposure for the brand name and trademark on T-shirts, baseball caps, and bumper stickers". Pichler and Hemetsberger (2007) note that the use of the term devotion highlights the intimately personal relationship, between the consumer and the focus of their devotion. Behaviours identified by Pimentel and Reynolds (2004) as common among devoted consumers include rituals, collecting and displaying, recruiting, word-of-mouth recommendations, personal sacrifices and pilgrimages.

Rook (1985) focuses attention on the role of rituals in embedding the act of consumption. Rituals are expressive, symbolic activities that come to take on an episodic, repeated nature. These activities, carried out with seriousness over time, imbue the brand with personal meaning in the eyes of the devoted consumer and permeate their daily life. The application of religious themes to an understanding of secular consumer culture has also been a feature of the fan cultures literature. Noting his continued prominence years after his death, Doss (1999:90) in her work on Elvis culture, argues that expressions of fandom for the late singer resemble a religion, as evidenced by fan's creation of elaborate shrines in his honour in their homes, and annual pilgrimages made to Graceland, Presley's home in Memphis, a trip which often entails lots of sacrifice, scrimping and saving on the part of devoted fans, in order to

"indulge their love, loss and loneliness for Elvis". She argues that fans rework and reinvent Elvis's image "to mesh with their personal and social preferences". According to Doss (1999:2), fans form strong, 'quasi-religious' attachments to Elvis because of their need to satisfy spiritual longings in an age when traditional forms of religion are declining in relevance.

The strong themes of religiosity are important in highlighting the spiritual meanings individuals attach to their consumption activities. One wonders, however, whether the metaphor has not been pushed too far. Duffet (2003) points out that the premise that a thing is a religion because it looks like one is weak, since activities that are interpreted as religious or transcendent are not always explored, understood or contextualized as such within the sense of reality of the groups in focus. Besides, religious discursive resources are already readily available to consumers irrespective of their culture. It is therefore not a question of religiosity being an attribute of a reified brand community, but of religious discursive resources being contextually drawn upon by consumers in expressing their experiences with certain brands (O'Reilly 2008). Einstein (2008) notes that religious marketing, for instance, and commercial culture have become inexplicably linked. Religion and spirituality are, themselves, popular products. The USA is one of the most religious countries in the world, certainly the most religious industrialized country, with most people (89 percent or more), claiming to believe in some higher power (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008). What this means is that religious narratives are, and have always been in circulation. Nonetheless, religious metaphors capture an intensity and level of brand loyalty that goes completely unnoticed under behavioural conceptualizations of brand loyalty, and barely registers under attitudinal conceptualizations.

2.3.5 Relationships and Loyalty

The use of a relational perspective in making sense of brand-consumer connections (Fournier, 1998) is based on the premise that brands possess human-like qualities (e.g. authenticity), that can facilitate self-image congruence and allow for the expression of self (Aaker, 1997). The brand relationship perspective explores the ways in which the brand interacts with the consumer as a relational partner. Since constructs of behavioural and attitudinal loyalty are limited in terms of their ability to capture the full

range of meaning, and the emotional and hedonic connections forged with the brand (Fournier and Yao, 1997), the incorporation of a relational perspective has been suggested as a way of examining and extending the notion of brand loyalty (Fournier, 1998). Relationship theory in the brand-consumer context relies on the assumption that the brand is a viable relationship partner, playing a proactive role in driving the exchange process and evoking feelings of loyalty. To facilitate this process, brands are vitalized and humanized through a process of anthropomorphization (Brown, 1991).

Anthropomorphization involves assigning human qualities to inanimate objects (Brown, 1991). Fournier (1998) suggests that this could occur through different mechanisms such as invoking the likeness of a person, as in the use of spokespeople in advertising; the strong brand-person associations that occur as the brand takes on a personal relation to a past other e.g. "the brand of air freshener grandmother kept in her bathroom" (p 345); or through the complete anthromorphization of the brand object itself by transferring emotions and motivations to the brand object. The inclination towards assigning human qualities to brand objects speaks to a need on the part of consumers to facilitate human-like interactions with the non-material world (Fournier, 1998) and is likely to be most visible when there is a match between the individual's self-image and the brand personality. The use of a relationship perspective reveals the inextricable character of brand meanings, suggesting that once a significant relationship is established, the meaning of the brand becomes inseparable from the value of the product (Fournier, 1998).

Though pioneered by Fournier's work, research on consumer-brand relationships have expanded to include a range of other perspectives. Accordingly, Escalas and Betteman (2005; 2009) propose that consumers purchase brands in part to construct their self-concepts and, in so doing, form self-brand connections. They focus on reference groups such as celebrities, as a source of brand meaning in the construction and communication of the self; Park et al. (2010) focus on brand attachment which highlights the strength of the bond between the brand and the self as composed of thoughts and feelings; Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence (2012) explore the notion of brand passion, which they describe as an intense feeling held by a consumer toward a brand, which predisposes the consumer to a close relationship with the partner (brand), and physiological arousal from possessing or consuming the brand; Patwardhan &

Balasubramanian (2011) characterise brand romance as a relationship observable where the primary motive for engaging with the brand is stimulation. Individuals looking for stimulation may seek out a partner who provides novelty, excitement, and arousal. The relationship features new experiences, insights and perspectives, similar to a developing romantic relationship where partners gradually discover each other, and long to be together; Walsh, Winterich, & Mittal (2010:78) look at brand commitment, "the enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship with the brand; and Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi (2012) focus on brand love – intense emotions consumers have for brands. They note that brand love is better observable with brands which are perceived as more hedonic in contrast to utilitarian products and for brands that have a strong symbolic dimension. The relationship perspective underpins fan loyalty by highlighting the personal symbolic meanings consumers in different contexts associate with particular brands.

The idea that consumers can form emotional attachments and relationships with brands, even where such brands have been imbued with human-like traits, has not gone uncriticised. Patterson and O'Malley (2006:10) accuse proponents of the relationship perspective of "stretching the inter-relationship metaphor too far". Rather than operating as an analogy or metaphor that enhances understanding of the complex connection between two constructs, much of the marketing scholarship has presented the relationship between people and brands as if it operates almost in a literal sense (O'Malley and Tynan, 1999). After all, no person in their right mind would be in a relationship with a cup of coffee or a shoe. Patterson and O'Malley (2006) recommend a brand community perspective that acknowledges the links between consumers themselves and understands the role brands play in facilitating these links (Cova and Cova 2002). The relationship perspective, with its appreciation of the meanings consumers draw from brands with which they align, can more clearly be accounted for under fan loyalty than is currently the case under behavioural and attitudinal loyalty.

2.4 The Psychological Continuum Model (PCM)

Some insights on fan loyalty can also be drawn from the sports marketing literature. Funk & James (2001) who are key contributors in this area applied the Psychological Continuum Model (PCM) to understanding the relationship between sports teams and fans, and to map the extent of involvement with the team, while accounting for the

factors that mediate the relationship between an individual and a sport or team. The Psychological Continuum Model is a framework that specifies the parameters within which the relationship between an individual and an object (sports teams in this case) are mediated. Funk and James (2001) isolate four boundaries considered in a continuum, with each representing a deeper psychological connection with the sport or team. The first level, awareness, highlights the point at which the individual initially becomes aware of the existence of the sport or team, though a specific choice or likeness has not been specifically articulated. Funk and James (2001) note that introduction to the sport or team may occur in childhood, as learnt from friends or parents or by participating at school or community. In the case of adults, initial awareness might be through media and promotional activities. This suggests that awareness of sports brands occurs through similar socializing processes as described earlier.

According to Funk and James, the second stage of the continuum, attraction, indicates that the individual is interested enough to invest time and emotion to evaluate between different teams (or brands) and identify a likeness or attraction for a specific team. Attraction is thought to result from psychological features of the social situation such as a child's need to fit in, or gain the approval or likeness of his father; and hedonic motives or a desire for pleasurable experiences such as the aesthetic features of the team or brand. Attraction is a tenuous connection between the individual and the brand, as the individual is at the risk of defecting if the condition fueling attraction is removed or superseded.

When the individual develops a more stable psychological connection with the team, which emanates from intrinsic, as against extrinsic processes, the third level of attachment has been reached (Funk & James, 2001). Attachment indicates that the physical and psychological attributes associated with the team or brand take on a personal meaning for the individual. Concurrently, the influence of extrinsic or situational factors become more limited. Also, the degree of the link between associations related to the team or brand and the individual are much stronger at this stage.

At the final and highest stage of the continuum, the relationship between the team and the individual is described as one of allegiance. Funk and James (2001:134) define

allegiance as "loyalty or devotion to someone, group, cause or the like." Allegiant fans possess highly formed attitudes towards a specific team which strengthen the psychological connection between the two. A stronger psychological connection is the product of "responses and tendencies elicited by a team which are persistent, resistant to counter-persuasion, influence cognition and impact on behaviour (p. 135)". The findings and classification of Funk and James (2001) though applied specifically to sports teams aligns neatly to some of the findings in consumer behaviour, particularly as regards the role of attitudes in driving behaviour. It is however not free of criticism as pointed out by Stewart et al (2003). They encourage more qualitative techniques that use in-depth methods such as interviews to tease out some of the underlying believes and motivations that drive the assumptions of these models. While typologies are of theoretical importance in terms of organizing a spectrum of believes, meanings and behaviours, more insights can be gained from capturing real consumer experiences.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Consumer focused research situates brand loyalty theory within the broader network of consumption and marketplace behaviours that underlie it. It reveals the relationships between individual meanings and the cultural milieu within which they develop. It serves as a reminder that consumption, and loyal brand-consumer interactions do not occur in a vacuum, but rather, play out within a complex set of cultural and structural influences. Whereas the majority of the core brand loyalty research field adheres to the logical empiricist paradigm, with cognitive psychology and theories of attitude formation shouldering most of the burden for explaining loyalty (Tucker 1964; Jacoby and Chestnut 1978; Dick and Basu 1994; Oliver 1997; Odin et al 2001; Jacoby and Kyner 1973; Uncles et al 2002); approaching the subject from an interpretive perspective holds existing knowledge against the cultural meanings, social dynamics and socio-historic influences that constitute and shape consumer experiences and behaviours in diverse ways (Fournier and Yao 1997; Arnould and Thompson 2005; Olsen 1993). Interpretive consumer research, therefore, investigates consumer behaviour, and loyalty as it is lived out across a range of contexts (online and off, leisure activities, conventions, open markets) (Kozinets 2001; Schouten and McAlexander 1995; Belk 2004).

What this means for brand loyalty is that since consumers lives are constructed around multiple consumption experiences, facilitated by different brands, in different contexts; the traditional view of a monolithic conception of loyalty needs to be updated (Copeland 1923; Oliver 1999). A more meaning-based approach to loyalty that embraces the diversity of consumer experiences needs to be cultivated. Rather than focusing on behavioural and attitudinal indicators alone, these perspectives on loyalty need to be supplemented and examined through the eyes of consumers - as a multi-faceted, rich, and diverse social phenomenon, in line with the socially shared meanings of consumers. The fundamentally socially constructed nature of loyalty needs to be pushed to the fore (Paavola, 2005).

While study of the actions and practices of loyal consumers is fascinating, loyalty can be more fruitfully understood if interpreted conceptually within the sense of reality, and lived experience of actors/ fans/ consumers as it is being practiced. This means less focus on actions, practices and attitudes of loyal consumers and more focus on how the enactment of meanings around loyalty actually takes shape. While it might be unrealistic to reveal an objective notion of loyalty within these groups, subjective and social conceptions on the idea and concept of loyalty and its formative processes can be brought to the fore (Muggleton 2000; De Nora 1986).

This chapter has focused on examining the concept of brand loyalty. The strengths and limitations of diverse perspectives on the concept have been engaged with. The construct of fan loyalty, which is meant to highlight the meanings consumers attach to loyalty through their lived experiences has also been advocated. As part of the current mandate of examining how loyalty is enacted within the context of community, the next chapter will examine the literature on community, and the idea of community as an online notion.

CHAPTER 3

CONSUMPTION COMMUNITIES

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter focused on a discussion of brand loyalty, exploring different approaches to the term and suggesting a framework for highly engaged expressions of loyalty – fan loyalty. This chapter attempts to situate loyalty within the context of community by reviewing the relevant literature on community within the field of marketing and in the adjacent field of sociology where the term has its roots. The chapter begins by tracking the development of community, from the modern era to more recent postmodern conceptualizations. The aim is to become acquainted with some of the key characteristics of community. This then informs the consideration of the ways groups of consumers have been represented within the field of marketing. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the reasons why the tribal construct is the theoretical frame guiding this enquiry.

3.2. THE NATURE OF COMMUNITY

3.2.1. The Modern Era

The concept of community has a long and contentious history in sociological thought, one that far outstrips the boundaries of a chapter of this nature which is aimed at providing context for the enquiry that follows. Nonetheless, a brief overview of some of the previous iterations of community is not out of place, especially to the extent that it provides insightful links to the sort of "consumption communities" that are currently common parlance in the marketing literature. Bekin et al., (2007) argue that the concept of community can be traced back to ancient Greece, where 'community' and 'society' were virtually interchangeable. Delanty (2003: 8) notes that community was a label for "the social domain of the life world- the lived world of everyday life". Community, like society meant social relations – a body of direct relationships, as opposed to the organized realm of the state. Towards the nineteenth century however, society increasingly became an expression of the territorial nation-state, preoccupied with war and crises. Community by contrast retained a romantic and nostalgic distinction for sociological scholars, of an age preceding modernity and as the basis for social integration (Delanty, 2003; Strath, 2002). The view of community and society as counter-concepts would go on to play a crucial role in shaping the social sciences in the nineteenth century (Bekin et al., 2007).

The heart of discourse on the concept of community at this time focused on cultural and traditional forms. Community was perceived as a moral standard in contrast to the remote and 'thin' values attributed to society. This era in community thought coincided with the rise of sociology as a field of social concern and is captured in the work of Max Weber, Durkheim and Tonnies among others. It is in this era that, seemingly, the negative effects of modernity's rationality and soulless economic relations began to take their toll on Society in the form of the First World War, and social instability. The notion was that the small scale, rural life that existed prior to the industrial age was a natural harbor for communal instincts. Interconnected relationships, imposed by social and economic mutual dependence, family ties and shared thinking grounded in morals and religion (i.e. 'community'), were supposedly being swept away by modern industrial forces, capitalism and new forms of 'society'. O'Guinn (2004) credits Ferdinand Tonnies' (1887) with giving community its modern sociological nomenclature. In Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft (Community and Society) Tonnies demarcates between the rural, harmonious, familial, organic community, engendered by religion, common natural laws and beliefs; and the individualistic, self-determining, rational thinking ways of modern society. His basic position was that the preferred state of community was transitioning into individualistic society driven by contractual economic relations and modern consumer culture with the likely result being anomie and dysfunction. Gemeinschaft emphasized common mores and responsibility to the whole as opposed to individualism. Tonnies presented the family as a perfect example of Gemeinschaft. Gesellschaft with its loose ties and impersonal nature was typified by managers, workers and modern businesses.

Taking a critical view of Tonnie's assertions, Brint (2001) points out that the qualities associated with community and society do not submit themselves to permanent categorization. Cohesion and common ways of life do not always suggest common beliefs. Likewise, familial and continuous relations are not always representative of stronger emotional ties. Gusfield (1975:74) also challenges modernization theorists who present communities as vestiges of the past. He argues that "the very aspects of linear theories which are posited as sources weakening the communal units in many cases actually emerge as re-enforcements for them."

What is particularly interesting as concerns the present enquiry is that the evolution of meaning around the notion of community is, at least partly, linked with consumer behaviour and marketplace realities. The ideals that community has historically been defined in contrast to are factors that can largely be linked to the growing dominance of capitalism and the consumer society at the time. What this might suggest is that a broader understanding of consumer behaviour (loyalty) is, to an extent, dependent on studying the consumer within this collective dimension. Until quite recently, the focus of the majority of the marketing literature has been on the one-on-one relationship between the brand and the consumer. The truly social aspects of consumption and the way meaning is shaped within the collective have rarely been studied as inherently social. Arguably, up until Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) introduced the brand community concept into the marketing literature, ushering in other studies that paid closer attention to consumer collectives, the community dimension had largely been ignored. Perhaps the perceived notion of community as antithetical to consumption as it manifests in consumer society (which is focused on the individual and individualisation) explains why consumer researchers have for so long, not looked at community. Recently there has been an extension of interest in consumer behaviour and marketing research to the cultural context within which consumption takes place. This has inevitably expanded the focus from the individual actor of traditional marketing to a more socially relative view of the consumer that encompasses both individual and collective identities (identities that are likely to be critical to the experience of music audiences and consumers e.g. for a live performance or mediated consumers of a music band) (O'Sullivan, 2009). In any case, Tonnie's contribution is important for pointing out key characteristics of the two contrasting ways of life - communal versus modern - and this narrative has continued to retain a prominent role within discourse of community.

Similar to Tonnies, Durkheim was conscious of the role of community as a medium for providing social support. Contained mostly within his work in Suicide (1951) and The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1911), he explored the nature of bonds that hold individuals together in modern society where individuals did not know each other and relationships were impersonal. In line with Tonnies, he was of the view that society needed solidarity and cohesion to function. Durkheim argued that there were two ways people could be bound in society: mechanical and organic. Mechanical solidarity is rooted in feelings of likeness as seen in small traditional societies. In these sorts of

societies people were driven by the necessity to engage in a wide array of production and distribution activities. Durkheim believed that these activities, performed together, bred a shared, collective conscience which was favorable to social order within society. Modern capitalist societies with their emphasis on division of labor and specialization, on the other hand, was not conducive to likeness or shared beliefs. Here, Durkheim believed solidarity took an "organic" form. Organic solidarity is dependent on a complex web of interdependence between members of a society with each person engaging in different activities geared towards the good of all. Durkheim is notable for extricating the community concept from the physical dimensions of traditional village locales and allowing it instead to consist of certain properties of human interaction that could as easily be found within modern cities. He believed that through the solidarity bred by organic relations and interdependence, the same sort of support systems that existed in traditional societies could be replicated in modern society. Similarly, Weber (1930) investigated the emergence of a disillusioned modern reality where old forms of authority based on affect and tradition were giving way to a rational, individually motivated reality. Unlike Durkheim, however, he viewed the essence of community as irretrievable under dominating modern conditions. Contrary to this tale of woe, however, the rise of mass media, and consumer culture – both central to modernity - have consistently necessitated the expansion of the notion of community to transcend limits of place. As communications technologies have evolved and expanded the reach of media, so also has a reformatting of the notion of community to embody unity of purpose and identity, irrespective of geography become necessary. Also, as will later be shown, contrary to the view that mass-marketed, branded society is destroying community, new forms of community coalescing around brands are a by-product of modern consumer culture.

3.2.2 Symbolic Communities

Another important strand in the community concept can be found in Victor Turner's (1969) seminal work *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. In it he uses the concept of liminality, a term borrowed from Arnold Van Gennep (1960) to express what he calls 'communitas'. Liminality entails a state of being "neither here nor there"; moments of passage during which there is a disengagement from the typical set of social structures and forms. Rituals, rites of passage, and pilgrimages are examples of this

symbolic state. ‘Communitas' is used instead of community to distinguish between the fixed, physical, spatial relationship borne out of co-existing in areas of common living; and the sense of social relationship that exists in every sort of society, and is an essential part of human interaction. Through these symbolic moments, the group or society reawakens to its collective nature and identity.

Turner (1969) proposed a separation between structure - the social order within which society and its dominant forms are organized through roles and position - and anti-structure which is situated in opposition to the organized system. By levelling the hierarchies and categories embedded within structure to the point where they are far less visible, liminals challenge these structures, and ultimately communitas is sustained. As an example of this phenomenon in modern Western society, Turner points to ‘the behaviour of what came to be known as the “beat generation,” who were succeeded by the “hippies” who in turn have a junior division known as the “teeny boppers”.… who are “cool” members of the adolescent and young adult categories…, opt out of the status bound social order and acquire the stigmata of the lowly, dressing like “bums”, itinerant in their habits, “folk” in their musical tastes, and menial in the casual employment they undertake. They stress personal relations rather than social relations’ (Turner 1969:112).

Turner is in essence stressing the social nature of society, irrespective of modern or traditional backdrops and fails to subscribe to notions that seek to locate the concept within particular enclaves of human existence. The symbolic links between members of society, however fleeting, instead take precedence for him. Echoing the same symbolic sentiment, and moving farther away from notions of community which are dependent on spatial categories, Cohen (1985) proposes a focus on a perceived sense of community which is shared and defined by group members in relation to others. To him community is almost entirely symbolic and cultural. He emphasizes the relational rituals and activities through which symbolic boundaries of a changeable interpretation of community can come to exist, one that is not bogged down by factual structures of any sort. While the “content (meanings)” can change, the “forms (ways of behaving)” remain the same (Cohen, 1985:21). This interpretation shows how community can be representative of a set of ideals, and at the same time, also be a symbolic construction open to interpretation by members. This symbolic, interpretive dimension of

community is important because it begins to take into account the complex and personal ways individuals can impose their own meanings on community structures as cultural resources in the modern era.

The symbolic perspective of community focuses almost entirely on the symbolic aspects of community, denying its more structural elements. A brand name, for instance, carries a host of symbolic meanings with which consumers can resonate and interpret as they see fit (McCracken, 1989). On a basic level, the ability to convey and communicate meaning is the foundation on which brands are built. Fans coalesce around these meanings and form communities anchored in the band/brand. But, these symbolic meanings are only one aspect of a community such as that coalescing around U2. There are also the band members themselves and their actions which are observable to fans; and the music in the form of recordings as well as the wider industry within which the band operates. To the extent that these wider realities deviate from the symbolic constructions of consumers/ fans, the symbolic constructions are inevitably affected. Research conducted at the Chicago School of Sociology, which will be looked at later, gives further emphasis to the structural effects of community on behaviour.

3.2.3 Alternative / Postmodern Narratives

Markers of class, nation, race, and other delineations that formed the foundations of society in an industrial age continued to give way to more fluid conceptions of community (Robertson, 1992). Community in the postmodern age is presented as an undefinable, unfixed, liminal, contingent entity. Under these conditions the demarcating boundaries of groups as "communities" are blurred and the nature of relationships are more dispersed (Robertson, 1992). Sustained by mass culture, increased mobility and globalization, community, rather than disappearing, is viewed as a more fluid set of relations comprised of people who are "here" and "there", moving in and out of spaces all at the same time, constantly creating new connections, while holding on to the old ones (Eade, 1995).

An important sociological work in this category is that of Michel Maffesoli. His work provides a rich background within which to consider mass consumer culture, and the proliferation of lifestyles. He focusses on "emotional communities" characterized by "fluidity, occasional gatherings and dispersal" which embody processes of

identification with groups, feelings and styles and are less dependent on race or class specific forms of consumption (Maffesoli, 1996:76). Maffesoli contends that these groups, which he calls "tribes", emerge in the midst of mass society and possess the essence of community in the postmodern era. The concept of individualism should, he suggests, be discarded in favor of a means of identification within groups marked by a "lack of differentiation" (Maffesoli, 1996:11). The emphasis is thus on collective aesthetic experiences. Maffesoli's conception of post-modern communities sees the groups purpose to lie in the relations of sociability and transient affiliations. In this sense it is close to Turner's (1969) theory of liminality and communitas. Community, from this perspective, is sustained through different forms of consumption and informal networks. Although his conception of community can be criticized on the grounds of its indeterminate nature (Burns, 2003), it nonetheless allows for notions of community that can be expressed even in the midst of mass consumer culture, independent of traditional or class conceptions. The notion of 'tribes' will later be revisited within this chapter, as one of the ways in which groups that coalesce around brands have been conceptualized within the marketing literature.

Anderson's (1983) concept of "imagined communities" can also be explored as an alternative and postmodern construct. A community is seen as imagined because it, necessarily, is not based on the face-to-face relations or strong ties on which traditional communities are based. Anderson (1983) notes that nations, similar to postmodern communities, are an imagined concept because the kinds of communities formed in the modern age need a perceptive ability beyond that which face-to-face relations can support. Though focused on the nation state, the insights raised by Anderson (1983) are relevant to the concept of community as a whole. As he puts it, "members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (Anderson, 1983:6). He contends that imagined communities became possible because of the convergence of capitalism and print technology. The same can however be said of other forms of mass communication such as the internet which have emerged since the dominance of print media. Anderson's contribution lies in provoking discussion on how exactly the nation state and community have come to be conceived. His focus on the nation state as a form of consciousness, as imagined, provides a springboard for

postmodern conceptions of community where boundaries are unfixed and uncertain, not based on a fundamental sense of place or unity, as argued by modernist theorists.

The dialectic between local and global can also be explored under post-modern community narratives. This discourse focuses on the effects of globalization and migration in creating new expressions of community (Auge, 1995; Olwig & Hastrup, 1997; Miller, 2004). The movement of people across defined national boundaries and the mix which occurs between host and diasporic cultures, calls into question the importance of place in the study of community. Miller (2004) for instance enquires into Chinese 'ethnoburbs' in North America to find out how transformations as a consequence of globalization, and the rise of transnationalism and cosmopolitanism are influencing the understanding of lived spaces. He concludes that in contrast to traditional communities which were stable and fixed, new constructs can be conceived of as 'spaces of flows', set apart by a continuous mobility of people, and a 'hybrid' configuration that blends migrant and host cultures, values, and ways of life. Through the ease of travel and communication technologies, ‘ethnoburbans' maintain ties concurrently with the host culture, fellow migrants, and allegiances in the country of origin (Miller, 2004). For him therefore, postmodern cosmopolitan communities are free of constraints of space and time, yet are able to maintain the sort of relations associated with community life. Community thus has an open, potentially global conception.

3.2.4 Virtual Communities

Virtual communities push the nature of community father away from its spatial beginnings and explore its expression through solely technologically mediated means. Here communities exist in their most fluid and transient form, contained within communicative practices (Wilson, 2002). Divorced from geographical or political boundaries, virtual communities tend to take different forms and center around specialized areas of interest and/or maintain traditional forms of relationship in cyberspace. Rheingold’s (1993) Virtual Community: Homesteading on the virtual frontier, was one of the first studies to tackle virtual community. In the book he documents his adventures on The WELL, and other computer mediated social groups. He describes the informal, decentralized sense of community of these online groups which for him existed in a separate realm from ‘real’ everyday life. He argues that it is

difficult to generalize these communities "as there is no such thing as a single monolithic online culture; it is more like an ecosystem of subcultures, some frivolous, others serious" and explores the opportunities of the then new technology as a source of mutual support, information and entertainment for members (Rheingold, 1993 pg. xviii). His work is a snapshot of the evolution of the internet from the earliest days of its use. This might explain his view of online communities as a world removed, and separate from reality. Communication technology and the internet is a lot more embedded in daily life in today's world and it would be a lot more difficult, if not unnecessary to demarcate online communities as separate from reality. He nonetheless succeeds in capturing the essence that, besides the fact that they exist on mediated platforms, these online escapes have all the trappings of what one might call a community.

Castells (2001) straddles the real versus virtual divide with greater care. For him, the internet is a social tool which people adapt to their lives. There is thus no purely online or virtual life - just life. He does not see online communities as replacements for traditional communities. The internet facilitates "networked individualism" where "individuals build their networks online and offline on the basis of their interests, values, affinities and projects" (p.131). He argues that online communities are not akin to traditional communities in the sociological sense; rather the reach and flexibility of these virtual communities makes socializing in individualistic society possible. Networked social relations is thus a substitute for spatial, familial and other forms of community. Similarly, Wellman (1999) argues that the internet creates a platform for the development of communities driven mostly by interest and specialized relationships. Virtual communities, he argues, are communities of choice, and active selection by members on the basis of shared passion and interest. Calhoun (1998) while agreeing that virtual community in its strongest form is largely a re-enforcement of pre-existing relationships, disagrees on its ability to create new networks. In his view, communication technologies simply empower existing networks. Most email messages, for instance, are not exchanged with strangers, but rather with individuals within one's existing network – friends, family, colleagues etc. Calhoun's (1998) argument that virtual communities must be considered in relation to existing social relations is important in grounding the concept of virtual communities.

Examples of virtual communities include internet message boards, online chat rooms, virtual worlds, social network services and specialized information communities. Virtual communities are dependent on communications; without which they would cease to exist. The question is whether these online communicative moments are enough to constitute 'community'. There is no binary answer to this question. It depends on the particular medium being looked at; and on what is meant by the term community. Delanty (2003) notes that if a postmodern view of community is taken, virtual communities provide an opportunity to create and explore new identities and experiences which might not be supported as easily under traditional modern notions. Also, personal social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, can rarely be seen as communities since people in these networks do not necessarily share much in common, besides being connected to the same persons; and they may not even be aware of each other (although they are on the same network). Conversely a community of interest dedicated to a specific cause, for instance an online forum of cancer survivors, or fans of a popular figure may feel a strong allegiance and identity with the cause they share. In the sense of Anderson's (1983) imagined communities, they possess a consciousness of their shared cause. Whatever the case, these studies point to a conception of virtual community as a loose form of social relations and a fluid, more temporary, form of community, but community nonetheless. Contemporary communities are less bounded, compared to communities of the industrial age. Contemporary society provides numerous opportunities for belonging based on religion, ethnicity, lifestyle, nationalism and/or consumption. Given the current relevance of consumption in developed societies, it should come as no surprise that consumption would constitute a basis for postmodern communal ties, and this brings us to the notion of consumption communities. In the next section we explore some of the ways community has been conceptualized within the consumer cultural landscape, with the aim of moving closer to an understanding of community that works for the current study.

3.3 CONSUMPTION COMMUNITIES

Branded consumption has become so central to contemporary societies that social aggregations form around consumption practices and objects (O'Guinn & Muniz, 2004). Studies of market place communities have explored various ways consumers forge communal ties as consumers (Belk & Costa, 1998; Kozinets, 2002; Schouten &

McAlexander 1995). These enquiries show how social ties grounded in consumption add meaning to the utilitarian nature of brands, products and services. According to Friedman, Abeele and de Vos (1993:35) consumption community is a concept first proposed by Boorstin (1973). He describes consumption communities as consisting of "people with a feeling of shared well-being, shared risks, common interests, and common concerns. These came from consuming the same kinds of objects: from those willing to "Walk a Mile for a Camel," those who wanted "The Skin You Love to Touch," or who put faith in General Motors." Boorstin found evidence of the role of advertising in forging communities in late 19th century America which, though weak, became a means of engendering feelings of community, particularly among America's growing immigrant population of the time. Contrary to modernist positions of the role of mass-marketed branded society in destroying community, the urge of humans to belong is believed to endure and assert itself in all sorts of places, including the marketplace (O'Guinn & Muniz, 2004). O'Sullivan (2009) suggests that some of the recent interest in consumption communities relates to the push within consumer behaviour research to be more mindful of the cultural context in which consumption takes place. Inevitably this has moved the focus from the individual actor of traditional marketing theory to a more situated, socially-relative view of the consumer spanning both personal and collective identities and the current inquiry seeks to position itself within this broader critical marketing 'tradition'.

This section proceeds by looking more closely at different consumption communities, explaining the development and characteristics of subcultures of consumption and brand communities, before highlighting the concept of consumer tribes as the guiding notion of community for the current inquiry.

3.3.1 Subcultures

Subcultures are a predominant social formation within discussions of individuals as members of social groups particularly as relates to music. The concept has also been seized by the marketing literature as a frame to explain groups which coalesce around brands (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). Core to the concept is the positioning of a set of people as distinct from, yet connected to a dominant culture, with style characteristics that are unlike the majority of the population, thus allowing group members to identify with their peers within the same subculture, and create oppositional

boundaries from outside pressures around prevailing focal concerns (Blackman, 2005). As will be shown later in this section, its suitability as a viable analytical construct is however contested (Redhead, 1995).

3.3.1.1 The Chicago School

The concept of 'subculture' has its origins in the attempts of researchers in the Chicago School of the 1920s to explain the cultural and social context within which escalating crime and deviance was taking place in immigrant, multicultural Chicago (Tibbets & Hemmens, 2009). The Chicago School scholars identified issues related to social space (Park,1915), social bonds (Wirth, 1928; Whyte, 1943) and pressures of moral and institutional traditions (Sunderland, 1924) as precursors of subcultural behaviour. For them, subcultures were, at least in part, a product of urbanization, and an explanation for the crime, deviant behaviour and social dysfunction Chicago was faced with.

Parks' essay, "*The City: Suggestions for the investigation of human behaviour in the urban environmen*t" (1915) was one of the pioneering instances of this argument. In it he expresses interest in what can be gleaned about social life from a focused, detailed study of the City and the experiences of people therein. His work championed the sort of focused outlook to understanding social life that would come to characterize subcultural studies. Park blamed prevailing ecological pressures such as competition for land and resources; for the clustering of people who share similar social characteristics within particular areas of the city, and saw the city as a platform for the individual to "find the moral climate in which his peculiar nature obtains the stimulations that bring his dispositions to full and free expression" (p. 608)

Similarly, in attempting to capture the gestation of subcultures with reference to delinquent members of male gangs, Cohen (1955), pointed to the role of social structure and the immediate environment of individuals in determining the choice of collective subcultural solutions to problems they are confronted with in society. He viewed it as an opportunity for individuals to collectively resolve problems of status inequality by encouraging new codes among members, which elevated the characteristics shared in contrast with the larger dominant culture. Attainment of status within subcultural

groups was thus, in his view, accompanied by labelling, and exclusion from the dominant mainstream culture. This was however not unwelcome by the subculture, which in response demonstrated its hostility to the majority and promoted non-conformity as virtue. As the subculture became more distinctive and dissociated from society, members depended increasingly on the group and each other for acceptance and social relations.

Themes of class, ethnicity and economic conditions as structural causal factors in the formation of subcultures therefore featured strongly in the Chicago research traditions. Williams (2007) points out that this "overly determinist" outlook of the Chicago School, similar to the Birmingham research tradition that would later follow it, also constituted one of its major weaknesses (p.575). By placing so much emphasis on peer groups and the immediate social milieu for the incidence of crime and subcultural behaviour, individual choice and free will were largely left unaccounted for. The Chicago scholars were nonetheless influential in setting the initial boundaries of subcultures as collective cultural solution and the use of focused ethnographic studies to explain social problems.

3.3.1.2 The Birmingham School

Under the Birmingham School which was at its most active in the 60s and 70s, the focus of subcultural theory shifted to youth, and their use of style as a symbolic creative agent (Gelder, 2005). Rather than being analyzed through the lens of deviance, subcultures were seen as existing in symbolic opposition, with the tenuous experience of youth as an illuminating resource for understanding larger societal class struggles. Resistance or opposition for scholars in this school found its expression in style and ritual (Clark et al., 1975). Subcultures were studied as a tool to make sense of style, and link this with larger underlying concerns. It was through style that youth were able to make a space of resistance for themselves, albeit a non-physical and solely expressive one, separate from hegemonic powers. It was also in this tradition that the exchanges and relationship between consumer culture and identity began to be apparent (Gelder, 2005). Consumer goods in a way constituted a palette for youth to choose from as they subverted mass produced consumption symbols through their peculiar consumption practices.

Phil Cohen (1972) was one of the central contributors to this narrative. He highlighted what he saw as the destructive effects of spatial reorganization and economic development on cultural integration of working class families in 1950's East London. Working class youth were an embodiment of these changes; caught between the culture of consumption driven by the mass media, and the working class culture of their parents. Cohen argued that youth subcultures diffuse and resolve the conflict between "the ideologies of traditional working class puritanism and the new hedonism of consumption" (p. 94). Skinheads, mods and other such coalitions could thus be viewed as a symbolic way for youth to regain the socially cohesive elements destroyed through the reorganization of social space towards individualistic family life. Music, clothes and rituals were the visual and infrastructural tools used to accomplish this mission: "the subculture provides a means of rebirth", offering autonomy from a situation perceived to be hopeless (p.96). Cohen thus frames subcultures within the same pre-determinist, social structural explanations of the Chicago school. Further stressing the role of class, Clarke et al (1975) in their volume of essays - *Resistance T*hrough *Rituals*- expanded on Cohen's position, and, as Blackman (2005) points out, condensed the semiotic approach into a field of discourse. Borrowing from Gramsci's (1971) concept of hegemony, he detailed the position of subculture as a dialectic between hegemonic and subordinate working class cultures. Hegemony describes the process through which the ruling class maintain their dominant status within a society, by controlling its worldview and presenting this as the normative value, belief, explanation or perception (Gramsci et al., 1971). By attaching the concept of subcultures to hegemony, Clarke and colleagues laid greater emphasis on style and subcultural activity as resistance than Cohen did. He also notes that ultimately subcultural solutions do not constitute actual solutions since "they solve but in an imaginary way problems (unemployment, dead-end jobs, low pay) which at the concrete material level remain unresolved" (p. 104). Clark et al. (1975) also explain why these issues, shared in common by all members of the subordinate class seemed to be expressed mostly in youth. They concluded that youth "encounter the problematic of class culture in different sets of institutions and experiences from those of its parents; and at different points in their biological career" (Clarke et al., 1975: 107). Shifting gears from class to ethnicity, Hebdige (1979), also key to the Birmingham School puts style front and center. Using the UK punk movement, skinheads and rastafarians as case studies, Hebdige posits that style functions as a form of protest against hegemonic power structures. By subverting

ordinary objects and transforming them to public statements, subcultures attempt to separate themselves from mass culture, and attain social significance. He compares subcultures to cultural noise, interfering with mass culture. The noise represents factions within society where there are tensions, and style - music, fashion- are the means through which these needs are subversively articulated. In response, the dominant culture, through the mass commodification of these styles renders them incompetent, and leaves subcultures unable to articulate their needs.

In spite of the usefulness of these arguments for understanding social collectives, subcultures as articulated by the Birmingham School have met with a number of criticisms. The notion of style and by extension consumption as an oppositional statement of resistance seems slightly removed from modern mass consumer society. For instance, Bennett(1999) points out that the idea rests on the assumption of a conscious, premeditated choice framed by class on the part of working class youth. He argues instead that the improved post war consumerist society and the purchasing power that accompanied this, allowed youth to forge individual identities that were different from the traditional class-based ones that existed previously. Musical tastes and stylistic preferences rather than being tied to issues of social class and resistance, as subculture maintains, are in fact examples of the late modern lifestyles in which notions of identity are 'constructed' rather than 'given', and fluid rather than fixed.

Similarly, Weizizierl and Muggleton (2003) suggest that "the era seems long gone of working class youth subcultures 'heroically' resisting subordination through semiotic guerrilla warfare" (p.4). They point instead towards "post subcultural forms which reflect the political, cultural and economic realities of the twenty first century" (Weizizierl and Muggleton, 2003:5). The Birmingham School has also been accused of privileging "pre-given totalizing theories" as against deriving the meaning of subcultures from the subjective meanings attached to them by the actors involved (Muggleton 2000: 9). Muggleton (2009) asserts that subcultural theory has failed to engage with the subjective viewpoints of youth themselves. "Too often 'big theories' have been relied on (deviance, semiotics etc.) which picture those involved as passive pawns of history, their lives shaped by grand narratives beyond their control". He proposes a more subjective, ethnographic, approach that privileges the stories by which social actors navigate their lived realities. Social actors themselves should be the central

narrators of how they perceive phenomena. Subjective meanings, values and motives of those involved in style subcultures should be given greater priority.

Considering the current focus on music, subcultures are also not as clearly demarcated along musical lines as they used to be. As Petridis (2014) describes the seeming disappearance of music subcultures in a Guardian article, back in the 1980's and 1990's: "it was fairly obvious who was who and what was what. You didn't have to be an expert in the finely nuanced semiotics of teenage dress codes to work out that the bloke with the vertiginous dyed quiff walking around dressed as a banana probably wasn't cut from the same subcultural cloth as the bespectacled cardigan-wearer carrying a copy of the Complete Works of Oscar Wilde." Fast-forward to 2016 and things could not be more different. Besides the decline in class culture which has greatly reduced the subcultural concern with subverting a dominant or mainstream culture (Bennett1999), there is far greater musical choice and access today than ever before, which further contributes to dispersing musical audiences, and blurring the sharp-edge of subcultures along musical lines. Holt (1998) makes the broader argument that the basis for social status (even when subcultural) has shifted from what people consume, to how they consume. He argues that overlap in consumption objects across class lines and participation in activities does not imply that class has ceased to affect consumption patterns. Rather these class related indicators have shifted from what is consumed to different consumption practices. With regards to music for instance, although consumers might have access to and consume the same music, individuals with high cultural capital apply a critical interpretive lens and read texts as entertaining fictions that do not directly reflect the empirical world. Individuals with low cultural capital on the other hand tend to interpret cultural texts from a referential perspective, and perceive these texts as realistic depictions of the real world. In this way, they are attracted to music that speaks to their life situations. He argues that different classes can use the same popular cultural objects as resources for different lifestyles – materialistic versus aesthetic and idealist. While this might be the case, the structuring effect of class takes on even less importance when considered in the context of the internet. As with virtually every area of popular culture, subcultures have been altered as a result of the growth of the internet. Fans are more content with constructing identities online than they are with making flamboyant show of their allegiances and interests (Turkle, 1995). The internet, social media and virtual communities are not

typically nurturing platforms for class, gender, race, status and other structural forms that thrive in the physical social world. In fact, online citizens may choose to conceal their names or physical location and thus carry on an anonymous existence online. With virtual identities, individuals have the opportunity to create and move between different roles and identities or choose between styles and traditions that allow them evade discrimination in relation to social structural backgrounds (Turkle, 1995). Some of these weaknesses and the move towards post modernism have precipitated the growth of what is being called the post-subcultural school.

3.3.1.3 Post-Subcultural School

Contributors to the post-subcultural school seek to advance a conception of subculture that is embracing of the post-modernist turn. For them, social groups are more fluid and fragmented compared to the essentially fixed class and group assumptions of the Birmingham School (Muggleton, 2000). Their position is largely held together by the work of Max Weber, Jean Baudrillard and Michel Maffesoli (Hesmondhalgh, 2005). Using ideas from these classic thinkers, postmodern theorists on subcultures seek to place greater emphasis on the subjective meaning of subcultures for its participants, and move away from overly theoretical, determinist positions (Muggleton, 2000). They propose new constructs such as tribes, neo-tribes, lifestyles and scenes as replacement for subcultures.

Steve Redhead has been a strong advocate of the post subcultural position. He borrows from the ideas of Baudrillard to present a critique of subculture. He uses Baudrillard's (1994) postmodern notion of 'the end' - the idea that humanity's linear perception of time is an illusion, and that, rather than moving towards an end point via a sequence of events, we are moving in reverse, and by so doing destroying our history - to argue that subcultures are creations of modernists of the past, and therefore should be disregarded. He uses Baudrillard's (1994) concept of 'hyperreality' - the inability of consciousness to make sense of the real from the simulated, particularly in the context of technological advancement - to argue instead that style is constantly being fashioned from different cultures and from the past, and thus it is increasingly impossible to separate the real from the imaginary. Rather than expressing distinct subcultures therefore, postmodern style is a product of individual shifting attachments and affiliations (Redhead, 1995).

Similarly, Muggleton (2000) while also pushing the post-subculturalist agenda argues that individuals operate within a landscape of choice afforded by the media and revel in the opportunity to try on different styles without being encumbered to any one in particular. Adopting a neo-Weberian approach to the study of style, he highlights consumption as agency and expression of subjective meaning for participants. In contrast to the modernist subcultural position of styles unfolding in a linear fashion along identifiable structural concerns, he points to the "glut of revivals, hybrids and transformations, and the coexistence of myriad styles at any one point in time" which allows individuals to playfully move from one style to the other (Muggleton, 2000 p. 47). He thus presents post subcultures as "multiple and fluid…constituted through consumption" and inept at articulating any concerns of class or ethnicity. He suggests that to the extent that subcultures and style are concerned with resisting a dominant culture the term has outlived its usefulness because these various styles themselves now constitute the dominant culture.

Also adopting the position that subcultures are inadequate as an analytical construct in the postmodern era, Bennett(1999) draws from the work of Michel Maffessoli in presenting 'neo-tribes' as an alternative. Using ethnographic empirical data from the Newcastle dance music scene he maintains that in line with the prevailing ethos in postmodern society subcultures are 'unstable and shifting cultural affiliations' (p. 599). He uses *lifestyl*e to describe the choice exercised in using consumption to construct a personal sense of identity free of structural motivations. Similar to a DJ's "sampling of sounds" from different global contexts to construct authentic new pieces, young people can mix and match consumer goods to construct subjective meaning. Taste, passion and aesthetic is thus the driver for belonging as against structural factors (Bennett, 1999). As another example of post-subcultural consumption, Goulding, Shanker and Elliot (2002:263) focus on the consumption of popular music as experienced through rave culture in Britain. Highlighting the role of post-modern sub-cultural activity as "an important space for the construction and expression of identity, rather than cells of resistance against dominant orders", they point to issues of identity, the emergence of new communities, engagement, and prolonged hedonism as the basis for the emergence of temporary communities which disperse after the experience is over.

In essence, the consensus of the post-subcultural theorists taken together is that group identity rather than being a collective, cohesive style statement as presented earlier, has become more individualized, fluid and fragmented due to the increasing availability of consumer goods through which personal identities can be constructed and lived out.

3.3.1.4. Subcultures of Consumption

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) in their ethnographic study of the Harley Davidson community present a subculture of consumption as a "distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity (with) identifiable, hierarchical social structures, a unique ethos, or set of shared beliefs and values, and unique jargons, rituals and modes of symbolic expression" (p. 43). Their definition aligns with the 'consumption as agency' ethos of the post-subcultural school. However, the importance of consumption as the central social bond is more prominent in their assessment. In contrast with the fleeting, transient approach of post subculturalists, subcultures of consumption appear more as a way of life for participants, governed by shared beliefs. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) also highlight the internal hierarchical social structure, which in turn determines the extent and level of commitment of members to the shared ethos. The Harley Davidson bikers who form the focus of their study are enraptured by the activity in a manner resonant with a transcendental religious experience. Similarly, Celsi et al (1993) looked at consumption within the context of high risk leisure sports activities. They identify "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997) - the transcendent state of total involvement which participants experience from engaging in high risk activity -, Communitas, and the sense of community triggered by the experience, and shared communion, as motivations for members engaged with subcultures of consumption.

Also potentially relevant in this category is the concept of 'subcultural capital'. Coined by Thornton (1996) in her study of British club culture, the concept describes the process through which members of a group embody the knowledge and codes necessary to retain membership of that group. Thornton borrowed from the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1984) who argued that possession of the right cultural knowledge (i.e. cultural, as opposed to material capital) increases the standing of its holder within a particular class. Thornton showed, by applying Bourdieu's theory that it was possible

to obtain subcultural capital, and status within these cultures by being aware of, and displaying the right sorts of consumption practices. Sinclair and Dolan (2015) for instance demonstrate how unwritten codes of the mosh pit of aggressive, but not necessarily violent, rituals are translated into subcultural capital. According to Sinclair and Dolan (2015), members are socialised into the heavy metal music scene by displaying knowledge of language, visuals, rituals and music as well as through exclusion by members as punishment for individuals who throw a punch or break the mosh pit norms. They argue that this demonstrates the capacity of subcultural codes to integrate participants into the scene, enable the enactment of cathartic rituals, signify hierarchy and the distribution of subcultural capital. In particular, they place emphasis on bodily forms of control and emotional self-steering enforced within the community. Ulusoy et al. (2018) also highlight the ways in which subcultures facilitate learning. Through subcultural affiliation, members learn and are awakened to social issues that are important to the group. The music encapsulates key intellectual lessons packaged in a highly appealing and exciting communication vehicle. The shared musical experience constitutes a journey through which members are immersed in the cultural scene. Other music driven subcultures have also been looked at in considering the role music plays in expressing identity in different contexts including goth (Hodgkinson, 2002), punk (Fox, 1987), extreme metal (Kahn Harris, 2007), and heavy metal (Walser, 1993).

Subcultures of consumption, stripped of the concepts' focus on resistance, and attending instead to consumption, serves as a link between the use of subculture in marketing and the traditional use of the term; and highlights the value of consumption in producing traditional communal like activity in contemporary consumer culture. Contemporary subcultures of consumption are less likely to exhibit resistance against a mainstream or dominant culture and are more likely to be characterized by weak bonds between members (Canniford, 2011). In these cases, since supposed subcultural communities appear to display few subcultural characteristics of social resistance and robust social structures, perhaps it should be conceded that these are in fact not subcultures at all. An entirely different theoretical description might thus be more appropriate. In the context of this study, the 'subculture' construct is not explored further since its relevance to a mainstream commercial band like U2 seems limited. Of course, a band or fans may wish to categorize themselves as members of a particular

subculture, although in the case of a commercial band/brand like U2 this is rather unlikely. Consequently, 'subculture' is treated within this inquiry as a resource which bands or fans may draw on discursively in making sense of the cultural or musical landscape.

3.3.2. Brand Communities

Brand community is another theory that has been specifically developed in the marketing literature for conceptualizing collective consumption. Brand community is typically situated within a mainstream, mass consumption context, unlike subcultures. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) in their seminal paper define a brand community as a "specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand" (p. 412). It is specialized because the focus is on a particular brand. Unlike tribes and subcultures, proximity is not a factor with brand communities as they are able to exist via mass mediated means. Individuals therefore engage in social activities with the branded good serving as the 'tie that binds' them together (p. 426).

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) use three traditional markers of community, to make the point that groups that coalesce around brands are comparable to other forms of community. These are a shared consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions and moral responsibility. Consciousness of kind denotes a shared sense of 'we-ness'- a knowledge of shared appreciation among members which sets them apart from others who do not form part of the group, and instills a sense of oppositional brand loyalty. Rituals and traditions further foment group solidarity and maintain brand culture by extolling and celebrating benefits and stories of the brand; and setting up public social antics that highlight differences from other groups. Moral responsibility involves assisting members in the use of the brand, providing information, particularly in a virtual context, and encouraging retention of members. Muniz and O'Guinn's work has inspired further research on brand communities in the marketing literature. Key themes relate to religiosity (Muniz & Schau, 2005) and the dark side of brand communities (Hickman and Ward, 2007)

Muniz & Schau (2005) explore themes of religiosity, rituals, transcendence and loyalty within the Apple Newton brand community - a community for which promotional efforts have ceased on the part of the marketer. They highlight the potential for "transcendent and magico - religious experiences" to emerge as group members rally to support the symbolic brand narrative they have come to believe in and adopt as representative of their own personalities (p. 738). Their research illustrates how community members make connections between the symbolic meaning attached to the brand and their own personal identities through their consumption choices. Other studies on brand communities have however attempted to reveal some of its negative aspects. Hickman and Ward (2007) show how a sense of belonging felt for a brand community could serve as an incentive for negative 'trash talking' and communication in relation to the opposing brand, driven not necessarily by a negative experience with that brand, but purely out of the need to express 'inter-group rivalry' (p. 314); and Larsen and Nasir (2014) explored the role of brand communities in negatively impacting on the welfare of addicted individuals by providing consumer-to-consumer social support to community members, thus driving the continuation of addictive behaviour. More focused work is needed however to understand the mechanisms of these on line communities as concerns loyalty and the way it is constructed and practiced in their own assessment.

The brand community concept succeeds in showing the social, peer-to-peer dimension of brands, and the ability for consumers to carry on communal like relationships grounded in a focal brand. It broadens the link between brand and consumer to encompass other consumers who share a passion for the same brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Despite its theoretical usefulness, recent research has shown that consumers do not typically locate their socialization in a single brand. Fans of U2 certainly do not consume the band's music exclusively, and they openly, within the online community, make reference to other popular bands/brands in the same genre as U2 with which they are similarly enamored. While the focal brand might be the reason why they come to the forum in the first place, it does not preclude their belonging to other communities, and the social ties can take on a position of greater importance than the focal brand sometimes. Fournier & Lee (2009) note that brand communities should exist to serve the needs of its members for building relationships and engaging their

interests. They stress that the social links that come from brand communities are more important than the brand itself as reasons for participation, thus echoing the sentiments of the tribal construct.

3.3.3 Tribes

The idea of consumers as tribes is usually framed within discourse of the emergence of postmodern society. Proponents of this construct believe that through extended consumption practices in the postmodern era, pre-modern like communal relations are maintained (Cova & Cova, 1999; Firat & Shultz, 1997). The use of 'tribes' as has already been noted, dates back to the work of Michel Maffesoli. Maffesoli argues that 'ambiences, feelings and emotions' are drivers for participation in what he describes as tribes (or neo-tribes), referencing the sort of kinship affiliations the word traditionally represents (p.11). He believes that at its heart, tribes exist on the basis of feelings, passion and the experiencing of the other.

Drawn into a marketing context, consumer tribes describe the emotional connection shared among consumers with similar consumption patterns. Goods and services thus possess 'linking value' for the expression of identity and creation of communal bonds (Cova & Cova, 1999:69). In this context, products are sought not for their practical functions, or use value alone but also for their 'linking value' between consumers themselves; and groups are held together by 'shared emotions, styles of life, moral beliefs and consumption practices' (Cova & Cova, 1999: 69). Roller skaters (Cova 2001), clubbers (Goulding et al., 2013), and gay men (Rinaldo, 2012) are examples of collectives that have been presented as tribes. Since people have varying interests, a person can belong to various tribes denoting different aspects of their lives, hence the concepts 'ephemeral, unstable and unfixed' nature (Goulding et al. 2013: 814). Tribal theorists therefore see shared consumption as one of the means through which the postmodern consumer forges and maintains social links.

Certain traits of the tribal construct make it particularly attractive in the context of the current enquiry. Tribes rarely permeate every aspect of the life of the consumer. Instead, tribes can be compared to spaces into which they move in and out of as they choose (Goulding et al. 2013). Moreover, participation or belonging to one tribe does not

preclude membership in other related communities. Tribal theory emphasizes flows between spaces and personas, such that affiliation can change, depending on the preoccupation of the moment (Bennet, 1999). Also, tribal membership does not play up the community characteristics of enduring moral responsibility, or religious fervor towards the brand, to the same extent that brand community membership often does. In its place, consumer tribes engage in what Cova et al. (2007) describe as 'active play' with marketplace resources – in this case the U2 brand, music and ideals. Of course this does not preclude the existence of more enthusiastic fans for whom membership of the community is a more permanent thread in their lives, which goes to further illustrate the overlap between brand community, subculture and tribes as they relate to a mass mediated b(r)and like U2. The tribal construct also emphasizes the element of passion as a bond that brings consumers together. Members congregate around a shared passion and in search of the emotional reward that comes with sharing that passion (Goulding et al., 2013).

Form Feature	**Subculture of Consumption**	**Brand Community**	**Consumer Tribe**
Locus	Activity	Brand	Emotion
Power Structure	Hierarchy of core members	Hierarchy of core members	Diffuse, Democratic, hybrid network
Purpose	Sociality, response to alienation	Brand use, sociality	Sociality, passion
Marketing Potential	Unpredictable, unmanageable	Brand equity, co-creative dialogue	Linking value
Time span	Long term	Long term	Transient
Structure	Slow to change, resistant	Slow to change	Conservative, fluid, fast moving
Social Position	Marginal	Mainstream	Ambivalent

Table 1. A Typology of Consumption Community (Canniford, 2015).

The concept of tribes highlights the ease with which individuals can move between different collectives and associations in contemporary consumer oriented society

(Maffesoli, 1996). It has however been criticized for being too vague a concept within which to understand consumer behaviour (Mitchell & Imrie, 2011).

3.4 CONCLUSION

Over the course of this chapter I have been concerned with constructs from the fields of sociology and the marketing literature that can assist in the conceptualization of the notion of community. The aim has been to engage with different theoretical frameworks that can guide the enquiry into how loyalty is enacted within community, by coming to an understanding of what exactly is meant by 'community' in the context of this thesis.

Towards this end I have tracked the development of community from its more traditional, familial interpretations in the modern era to postmodern and virtual notions. This has allowed for an identification of key touchpoints and characteristics of community drawn on by marketing theorists and applied in more recent communities of consumption. I have also noted the differences and overlaps between subcultures of consumption, brand communities and consumer tribes. Taken together, these terms present different ways to describe what is going on in the marketplace among social consumers. The chosen community of interest does not fit perfectly into any of these theoretical marketing boxes. However, consumer tribes, by virtue of the flexibility it offers and the way it handles some of the limitations of subcultures and brand communities serves well for the current enquiry.

The discussion on consumption communities began with a look at subcultures, a group who respond to being marginalized by a dominant mainstream culture by subverting market resources and engaging in consumption rituals. Subcultures as tools of resistance, and the enduring commitment of these groups in the postmodern era have been called into question by recent research (Canniford, 2015; Elliot and Davies, 2006). Bennett(1999) argues that, as presented by proponents of consumer tribes, consumers in the postmodern era exhibit more fluid and unfixed style and consumption preferences, particularly around the consumption of music. In this sense, subcultures that do not display traits of long term cohesion and resistance may in fact not be subcultures at all.

Brand communities capture an enthusiasm, zeal for the focal brand and likeminded

thinking that could also apply to the U2 community (Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). Most consumption focused communities do not however limit their consumption to one single brand. In the case of brand community, as with subculture, tribal theory offers an alternative by recognizing the ways in which consumers might draw on a range of resources as they socialize with likeminded others, sometimes for fleeting periods. "Tribes appear as collections of diffusely empowered consumers who, through the features of a hybrid, affectual, performative and changeable tribal network, enter into productive, democratic and symbiotic dialogue with market offerings. In so doing, they foster and nurture linking value." (Canniford, 2015:70). The tribal construct provides opportunity for a flexible, networked approach to the U2 forum and allows for theoretical links and investigation that might otherwise be overlooked. Still, there remains the chance of some overlap between these constructs as applied to the U2 forum. Perhaps, also it is in these grey areas that interesting phenomena such as those relating to contested loyalty and meaning become most apparent. Besides, what all these amount to are labels, which ultimately matter little to the community that forms the focus of this analysis. Of greater consequence is exploring the ways in which they construct identities for themselves and give meaning to their own relationships and actions. The next chapter moves us in that direction by framing the brand loyalty and community discourse looked at so far within a broadly cultural perspective focused on popular music.

CHAPTER 4

FAN CULTURE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This is the last of three literature review chapters that serve as the theoretical basis for the current inquiry. Considering the aim of understanding how popular music fans enact and make sense of loyalty within a dedicated community space, attention to issues of culture and meaning in all of its manifestations (not just commercial) is a particular prerogative of this chapter. Towards this end a culturalist perspective is taken. Since the study aims to draw on consumer generated meanings of loyalty as articulated through interactions among a community of fans, this chapter moves us towards that goal by situating the study within a culturalist perspective which highlights the meaning-based and symbolic aspects of the group in focus. The chapter starts out by examining the notion of culture within the field of cultural studies. This allows us to draw attention to the arts based context of popular music within which the study is being conducted. The circuit of culture framework (Du Gay et al.1997) paves the way for a mutually constituted view of loyalty by accounting for all parties within the exchange relationship that contribute to framing meaning around loyalty. The chapter also considers the nature and functions of music as a product, the broader popular music industry, the position of artists as brands and the reasons why this is an interesting context within which to look at how meaning around loyalty is constituted through online interactions.

4.2 CULTURE

'Culture' is a term that carries a range of associated definitions and meanings. Birukou et al. (2013:2) in trying to find consensus on the meaning of the term describe it as a "slippery and ubiquitous concept". Apte (1994) notes that despite a century of efforts to define culture adequately, there as yet remains no agreement regarding its nature. Typically, definitions of culture touch on themes ranging from ideas about creativity and values, to shared identity and social organization, heritage and expression. The broad ground covered means that what is gained in scope is lost in terms of focus and clarity. By engaging with a number of these definitions however it is possible to gain some sense of what culture entails.

The following extract by Baldwin et al. (2006:30) summarizes seven different themes

which have been used as definitions of culture:

A. Structure/patterns
    1. Whole ways of life: Total accumulation of lifestyle; "more than the sum of the traits" Note: This category also applies if the notion of "culture' is simply in terms of general "differences" between groups.
    2. Cognitive structure: Thoughts, beliefs, assumptions, meanings, attitudes, preferences, values, standards; expression of unconscious processes, interpretations.
    3. Structure of behaviour: Behaviour, "normative glue," patterns of rules, techniques, dispositions, customs, set of skills, patterns of behaviour, habits, actions, concrete practices, ceremonies, rituals.
    4. Structures of signification: Symbol systems, language, discourse and communication processes, system of transferring thoughts, feelings, behaviours.
    5. Relational structure: Relationship to others, orientational system.
    6. Social organization: Organizational forms, political institutions, legal institutions (e.g., laws, crime and punishment), religion as institution.
B. Functions
    1. Provides guide to and process of learning, adaptation to the world, survival.
    2. Provides people with a shared sense of identity/belonging, or difference from other groups.
    3. Value expression (expressive purpose).
    4. Stereotyping function (evaluative purpose).
    5. Provides means of control over other individuals and groups.
C. Process: Practice, etc., a verb as well as a noun
    1. Of differentiating one group from another.
    2. Of sense making, producing group-based meaning, of giving life meaning and form.
    3. Of handling "raw materials of life," of dealing with social world.
    4. Of relating to others.
    5. Of dominating, structuring power.
    6. Of transmitting of a way of life.
D. Product

1. Of meaningful activity (more broad than representation): art, architecture.
2. Product of representation/signification: artifacts, cultural "texts" mediated and otherwise, etc.

E. Refinement/ "cultivation"
   1. Moral progress: Stage of development that divides civilized from savage; study of perfection, civilization.
   2. Instruction: Care given to development of the mind; refinement (e.g., of a person).
   3. Uniquely human efforts from any of the aforementioned categories that distinguish humans from other species.

F. Group Membership
   1. Country.
   2. Social variations among components of contemporary pluralistic society; identity.

G. Power/Ideology
   1. Political and ideological dominance: Dominant or hegemonic culture.
   2. Fragmentation of elements (postmodern definitions).

A band and its fans, collectively, provide examples of these different definitions of culture, at least to varying degrees. Dedicated fan communities are sustained through interaction, and typically possess shared symbols and social processes and structures of meaning-making grounded in the band that forms the focus of their attention (Jones, 1997). Fan communities also provide people with a shared sense of identity/belonging, or difference from other groups (e.g. Kozinets, 2001). Music artists put cultural and artistic products into circulation (Negus, 2011) as well as cultural artefacts that are distinctive to particular groups (O'Reilly, 2004).

4.3 A CULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON LOYALTY

At the heart of the current enquiry is the notion of meaning – to come to a sense of the meaning attached to loyalty within a delineated cultural space. In order to do this a cultural perspective is taken on loyalty, drawing on the discipline of cultural studies. A cultural approach to loyalty challenges the notion of a universally applicable way of thinking about loyalty, and acknowledges diverse ways of approaching the subject that are grounded in the context from which they emerge, rather than a purely managerial

perspective.

Barker (2000:6) suggests that cultural studies is "constituted by a regulated way of speaking about objects (which it brings into view) and coheres around key concepts, ideas and concerns". Elsewhere he notes that "the central strand of cultural studies can be understood as an exploration of culture as constituted by the meanings and representations generated by human signifying practices and the context in which they occur" (Barker, 2004:42). It is these grounded meanings and representations of loyalty by music consumers that are in focus in this study. Recent developments within cultural studies have placed even greater emphasis on the process of producing and circulating meaning. Du Gay et al. (2013:6) ask the questions for instance, "how is meaning actually produced? Which meanings are shared within society and by which groups? What other counter meanings are circulating? What meanings are contested?" Questions such as these lie at the heart of the current study, which examines the role of the symbolic sphere and draws attention to the production and circulation of meaning around loyalty.

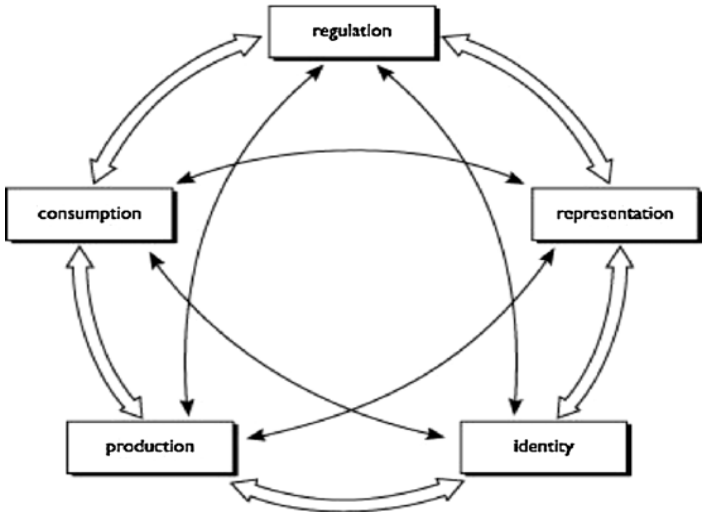
A culturalist understanding of meaning leaves room for a view of loyalty that is unstable, inconsistent, changing and constantly renewed within the context of popular music consumption in offline and online social interactions (O'Reilly et al., 2013). This perspective also signals an examination of the ways in which different views on loyalty are made visible within an interaction, and the outcome of defining self and others in one way rather than another. It sees loyalty as contextually and discursively constructed and negotiated in the interactions of stakeholders – fans, the band etc. This mutually constituted view of loyalty offers an alternative to overtly managerial constructions of loyalty which place greater emphasis on the role of management in creating a product that meets the needs of consumers and consequently leads to loyalty. The culturalist perspective suggests that all stakeholders have a role to play in shaping meaning. The cultural lens affords a view of the different meanings around loyalty, and the process through which they take shape.

4.4 THE CIRCUIT OF CULTURE

A framework which allows for a bird's eye view of the movement and circulation of meaning in products and brands is the 'circuit of culture' (du Gay et al 1997). In their

case study analysis of the Sony Walkman as a cultural object, du Gay et al. (1997) develop a model that probes the process of meaning attribution in relation to social formations (like a commercial music band). The framework of the circuit of culture as presented and applied in this chapter draws heavily on the work of Du Gay et al. (1997) and O'Reilly et al. (2013) and the debt to their work is acknowledged. Du Gay et al (1997) identify five major cultural processes – representation, identity, production, consumption and regulation – which together constitute a sort of 'cultural circuit' that can be used to structure the study of any cultural text or artefact. A complete analysis of a cultural artefact requires an examination of the different elements of the framework. Du Gay et al. (1997) suggest that the movement of meaning along the framework can be compared to a dialogue, with the different elements of the framework seen as mutually constitutive of meaning.

Figure 1: The Circuit of Culture



Source: Du Gay et al. (1997)

At the stage of production, a product is made meaningful as it is encoded with particular meanings. In talking about the production of culture, thought is also being given to the culture of production that dominates within a cultural space. The culture of production embodies the way things are done within the organization – e.g. staff recruitment policies, management styles, values – that guide decisions and activities (O'Reilly et al., 2013). The culture of production also feeds into perceptions of external observers. Typically, a commercial music band comes to embody its own sense of music and style,

with its choice of images, lyrics, performance style and sound that, together, signify its cultural production.

A focus on consumption allows us to identify the meanings that proliferate in actual social usage. Cultural studies dismiss the view of consumers as 'dupes', and of a lesser importance to the producer in the process of constituting cultural meaning. In the words of Denzin (2001:325):

> With a cultural studies framework, consumption refers to more than the acquisition, use and divestment of goods and services. Consumption represents a site where power, ideology, gender, and social class circulate and shape one another. Consumption involves the study of particular moments, negotiations, representational formats, and rituals in the social life of a commodity. The consumption of cultural objects by consumers can empower, demean, disenfranchise, liberate, essentialise, and stereotype. Consumers are trapped within a hegemonic marketplace.

From this perspective, consumption is an active process, and consumers can put producers' signifiers to other uses as no one meaning is uncontestable. Meaning is produced by consumers through the use and interpretations they give objects in daily usage. O'Reilly et al. (2003) relates this to Elliott and Wattanasuwan's (1998) suggestion that consumers use brands as tools for constituting their identities. From this view social subjects are active agents who play a crucial role in creating their own identities through consumption. Popular music fans are invested in music artists/bands/brands who they see as central to their sense of self and identity. They also engage in practices of interpretation, sense-making and symbolic consumption. Part of the aim of the current study is to pinpoint these symbolic meanings with regards to loyalty.

In relation to identity, Du Gay et al. (1997) focus on the way meaning is constructed or made (i.e. articulated) and internalized by the individual person or cultural group when confronted with a text. Taylor et al. (2002:615) note that identities "are always strategic…scripted and imposed by others as resources for a desired performance of the self". A popular music band will construct its own sense of identity for fans to buy into. This could be through songs and lyrics that stake out certain positions on race or

religion, for instance.

Representation relates to the construction of meaning through the use of signs. Meaning takes shape through representations from language "which use signs and symbols to represent or re-present whatever exists in the world in terms of a meaningful concept, image, or idea." (du Gay et al. 1997:13). Stuart Hall (1997:15) identified a way of understanding how representation constructs and is constructed by the world around us. He suggests that representation can be *reflective* in which case language is a reflection of meanings that are already in existence; *intentional* in which case language is the expression of intended meanings of the producer or *constructionist*, in which case meaning is constructed in and through language. He thus attempts to 'separate the physical world where things and people exist from the symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate' (O'Reilly et al. 2013; Hall 1997). Representation in common usage can be descriptive of something, or a symbol or substitute for something. Representation may 'be' or 'stand for' something other than itself (Leve, 2012). The work of representation may be to highlight preferred meanings while subjugating others; limiting the potential meanings or extending possibilities for understanding (Leve, 2012). A commercial music band can be seen to create representations through texts – songs, interviews, lyrics performances – that construct the world in particular ways on different issues. Fans draw on these texts and constitute and re-constitute them in their own search for meaning.

Regulation can be considered in two interrelated forms. Firstly, the formalized policies and regulations that dictate operations within the popular music industry. Regulation could also relate to more mental perceptions of an order of signifying practices as regular or natural, raising questions of the balance of power. Thompson (1997) notes that both forms of power can be seen as contested.

The circuit of culture is a useful conceptual tool for investigating complex cultural meanings or constructions and provides a template for looking beyond the surface at what is being examined – in this case what it means to be loyal. It moves beyond the relationship between production and consumption to allow for the consideration of moments in that process.

Tia De Nora, the music and cultural sociologist, (1986:93) ties the notion of meaning more closely to music as a space and place for work. She notes that:

> the social structure which characterizes this appropriation (its "relations of production" between composers as a group; listeners and composers; composers and critics and listeners; and listeners themselves), which we may be able to describe by distinguishing greater and lesser degrees of author-ity on the part of the composer and his/her colleagues on the one hand and response-ability on the part of the listener and his/her colleagues on the other. We should be willing to consider that these social structural "relations of meaning production/construction" may provide "subliminal" or pedagogic messages which relate to taken-for-granted assumptions about meaning, musical and other: where it is and how it is (or should be) conveyed.

She goes on to suggest that

> with regard to social or conceptual meanings (that is, "count as" phenomena), this implies a dissolution of the subject/object dichotomy as it is generally implicit in conventional theories of meaning "transmission" and "reception." In other words, the perceiving subject constitutes, given perceived constraints, the "object" through interpretation, and further, the meaning of this response or interpretations in turn constituted by the response to the response, and so on. What this in turn implies is that the "field" of meaning generated by speaker/hearers' utterances/objects/acts and responses ought not be conceived of as a bounded linear or additive progression (as if actors move along a column or tube of meaning) but as a multi-dimensional space.

The study of musical meaning has implications for connotative meaning and interpretation more generally, and these implications are in turn important for the ways in which the relations between social actors (as individuals and as collectivities) and culture is conceived of and meaning in relation to a cultural product like music, within a cultural space ought to proceed.

4.5 POPULAR MUSIC STUDIES

Popular music studies is interdisciplinary, drawing inspiration from a range of academic fields including “musicology, media and cultural studies, anthropology, ethnomusicology, folkloristics, psychology, social history and cultural geography” (Hesmondhalgh & Negus, 2002:2). This might go some way to explaining why despite

sharing an interest in 'popular music' (Cloonan 2005), there is little agreement amongst scholars as to exactly what it is.

Shuker (2016: 7) while acknowledging the difficulty in pinning down a precise definition for the term, relates popular music to the commercial nature of its production and dissemination. He sees popular music as "commercially produced music for simultaneous consumption by a mass market……. a hybrid of musical traditions, styles and influences with the only common element being that it is characterized by a strong rhythmical component, and generally, but not exclusively relies on electronic amplification". Shuker (2013) links the 'popular' with other cultural forms which are typically immersed in the market and are invested with ideological significance by consumers.

Taking a similar view, Longhurst (2007) suggests that in broad terms, there are two modes in which popular music has been discussed - critical and celebratory. In critical terms the overriding commercial motive of selling forms of music for profit is the focus. In this case, music as a commercial product is seen as aesthetic drivel, "rubbish, poor art, trite" and so on (Longhurst, 2007:1). In celebratory terms, popular music is valued because it expresses positions that are critical of dominant political powers, or enables the expression of ideas that seek social and cultural change; it may also be seen as innovative and pushing aesthetic musical boundaries.

O'Reilly (2008, cited Middleton, 1990) identified three different approaches to the study of popular music: a structuralist, culturalist and political economic approach. The structuralist approach focuses on how the structure of a musical text produces meaning, and how the audience member is constructed and positioned. It also encompasses musicological and semiotic perspectives on the subject. The culturalist approach frames the consumer of popular music as an active agent and also includes oppositional politics in popular music, tensions and contradictions, music subcultures and the individual as an active participant in generating cultural meaning. The political economic approach draws attention to issues related to the dominance and economic power of the music industry and its role in shaping the tastes of audiences. While for the purpose of the current study the focus is, to a greater extent on consumption, and the interactions between fans as arbiters of meaning; this does not preclude an appreciation of the role

of other actors (producers, non-fans) and processes in co-constructing meaning. Although the focus of the analysis is on fans, fans are understood within the context of mainstream commercial culture. For a band like U2 which might currently be seen as a mainstream commercial band there is a constant need to negotiate the expectations of the market with the expectations of an authentic cultural band that is trying to maintain a sense of its artistry. This raises tensions with regards to the agency and power of fans, and also between commerciality and art, business and music.

Other key themes that feature prominently in popular music studies are critical musicology i.e. how how musical sound can have certain kinds of political agency (Tagg 1979; 1991), youth subcultures (Hebdige 1979), the relationship between youth and popular music (Bennet, 2000), and the analysis of musical practices and identities (Frith 1998).

4.6 MUSIC CONSUMPTION

The cultural influence of music is pervasive. Its metaphysical qualities, and the ease with which it can be captured, acquired and used in its current construction in recorded or live form, leaves most people with little choice as to whether or not to engage with it in today's mass mediated society. Frith (2001:26) notes that "music is a universal human practice, like talking or tool making…. all of us can do it; all of us do do it". Aside from being a force in its own right, music is employed in making other forms of cultural engagement (e.g. movies, advertisements) digestible.

In spite of the reach of music in general, and popular music in particular, it has received only limited attention in marketing and consumer research. While the marketing and consumption of music shares similarities with other mass marketed goods (e.g. serving the broadest possible audience), music possesses some characteristics that distinguish it from other commodities. Music is by its nature intangible. It can be heard, but not held (Frith 2001). Music can be sampled freely on radio or in public without ever being purchased (Lacher 1989). It is not depleted by repeated use. These unique features of music make it difficult to frame the purchase of music as synonymous with consumption and raises questions about what, specifically, is meant by consuming music. With the experiential turn in marketing however there has been greater focus on the aesthetic aspects of consumption (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982) and by extension

on how the experience of using music factors into its consumption. Expansion of the notion of consumption to encompass not just the decision to purchase, but also the experiential elements associated with consumption pushes to the fore, the rich symbolic and communicative resource that music is for people (Larsen et al., 2010).

Contextualizing engagement with music as consumption supposes an individuals' capacity as an economic man to make a choice out of a range of producers or suppliers of the music product (different musicians or songs), and exchange money for the right to gain ownership or access to the valuable music product towards satisfying a perceived instrumental need. It highlights a form of engagement that is mediated by the market and represents the consumer as unrestricted in exercising their choice (O'Reilly et al., 2013).

Adorno (1991) challenges this prevailing discourse in conceptualizing music consumption by pointing to the hand of the profit motive in shaping and controlling the choices available to the music consumer. In contrast to the rhetoric of consumers as sovereign individuals, he represents consumers as economic slaves, structured by the whims of the owners of capital. Central to this argument is the position that in order to produce music to appeal to the mass, music, particularly popular music must be standardized like a commodity in terms of structure, form and experience. Adorno makes his argument by identifying two spheres of music - popular music and serious music. He describes popular music as a standardized and interchangeable text, similar to parts off an assembly line, that is fed to the masses, whereas serious music is unstandardized and more likely to be appreciated by those who are musically literate, for instance the music of Beethoven. He makes the assertion that popular music is highlighted by its chorus, which is created using a limited range of one octave and one note. This makes it easier for popular songs to sound familiar to audiences since they are aware of genre, and song structure. The result of this is that popular artists are unable to innovate and create original music outside of a limited pre-defined scope. In order for a song to become popular, the artist must play by the restrictive rules of 'popular music'.

Adorno introduces the theory of 'pseudo-individualism', where the music product is made to give the illusion of individuality whereas in reality variations do not alter the

basic musical structure of different songs, but rather offer surface changes. Goodwin (1992, cited in Longhurst, 2007) provides examples of how pseudo-individualism might be applied in a contemporary context:

> Pop songs often utilise the same or very similar drum patterns, chord progressions, song structures, and lyrics while being distinguished by marketing techniques (the construction of 'personalities' involved in selling, say New Kids on The Block, the makeup once worn by the rock band Kiss), performance quirks (Michael Jackson's 'hiccup', Madonna's 'controversial' videos) or rhetorical gestures (Pete Townsend's 'windmill' swing at his guitar, Chuck Berry's 'duckwalk'). (1992:76)

Adorno's position on popular music can be criticized for being too objective and generalist in the way that it measures and analyses music and ignores the role of the consumer in decoding and making sense of meaning embedded in popular cultural texts (Beard & Gloag, 2005). By focusing almost exclusively at the point of creation and authorship, he ignores individual, unique ways a music consumer might interpret popular music at the point of reception. A more subjective, interpretivist perspective gives the consumer greater power and agency in terms of decoding signs and meanings in popular music.

Another way of understanding music consumption is by following the trajectory of the broader field of consumer culture theory. In consonance with the managerial slant of much of brand loyalty research, early understanding of consumption focused on the information processing approach which is based on research in the field of cognitive psychology (Bettman, 1979; Johnson and Puto, 1987). Based on this view, consumers evaluate the value attributable to a product by assessing available information, before making a rational, needs based choice on which product to purchase. It has been argued, however, that this approach ignores the behaviour of consumers in relation to hedonic products such as music. The affective responses triggered during the consumption experience are also key to understanding behaviour (Holbrook & Hirschman 1982; Belk 1988).

Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) ushered in a new era in consumer research, by acknowledging that the information processing model neglected aspects of

consumption which are not captured by purchase such as "playful leisure activities, sensory pleasures, daydreams, aesthetic enjoyment and emotional responses" (p.132). This view allows consumer researchers to look beyond exchange and to consider what people do with the products they purchase, and also how they dispose of them. Consumption thus encompasses purchase, usage and also disposal (Holbrook, 1995). The subconscious and irrational dimensions of consumption, affect and feelings that are evoked subjectively through use are incorporated in accounting for the behaviours of consumers.

Also, extending the experiential view, the symbolic, and meaning making aspects of consumption have been emphasized under consumer culture theory (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Consumers are represented as active agents drawing on the rich cultural resources of the marketplace to construct and communicate symbolic meanings and identities and tell their stories (Holt 2002; Kozinets 2001). Consumers have been shown to rework and reconstitute meanings in furtherance of their personal identity projects (Thompson and Hirschman 1995).

Music presents the perfect example of a product where the experience of use, as opposed to the act of purchasing the product is fundamentally important (Shanker, 2000; Saren, 2015). One definition of music consumption is the act of listening to a piece of music (Holbrook and Annand 1990; Lacher and Mizerski, 2004). Listening to music is an immensely important part of everyday life and a key part of the material through which social action is organised (DeNora, 1986). Rituals associated with different types of music can provide cues for different activities, creating ambience and energy. Music allows users to express who they are and interact with others (Willis, 2014). Aside from listening to music however, there is a lot more that comes into play in terms of framing music engagement as consumption. It also involves understanding how it becomes integrated into the social lives of individuals and the technologies that make this possible. Defining music consumption as listening to music says nothing about how the experience of engaging with music differs if one does it as an audience member, as a fan or as a consumer (O'Reilly et al., 2013). Understanding the way music is distributed, purchased, shared, interacted with and listened to - the infrastructure that allows it to function as an industry is also an essential part of understanding what it means to consume music.

4.7 REASONS FOR CONSUMING MUSIC

The reasons why people consume music and its use values are underpinned by different philosophical positions on the nature and value of music. O'Reilly et al. (2013), building on Bowman's (1998) work on philosophical perspectives on music, provide diverse perspectives on music, ranging from "music as imitation" to "music as a product". These positions are diverse and at times contradictory, although some common themes can be identified. Many of the different philosophical positions view music as inherently social and tied to the social world (e.g. music as imitation, music as symbol, music as social and political force and music as contemporary) (Larsen et al. 2009). For example, the music as social and political force perspective views music as a human construction intimately connected to power. Music is also cultural, and thus is constantly being created, recreated, modified and contested. From this perspective, musical value is never absolute, but is culturally and historically relative and shaped. On the other hand, the music as autonomous form perspective views music as wholly self-contained, with musical meaning being wholly intramusical (O'Reilly et al., 2013)

Perspective	Nature of Music	Value of Music	Key Philosophers
Music as Imitation	Music as imitative art. Doctrine of mimesis: music as an imitation of the ideal. Musical, social, political and moral concerns are intimately connected.	Significance lay in music's resemblances to other things (e.g. harmonious balance and unity). Concern with potentially adverse effects (e.g. capacity to deceive)	Plato (427 - 347 BC) doctrine of mimesis. Aristotle (384 - 322 BC) excellence of imitation vs. the goodness of what is imitated
Music as Idea	Music as a product of human minds. Dualistic foundation: relationships between music's ephemeral felt nature and the realm of ideas.	Significance lies in music's relation to other human mental activity. Music entails some kind of knowing and awareness of aesthetic value.	Kant (1724-1804) account of aesthetic experience. Hegel (1770 - 1831) artistic vs. natural beauty
Music as autonomous form	Music is intrinsic and located wholly within a purely musical realm. Formalist foundations: focusing on the sonorous event.	The course of musical involvement is none other than tonally moving forms. the meaning of music is wholly contained within music's own materials, events and patterns	Hanslick (1825 - 1904) defence of music's purely musical value. Gurney (1874-1888) musical experience mediated by a special mental faculty

Music as Symbol	Music is a symbol that mediates cognition and interpretations of the world. Semiotic theory: music is a distinctive kind of symbol situation with its own musically unique, semantic devices.	Music is an important vehicle by which humans construct their conceptions of 'reality'. Musical meanings do not have assigned reference and are multiple, fluid and dynamic.	Langer (1985 - 1985) music is a logical symbolic expression of the inner, felt life. Nattiez (1945) music is plural and dynamic, its meaning relative to interpretive variables.
Music as experienced	Music is a lived bodily experience. Phenomenological basis: resists efforts to explain what music is about, preferring to richly describe what music itself says and how music is experienced.	The world of music is vital, replete with its own meanings and values. The value of music can only be determined through close attention to how it is experienced.	Dutrenne (1910) aesthetic experience deploys imagination. Clifton (1935 - 1978) music is what I am when I hear it
Music as social and political force	Music is a human construction intimately connected to power. Cultural perspective: music is cultural, and thus is constantly being created, recreated, modified, contested and negotiated.	Importance of music is the way it shapes and defines human society. Musical value is not absolute, but is culturally and historically relative. Human and social orders are in turn, constructed and sustained by musical practices.	Adorno (1903 - 1969) normative, hierarchical account of musical value. Attali (1943) music indicates changes in socio-political and socio-economic relations
Contemporary Pluralism	Musical practices are plural, diverse and divergent. Pluralist perspective: shift away from grand theory to accounts that figure plurality and difference, e.g. feminism and post-modernism.	Musical value is not fixed, singular or uniform. What is important is how value and meaning have been constructed	Goltner-Abendorth: articulation of a matriarchal alternative to the dominant patriarchal aesthetic. McClary: link between music and matters of gender, sex and eroticism.
Music as Product	Music is a form of capital. It can be recorded, stored and reproduced in a standardised manner by those who own the rights to it, for sale to others.	Music value centres around its economic value in exchange, and is market driven and extrinsic. Its value primarily lies in the ability to capitalise on all types of value which it may have for those involved in its production and consumption.	O'Reilly et al (2013)

Table 2: Perspectives on Music. Source: O'Reilly et al. (2013)

Considering the focus of the current study on popular music within a mainstream

commercial context, there is a particular interest in the consumption of music as a product in itself, although there remains considerable overlap between this and other philosophical perspectives.

A useful approach for thinking about music consumption is to focus on how music is used - that is its various functions. Framing music engagement as consumption highlights a range of use values that motivate consumers. Functionally, the music product has many utilitarian and tangible benefits with which it is associated. This perspective is in line with the information processing model discussed earlier (Arnett, 1995). In this case, music is used as a means towards attaining a particular state or achieving predefined goals. Since not every product (song, artist, style of music) is likely to produce the desired outcome, the notion of choice comes into play. Kerageorghis and Priest (2008), for instance, highlight the role of self-selected motivational music in driving repetitive, endurance type activities like exercise by enhancing affect, reducing feelings of perceived exertion, improving energy and leading to increased work output; Kerrigan et al. (2014) consider the use of music as pleasurable escape when running. Through the musicalisation of running, people escape their humdrum existence, the very act of running and the urban environment. Cook (1986) also highlights the therapeutic use of music in treating physiological problems such as pain and insomnia. In these cases music consumption is instrumental to achieving a desired state. Still, focusing solely on its functional application is a limited way to consider a product like music, which is largely experiential and communicative in nature, with a broad range of intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions (Larsen et al. 2009).

In what has become a classic outline of the reasons for consuming music anthropologists Merriam & Merriam (1964) presented a more encompassing list which captures some of these social functions. They include

1. Emotional expression.
2. Aesthetic enjoyment.
3. Entertainment.
4. Communication.
5. Symbolic representation (symbols within the text, notation, and cultural meaning of the sounds).

6. Physical response (dancing and other physical activity).
7. Enforcement of conformity to social norms (instruction through song and rhymes).
8. Validation of social institutions and religious rituals (use of music in religious services and state occasions).
9. Contribution to the continuity and stability of culture (music as an expression of cultural values).
10.Contribution to the integration of society (use of music to bring people together).

Merriam & Merriam's work (1964) has had a lasting influence among music scholars, though it has been criticised for focusing almost exclusively on the social functions of music (Shafer et al. 2013). Hargreaves and North (2010) expand on the ten functions identified by Merriam & Merriam (1964). They note that emotional expression relates to the power of music to act as a vehicle for feelings and to produce physical reactions (such as sweating and shivers down the spine). Other emotional effects of music also relate to mood maintenance. Hargreaves and North (1999) also identify an aesthetic enjoyment and entertainment function which highlights responsiveness to a given piece of music, which could also be dependent on interactions between characteristics of the listener (age, gender), of the music (complexity, style, familiarity etc.) and of the situation in which it is encountered. Aesthetic responses could also involve an element of cognitive appraisal of the music. The communication function focuses on the ability of music to convey specific information through musical structure and message and the process through which structures come to acquire meaning as they are interpreted in different social contexts. Symbolic representation deals particularly with the transmission of extra-musical information - values, ideals and the social construction of musical meaning within particular cultural contexts (Hargreaves and North, 1999). Most of these functions are seen to have a strong social dimension and do not provide clues on how, specifically, music is consumed at an individual level.

Lonsdale and North (2011) attempted to accommodate recent technological changes and digital developments which have made music increasingly accessible, convenient, affordable and cheap, which in turn has allowed for myriad individual applications of music by consumers. They draw on research which apply a 'uses and gratification'

approach to investigate different reasons why people listen to music. Common themes identified across the studies they look at include:

1. Mood management - Music as a means to express emotions and manage the mood of the listener.
2. Music as background noise - that is as a secondary activity used to accompany other tasks.
3. Musical participation such as singing along and dancing.
4. To reflect on the past and bring back memories.
5. Music for entertainment and interaction
6. Music as a social activity and medium for interaction
7. Music as a distraction when bored
8. Personal identity - that is music as a means to construct, maintain and express the listeners' identity.

The experience of listening to music is typically characterized by a complex interplay of these different functions (O'Reilly et al., 2013).

4.8 THE POPULAR MUSIC INDUSTRY

Popular music as we know it today is the product of attempts at adapting money making practices to changing technologies (Firth, 2001). The digital revolution is the latest in a string of technologies that have shaped and impacted the development of the music industry. In its infancy the music industry consisted of musicians (along with the individuals who made a living supporting them e.g. musical instrument makers and agents) performing to live audiences in return for payment from religious patrons, communities and wealthy individuals (O'Reilly et al., 2013). The greater their perceived talent, the more they were able to command in financial terms. This form of court patronage was the dominant form of professional production of music through the mid 18th century when market structures that could support musicians slowly began to emerge (Firth, 2001).

The evolution in music technology and the industrial revolution heralded the sheet music era, where hearing popular new songs entailed buying the sheet music and playing it at home. This allowed sheet music publishers to thrive as the industry's biggest force. Performers and composers such as Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and

Ludwig van Beethoven came to prominence in this era. Orchestras were able to play the compositions of few composers as a result of sheet music distributed to them, and by the late 1800s, composers could write works that would be sold on paper to hundreds of localized orchestras and the printing industry was thriving (Tschmuck, 2012).

With the invention of the gramophone in 1877, and the ability to record a particular band performing a particular composition using the sheet music for it, the recorded music industry took off. A series of mediums including LP's, vinyls, cassettes, CD's and digital formats were used to record and distribute music commercially (O'Reilly et al., 2013). The recorded music industry put more focus on musicians themselves, and away from the composers. Record labels, who saw an opportunity to profit, mobilized composers from the publishing industry and musicians from the live industry and created original recordings for a mass market. The mass marketization of music also created a need to employ people to find the upcoming talent: to match musicians with the right songs, producers or sound engineers and coordinate the release of the record at the right time. These people became known as Artist & Repertoire Representatives (or A&R reps). Other sectors that were created in the industry included promoters, agents, ticketing companies, venues etc. (Negus, 2011; Firth, 1987).

Further industry advancements crystallized through the 1960s when artists like Elvis Presley, and the Beatles created the blueprint for a business model of what an artist with an international audience can be and do in terms of record sales, song writing and live performances. The massive success of these artists attracted larger investments in the music industry, enabling elaborate stage shows for promotion, manufacture of large volumes of records that were distributed worldwide, and lucrative recording contracts with talented artists. Merchandising prospered through live events as an alternative income stream and for many years this continued as a successful strategy (Negus, 2011).

The digital revolution and increased access to the internet from the mid 1990s created yet another shift in the music industry. In digital form, music recordings could be accessed without owning a physical copy and distributed with ease over the internet, legally or illegally. This technological development has allowed music to be widely available in digital form and has driven the storage, distribution and consumption of

music to online platforms and drastically changed the recorded music business (Knopper, 2009). Illegal downloading has run rampant, resulting in a decline in physical sales. Legal digital distribution outlets have emerged. Music has become more portable, and alternative revenue streams for artists and labels have been developed. Artists have started to focus on making the majority of their money on merchandise, endorsements, and touring. Recognizing that that these revenue streams could generate profit for them as well, record labels started requiring artists to sign 360 deals (or risk not having a deal at all).

Structurally, the music industry is dominated by only a few firms with the financial strength, technology, media connections and distribution networks to deliver the music product to consumers and to promote and publicize them through the mass media. There also exist quite a large number of smaller independent record labels and distribution companies which offer an alternative route to market for 'independent' artists (Burnett, 1996). Recent upheavals in the industry have led to massive consolidations, leaving three major multinational firms dominating most of the market as at 2017: the French-owned Universal Music Group, the Japanese-owned Sony Music Entertainment, and the US-owned Warner Music Group (Jones, 2002). Many artists also attempt to sell music directly to consumers through their websites or online channels, skipping the use of a record label entirely. While, on the one hand, this model involves artists keeping a larger percentage of the proceeds generated from the sale of their music, it limits their opportunity to tap into the promotional machinery that the big labels can provide. What's more, these artists face the challenge of having to provide their online content in a way that is more attractive to consumers than down-loading the music for free (Fox, 2004.)

The music industry also maintains close ties with media broadcasting. Radio and television outlets serve as promotional mediums for delivering music of artists to a broad audience. Radio stations typically cater to particular music formats and deliver programming and playlists targeted towards a particular market group. MTV, VH1, and other cable and broadcast television offer a range of live and recorded music programs and lifestyle content, promote celebrities, award shows and other live music events. Television also hosts talent shows such as The Voice and X Factor which incorporate a social element in the form of entertainment. Thus, the public plays an active role in

selecting new talent, and artists can achieve fame far more quickly than through traditional routes.

Another key feature of the music industry is the treatment of musicians as celebrities. Artists are promoted and admired not just for their music, but also but for their image (Kubacki & O'Reilly, 2009). Successful commercial artists are thought of as cultural brands which can be co-opted, appropriated and commodified for capitalistic purposes through celebrity endorsements, product placements etc. and artists constantly have to negotiate the risks of walking the commercial line, or maintaining their credibility as artists. Artists have the ability to manage and construct their musical and artistic identities, and certain artists come to be known for their alignment with different key social issues. Fans buy into these ideals and attempt to replicate and live them out through their consumption practices, and use them to make choices about how to present their personal identities and sense of self. Alignment with these ideals also serve as an incentive for fans to coalesce around different subcultural styles and groups e.g. punk or goth. Fans talk to each other online about their favorite bands and engage in a range of consumption practices and experiences centered on the artist. The notion of consuming music is therefore a complex one, and people engage with and consume music for a variety of reasons. The experience or usage of popular music reaches beyond the functional and into the symbolic, experiential and aesthetic (O'Reilly et al, 2013). It is therefore important to locate the consumption of music in the lived experience of individuals, cultural and subcultural groups.

4.9 BRANDING

As mentioned previously, music as a product lends itself to symbolic associations for consumers, and artists are often thought of as cultural brands. The area of marketing that focuses on the symbolic aspects of products in an exchange relationship is branding. In this section we focus on what exactly a brand is and how it relates to the current enquiry. Though as a topic, branding is immensely popular in the field of marketing and as part of management practice it also attracts a great amount of confusion and disagreement. This disagreement can, in part, be attributed to the intricacy and complexity of what a brand is and the way in which it takes shape in people's minds.

De Chernatony and Dall'olmo Riley (1998) identified twelve main themes which broadly categorize the broad range of definitions of a brand. These are: the brand as legal instrument, the brand as logo, the brand as company, the brand as a shorthand, the brand as risk reducer, the brand as identity system, the brand as image in the minds of consumers, the brand as value system, the brand as personality, the brand as relationship, the brand as adding value and the brand as evolving entity. What is apparent is that there are diverse ways in which brands can be defined and understood.

For a long time, the American Marketing Association defined a brand as "a name, term, sign, symbol or design, or a combination of these, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors (Kotler and Keller 2006: 274). This definition, while capturing the more visual and representative aspects of a brand, raises a number of issues. In the first place, brands are not solely visual. Besides the identifying logo, sign, symbol or slogan, there is much more that comes into branding, such as the broader brand personality and identity. Also brands serve other functions in society besides identification and differentiation. For instance, by coalescing around brands, consumers derive social and hedonistic benefits (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002), commune with likeminded users of a brand and gain access to information that enables them make empowered decisions (Muniz & O'Guin, 2001). Moreover, it is not only producers and sellers of goods and services that brand their offerings. Although branding today is widely practiced by commercial enterprises, individuals (Britton, 2015), countries (Harrison-Walker, 2011), political parties (Lupu, 2013) and even religious organizations (Einstein, 2008) also engage in branding practices. Besides goods and services, ideas and concepts also make use of brand associations (Askergad, 2006).

Also, branding is not simply a managerial practice used by organizations. Brands have extensive social implications for individuals and society at large. Keller (2008) accounts for the more symbolic and intangible aspects of a brand which are largely ignored by the previous definition. He views the brand as adding either functional or rational dimensions related to the performance of the product, or symbolic and intangible dimensions associated with what the product stands for, which distinguish the product from similar products designed to meet the same or similar needs. According to Keller (2008) the AMA definition ignores the added value – the wider

array of associations that might relate to a brand. In other words, it ignores the full range of functions that brands perform. Kapferer (1986) sees a brand as a mix of "both, tangible and intangible, practical and symbolic, visible and invisible (elements) under conditions that are economically viable for the company". Through his identity prism he mixes functional and symbolic aspects of a brand and emphasizes the meaningful impact of these elements when they are interpreted by consumers. The integration of emotional and functional aspects of a brand is a key principle within branding (Gordon, 1999).

Another key notion within branding is that of the brand as a signifier. The brand is typically thought to embody a set of attributes or associations. Batey (2008) takes this view, noting that as far as the consumer is concerned, a brand is a set of associations, perceptions and expectations that exist in their minds. These brand associations are created, sustained and enhanced by every experience and encounter a consumer has with the brand. Batey (2008) also points out that these associations do not always emerge as a result of marketing action, but also as part of the consumers' reading and reaction to the activities of marketers. This position alludes to the socially constructed nature of brands. It is also in line with a cultural perspective which views meanings, in this case as relates to the brand, as mutually constituted by producers and consumers.

The American Marketing Association has provided an updated version of its definition of a brand to capture a more encompassing view of recent branding theory and practice. The updated definition presents a brand as "a customer experience represented by a collection of images and ideas; often it refers to a symbol such as a name, logo, slogan and design scheme. Brand recognition and other reactions are created by the accumulation of experiences with the specific product or service, both directly related to its use and through the influence of advertising, design and media commentary" (AMA Dictionary, 2014). Although, significantly, this definition accommodates implicit ideas and values which might be captured explicitly through symbols, it also presents the brand as largely a company asset, and silences the role of the consumer in constructing brand meaning.

Chandler and Owen (2002) note that a unifying feature among various definitions of brands is the notion of brands as 'systems of meanings'. They see brands as made up

of a collection of values, ideas, and associations, feelings, emotions and so on that, taken together make up a coherent whole which is more than the constituent parts or the product itself. This added value exists in the mind of the consumer. They identify some common elements which can be consistently found.

- Subjectivity: Meanings, imagery, feelings, sensations, associations etc. relating to the brand are embedded in the subjective side of the consumer.
- Complexity: Brands are perceived as sets of meanings, associations etc.
- Associational: Meanings are not invested in any one entity, but rather emerges from all elements of the product and the way it is communicated
- Unspoken: The detailed meaning of a brand often exists implicitly at subconscious or taken for granted levels, and are rarely fully articulated.

In this sense a brand is seen as a flexible, shape-shifting reservoir of meaning, which is constantly asserted through social interactions in a consumption context. Meaning is seen as emerging in a process. This view sees brand meaning as discursively and contextually constructed.

Branding is no longer limited to commercial applications alone, but also permeates fields which would have been difficult to imagine in commercial terms even a few years ago. The brand has emerged as a social and cultural force that holds only minor resemblance to its beginnings as a mere promotional tool or company asset.

4.10 CULTURAL BRANDING

Cultural branding taps further into the socially constructed nature of brands and the way consumers draw on the brand, and its cultural values, in attempting to construct and communicate their identity. There are a number of specific ways in which we may conceive of ‘cultural branding’ (O’Reilly, 2005). Cultural branding may refer to the idea that (1) in order to understand branding we need to understand its cultural dimensions; (2) the idea that corporations ‘brand’ people through their labour practices, the creation of production ‘cultures’ and so on; and (3) the idea that corporations create culture when they make products (iPhone), or encode messages (advertising), – i.e. they make their mark upon culture. O’Reilly (2005) further identified three different types of cultural brands. These are cultrepreneurs – artists who act like business people,

commercial corporates – i.e. mainstream commercial businesses that forge links with culture, and cultural corporates – cultural organizations that behave like business. Examples of cultrepreneurs according to O'Reilly (2005) are popular music artists who employ media management strategies to sell themselves as cultural brands with the aim of achieving greater commercial success. Popular music artists such as Prince and Madonna do this by making strategic use of shock and outlandish identities to work the gaze of the media (Brown, 2003). Commercial corporates include mainstream commercial organizations that align with and appropriate culture in order to grow their brands through mechanisms such as advertising, co-branding, celebrity endorsements, product placement, merchandising, sponsorship, cause-related marketing merchandising etc. By pairing their marketing communications with television, movies and music they embed their brands in the consciousness of media consumers. Finally, cultural corporates consist of organizations such as museums and art galleries whose core mission is cultural in nature, but due to financial demands, adopt commercial business models to remain relevant.

In his book, *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding*, marketing theorist Holt (2004) develops on the idea of brands as cultural forces. According to Holt, the brands that achieve the status of icons in consumer society tap into the prevailing cultural winds at play at any time. Besides merely reflecting people and the times in which they live, iconic brands offer myths that help resolve the contradictions of society; they are channels for expressing desire and relieving anxiety. Holt's (2004) work is in line with sense (3) above, i.e. using culture in a 'structure/functions/ideology' sense of brands *as* culture, whereas O'Reilly (2005) is mostly focused on culture as a product. In either case, both are related in their cultural approach to branding.

As relates directly to music consumption, Drummond (2017) asks the question, What makes rock and roll a marketplace Icon? As a means of revealing rock and roll's enduring iconicity, the author creates a narrative by tracking his personal relationship with Led Zeppelin. This narrative is then used to locate four sites of rock and roll iconicity: the private, since rock and roll can be an intensely personal experience; the public, because personal experience inevetitably becomes the starting point for self-identity and social discourse; the communal, since rock and roll music drives

consumers to attend live performances with others in search of the transcendent; and the kinetic, because rock and roll induces consumers to move. A fifth site of iconicity, the nostalgic, is identified as inevitable because rock and roll has the ability to trigger consumers' deepseated longing for the past. The author concludes that rock and roll achieves its iconicity in the marketplace by offering a text against which consumers can measure life' s progression.

Ultimately all brands are cultural brands on some level to the extent that they are socially constructed and part of culture (O'Reilly, 2005). Brands are cultural to the extent that cultures of production brand or mark their producers and consumers for better or for worse, and they are also branding cultures in so far as they seek to brand the everyday. As concerns the current study, culture is also inseparable from the meanings that come into play in the relationship between artist and fan. This is explored further in Chapter 8.

4.11 ARTIST BRANDS

Artists can be and are often referred to as brands. Artists such as Madonna and Prince are often mentioned for their ability to manage their artistic and musical identities, and evolve with changing cultural trends over the course of their careers (Brown, 2003). Unlike mainstream commercial brands, music artist brands can afford to take greater risks with their brand persona's, employing strategies such as subversion and scandal which are more culturally acceptable from artists (O'Reilly et al., 2013).

Within the popular music industry, the notion of the artist as a brand is significant because an artists' commercial viability is more highly rated, when compared to a record which typically has a life span of three months to a year. A lot of marketing effort and resources are therefore focused on the brand identity of the artist in order to reap from successive records and offerings (Wicke & Fogg, 1990). Successful music artists can become celebrated, with fans consciously or unconsciously associating ideals through the media with the artist. The media therefore plays a key role in propagating star culture (Rojek, 2001). Star culture is a standardization tool for the music product. In a capitalist context, consumers do not only feed 'wants' by buying records, but also perpetuate the illusion of embodying the ideals associated with the

artists; and representations in the mass media are the central elements in forming such a culture (Rojek, 2001).

Similar to other brands music artists have symbolic value and can be used to signify and express the consumer's identity (Larsen et al., 2010). They also differentiate themselves from other artists in the market; and hold strategic value for their record companies. Popular music artists speak to a culture or way of life with some artists like The Beatles achieving the sort of iconic cultural status described by Holt (2004).

Turning to marketing theory, it is possible to conceptualize the artist as a brand using Aaker and Joahimsthaler's (2002) brand identity model. Aaker and Joahimsthaler conceive brand identity as consisting of three brand associations which can be made with a product. These are a 'Core Identity', an 'Extended Identity' and a 'Brand Essence.' The core identity is the central essence of the brand. It represents associations that are likely to remain unchanged as the product moves from one market to another. The extended identity adds details and context about the brand. It includes all the elements that are not represented in the core (Aaker, 1996). The elements of the extended identity are subdivided into four perspectives and 12 subcategories – brand as product, brand as organization, brand as person and brand as symbol.

For instance, the core identity of U2, the rock music band, could be the band's epic, stadium-scaling sound. Their lyrical themes and mix of activism and religion could be seen as the building blocks of the bands' Core Identity. These attributes are valued by their fans in every market. The fact that they are an Irish band out of Dublin can be considered a facet of the bands' extended identity. This might matter to their fans in the home country, who may expect a certain style of music from the brand and take pride in the bands heritage, but is of little consequence to their global fan base.

The Brand Essence summarizes the Core and Extended Identities of the brand in a statement that resonates with consumers (Aaker & Joahimsthaler 2002). This could be a slogan or story used as part of the promotion process e.g. U2 the Irish rock music Icons.

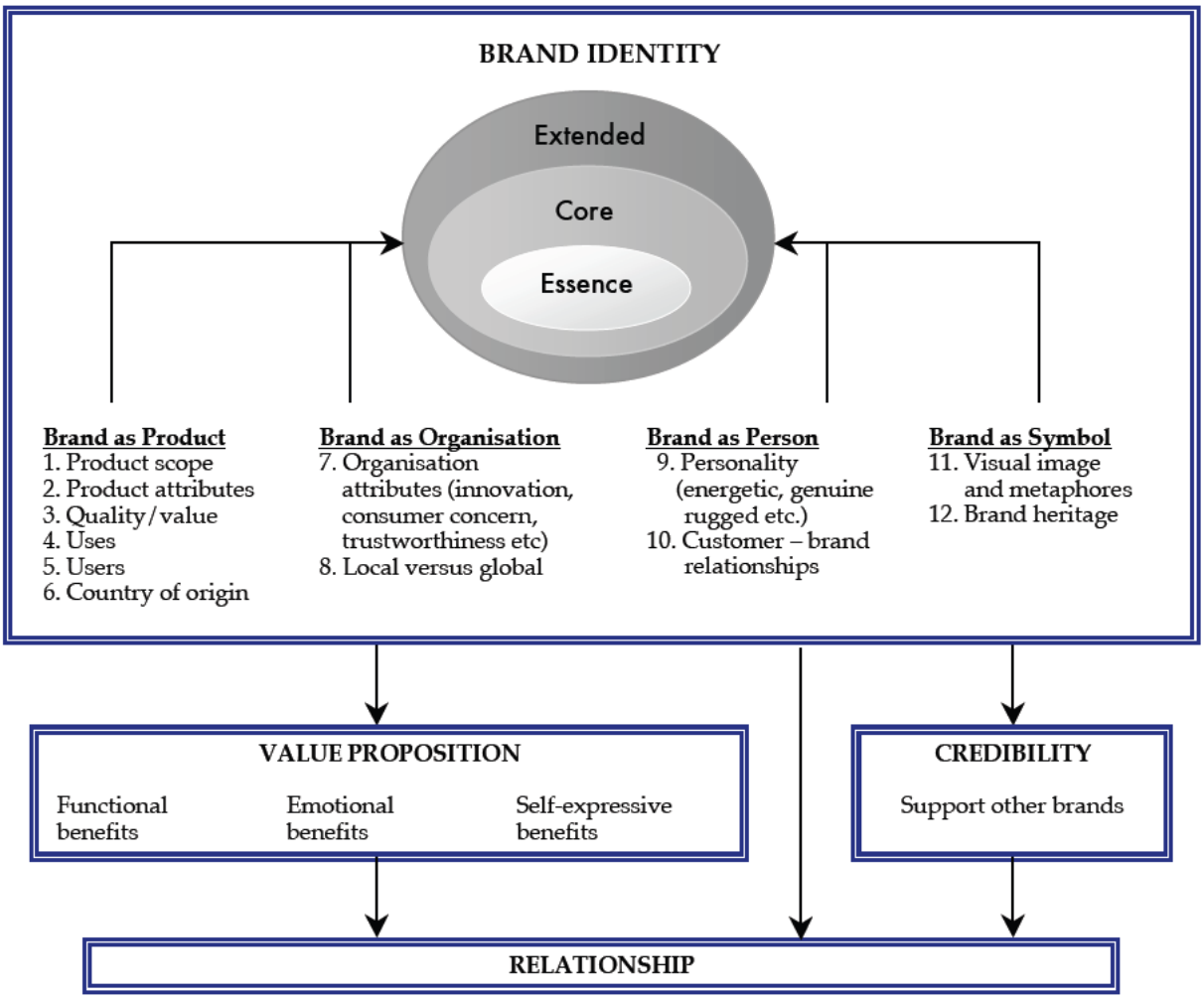


Figure 2: Aaker and Joahimsthaler's Brand Identity System (2002: 44).

Brand as organization is visible in the team behind the artist: agents, personnel, manager, record label etc. Brand as person can be seen as the artist's music or personality *i.e.* the way the band gets along with their audience. The artist logo is an example of a brand as a symbol. Clothes, hairstyles and dance moves could also be symbolic of a particular artist. Going a step down Aakers' Model, the value proposition in terms of benefits derived by users can be functional, emotional or self-expressive. Functional benefits relate to the practical benefits that the user can attribute to the product. Music playing in the background for relaxing or aerobic exercise is an example here. Aaker (1996) points out that emotional benefit occurs when the user derives positive feelings as a result of brand patronage. Emotional benefits add depth to the use of the brand, while self-expressive attributes could emanate from fans forming communities that distinguish them from fans of other artists.

Relationship is the last part of the brand identity structure. It highlights the nature and quality of the relationship between a brand and its customers. Though created largely through representations in mass media (Rojek 2001), the relationship between an artist and their fans resembles a personal one. In the age of the internet and social media this relationship is nurtured and maintained online both proactively by record labels and sometimes the artists themselves as part of their promotional activities; and by fans and consumers as they see it as an opportunity to engage with other consumers who share their passion for the same brands. It is however important to be careful when thinking of artists as brands since the personality they present on stage might be different from who they are off the stage. Misaligned individual and artist brand profiles can confuse consumers, and undermine the brand value of the artist (Balmer and Greyser, 2006). Also brand personality traits are culturally variable, rather than generalizable ascriptions (O'Reilly et al., 2013)

There are several reasons why music artist brands present a rich context for a study of loyalty online. Firstly, music has experienced huge changes in recent years caused by digital technology. The structure of the industry has undergone significant shifts as a direct result of the internet and the capabilities it provides, pushing to the fore issues of copyright and piracy and bringing into sharp relief, the notion of loyalty (Tan and Lam, 2001; Peitz and Waelbroeck, 2005). Also, as brands, music artists attract highly passionate and engaged fans who are active online. The connected, digital landscape has opened up space for consumer-to-consumer interactions that shape, and are shaped by, the meanings, perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and experiences of loyalty in a consumption context (e.g. Algesheimer et al., 2005). Music therefore offers a unique opportunity to advance our understanding of brand loyalty by highlighting its socially constituted nature. Music consumers also merit research that explores their grounded and lived experiences of loyalty.

4.12 SUMMARY OF LITERAURE REVIEW CHAPTERS

In this section, a summary of the literature review that pulls together all of the key themes and issues emerging from the preceding three chapters is presented. Over the course of the literature review an extensive amount of material has been engaged with, towards advancing the aim of exploring the constitutive nature of brand loyalty within a dedicated popular music fan community. The literature review began with an

examination of the notion of brand loyalty, drawing attention to dominant approaches applied in traditional marketing theory. An important idea to be taken forward from the chapter on brand loyalty is the notion of fan loyalty as another dimension of loyalty within which other factors that affect the depth and intensity of engagement consumers have with certain brands can be accounted for. As investigated across a range of contexts (Belk 2004; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), the clearly identified links in interpretive consumer research between identity construction and the meanings consumers weave into their interactions with particular brands, as well as the peer-to-peer dimension of interaction, which serves to amplify loyal relationships between the brand and the consumer, can be more clearly represented within the concept of fan loyalty. The notion of fan loyalty serves to highlight the symbolic and hedonic aspects of brand loyalty that are otherwise only barely touched upon in theories of attitudinal loyalty. This perspective also allows traditional brands, similar to cultural brands, to function as conceptual spaces where consumers can construct their identities and make sense of the things that matter to them (Grossberg, 1992). This recognition also paves the way for an analysis of the reasons why certain brands might be elevated from mundane, everyday activities, objects and experiences to the status of sacred, transcendent religious experiences (Belk et al, 1989). The frame of the fan expanded to symbolize enthusiastic devotion expressed towards a brand in any context, allows us to explore the full range of emotional engagement between the consumer and the brand, from the functional and basic, as captured in the behavioural literature, to more passionate and highly engaged forms of loyalty.

From deliberations in Chapter 3, efforts to account for the precise nature of communities of fans have led to terms that are currently being used to describe the groups of consumers that coalesce around brands in the marketing literature, including brand communities, subcultures and tribes. Although the consumer tribal lens is thought to be particularly relevant for conceptualising fan groupness for a commercial b(r)and like U2 on account of its flexible and diffuse nature, one of the tasks of the current analysis is to pay attention to the terms and ways in which U2 fans construct the idea of their community in relation to the brand in focus.

The final review chapter sought to situate the inquiry within the cultural domain in order to link the notion of loyalty to the culturally bound meanings that shape it. An

important concept to take forward in this regard is the circuit of culture framework. The circuit of culture tracks the circulation of meaning, and allows for a mutually constituted view of loyalty. It moves the focus of analysis to the subjective forms at different stages of the formation of meaning and also highlights the role of context in determining meaning. This approach is complementary with the aim of highlighting the symbolic and experiential aspects of loyalty. The popular music context in focus is thus, from this perspective, seen as a textual field of meanings to be identified, understood and interpreted. Also related to this, as presented in chapter 3 is the notion of the brand. The brand is seen in marketing as an embodiment of meaning. Brand meaning may be instilled through the efforts of marketers, but consumers also creatively construct and interpret individual meanings, which, through interaction can be altered and negotiated.

4.13 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the aim has been to situate the study within a cultural perspective that highlights the symbolic and meaning based aspects of exchange interactions, and to introduce the popular music context within which the study is being conducted. The result is a combination of cultural studies, and popular music studies, which, taken with the traditional marketing perspective introduced previously under the chapter on loyalty builds up to a richer theoretical framework for the fieldwork that follows. The next chapter articulates the overall methodology guiding the inquiry, and the methods of data collection and analysis.

CHAPTER 5

METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous three chapters were focused on setting out a theoretical frame of reference grounded in the existing literature to guide the current enquiry. In this chapter the focus moves to research strategies adopted to ensure that the data collected is able to effectively address the research questions, and assess meaning in relation to loyalty within the online music community identified. The research study is approached from a broadly interpretive perspective, with the researcher positioned as an interpretive bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln 2011) attempting to piece together meaning and online culture with regards to loyalty for the U2 brand. Interactions and communications are viewed as text which can be analyzed to create a composite picture of the operations of loyalty online. Symbolic interaction is employed as a platform for exploring how loyalty is constructed and given meaning by U2 fans. A combination of online ethnography and discourse analysis is used in approaching the data with the aim of merging the observation of discourses within the selected fan community with immersive knowledge of the culture. This has allowed for an account of loyalty as told and understood by music fans interacting online. The account presented is subjective, and reliant on the representations of U2 fans of their lived experiences, as well as the researchers' interpretation of these accounts. It is not an 'objective' telling of loyalty, but rather is context bound. As such, every attempt was made to apply self-reflexivity, and constantly evaluate the role of the researcher in the process. This chapter proceeds by discussing the ontological and epistemological stance taken. The specific procedures used in conducting the fieldwork are also discussed, as well as the suitability of the chosen methods of data collection and analysis for addressing the research questions posed.

5.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Broadly speaking the research aims to answer the question of how loyalty is constructed within the context of an online music community. The following research questions are also highlighted:

- What are the discursive resources which music fans use to construct loyalty?
- What are some of the core tensions around being loyal music fans, and how are these tensions negotiated within the context of community?
- Why do fans negotiate the tensions that emerge from different ways of being

loyal?

5.3 ONTOLOGICAL AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL LEANING: SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

The inspiration for symbolic interactionism came from Dewey (1969), who believed that people are best understood interactively, in relation to their environment. Seminal publications by William James (1890), and Charles Horton Cooley (1902), are also usually associated with the birth of the interactionist perspective. Herbert Blumer (1969) is however credited with putting together a cohesive body of work expounding the theoretical tenets of symbolic interactionism (Benzies & Allen, 2001). Blumer (1969) argued that the mind is a product of reciprocal social acts, in which people engage. Within this view, individuals structure the external world based on their perceptions of what they conceive that world to be. It is the individual's perception that affects behaviour (Blumer 1969). Interactionists support the idea of an inseparable connection between the individual and his environment (Mertzer 1975). Ideas and behaviours are in a constant state of flux, adapting and changing based on the individual's interpretation of the world. These changes nonetheless occur within a set framework defined by the individual which govern their relations. Borrowing from the pragmatist view, interactionists assert that the meaning of constructs exist in the behaviours of actors towards that construct, and not in the construct itself. These behaviours are the product of a constant negotiation between the individual and his environment. The individual is a proactive actor reacting based on his interpretations of symbolic objects (Meltzer et al., 1975).

Symbolic interactionists summarise their position on the nature of knowledge in three key premises. The first is that human action in relation to a thing is predicated on the meaning attached to it. Secondly, the meaning attached emerges out of social interaction. Thirdly, interactionist assume that these meanings are negotiated and modified through an interpretive process through which the person makes sense of all he encounters (Blumer, 1969). Rather than looking for explanations for human action in external determinist factors, or psychological motivations, the meaning of action for human actors takes center stage. The source of meaning is derived from the exchange and interaction between people with regards to the thing, as against emerging

intrinsically from the thing being observed. Meaning is thus seen as a 'social product' formed through interaction, and the subjective meaning of human behaviour is emphasized (Blumer, 1969; Charon, 1995).

Truth is provisional because meaning is fluid, changing depending on the context of the individual. The nature of being is best understood through the eyes of the individual's interpretation of reality in a social context. The focus of research is on the nature of individual and collective social interaction. Coming to know entails searching for ways to understand the meaning of a situation from the perspective of the individual, and societal (online) groups. Understanding of the social world involves understanding behaviour in terms of other people's meanings and interpretations. The interactionist assumes the role of 'meaning maker', imposing meaning on an otherwise meaning-less world (Benzies & Allen, 2001). This necessarily entails maintaining close proximity and immersion in the context of the actors in order to understand what actions mean, how the actors define it, and the process by which they construct the situation through their interaction. As a result of this close contact, interactionists cannot extricate themselves from bias or value free judgements, but rather, make use of their values while striving to conduct objective research. (Meltzer et al., 1975).

Symbolic interaction serves as a theoretical platform for exploring how loyalty is constructed and given meaning online in relation to the artist brand. Following from the assumptions that underpin symbolic interactionism, it is imperative to understand what individuals within an online community context know about loyalty, how they interpret meanings related to it and how the online community context affects or is affected by loyalty. The process of meaning attribution thus takes center stage. The basis for interaction among members of fan communities is a shared system of meaning. Overtime, symbols evolve, and ways of thinking about loyalty condense. Group members look to each other for help in defining situations. Behaviours with regards to loyalty are based on perceptions, the use of language and symbols and the creation of shared meaning within the community. It is these symbols and meanings that this research aims to decipher. The researcher is positioned as an interpretive bricoleur (Denzin & Lincoln 2011) attempting to piece together meaning and online culture with regards to loyalty. Interactions and communications within online communities are viewed as text which can be analysed to create a composite picture of the operations of

loyalty in fan communities. Theory is seen as an attempt to make sense of the way social reality is constructed. The task of the researcher is to "figure out a local structure of meaning, to crack a case in such a way that it is possible to understand something that was odd or inconceivable at the outset" (Alasutari 1996: 372). The study is designed to allow fans and members of the community to narrate what loyalty means to them, and how they practice it in their interactions online.

Denzin and Lincoln (2011:4) describe the interpretive bricoleur as one who "produces a bricolage - that is, a pieced together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation." The bricolage which is the result of the bricoleurs' efforts is an emergent construction that segues into new forms as the researcher applies whatever tools and methods are necessary to solve the problem at hand. This research is therefore an attempt to present a 'bricolage of meanings of loyalty within the community in focus. It aims to produce a montage of the subjective meanings attached to loyalty, and the consequences of these perceptions in relation to U2. The methods chosen allow for a triangulation of representations, and produce an account that adds "rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth" to our understanding of loyalty for U2 fans (Flick, 2002: 229).

Saukko (2005) points out that an ability for critical reflection on how social discourses and processes shape or mediate the experience of self and environment is also key to operate with trust worthiness from a cultural interpretive perspective. This highlights the need for constant introspection during the interpretive process, to ensure a thorough understanding of how online participants want to be represented. It also requires participant observation to gain a real feel for loyalty online.

5.4 SYMBOLIC INTERACTION, ONLINE ETHNOGRAPHY AND DISCOURSE

This study highlights how ways of being loyal, and acts and practices associated with loyalty, take shape and are negotiated through community interactions in relation to the brand in focus. Coming from the perspective that meaning is a "social product" formed through interaction, the study captures the meaning making process that contributes to embedding conceptualisations of loyal behaviour.

To achieve this a combination of online ethnography and discourse analysis has been employed. This has enabled a merger of the systematic observation of discourses within the selected fan community, with direct contact with its social actors (Androtsoupouos 2008). Ethnographic insights serve as a backdrop to the selection, analysis and interpretation of data in order to illuminate relations between the texts and their production as well as reception practices.

The study represents an embrace of DeNora's (1999, 1986) approach to the social study of music. DeNora (1986:92) asserts that "the meaning of objects, utterances and acts are not inherent, but rather are socially constituted". In other words, the perceptions acted out by individuals are, within certain constraints, constantly constitutive, and being re-constituted. Rather than conceiving of cultural goods as static constructs, what should rather be highlighted is "the struggle over the definition of social reality" (p.93). As a product which functions essentially as a social experience, DeNora argues that music provides a space within which social life is acted out, individuals are able to create meaning, community is shaped, and modern life is managed. For this reason, focusing on music in action, as it is experienced interactively, provides an opportunity to gain insights into wider issues, such as the social construction of meaning. The interactionist perspective that underpins DeNora's study of music serves as a portal for understanding the relationship between people, objects (music, loyalty), and meaning.

Coming from this perspective, it could be argued that loyalty can best be understood by witnessing its constitutive process within the daily interactions of fans. Symbolic interaction makes sense for a study focused on music as a product, and artists as brands because of the potential of music to serve as a space for interaction. Meaningful forms of action can emerge within the spaces of popular music. Though often presented as a context of social life, music plays an intimate role in the meaning making processes in which people engage in their daily lives (Gardener 2010). In order to highlight the ongoing process of structuring notions of loyalty, this study therefore centers attention on the use of particular resources, and drawing from insights afforded by an ethnographic focus, the meanings attached to these resources.

5.5 METHODS

5.5.1 Online Ethnography

This study can be described first and foremost as an ethnography. Online ethnography is understood in this study primarily as a method of conducting research based on the internet. Online ethnography, sometimes termed digital ethnography (Murthy, 2008), netnography (Kozinets 2010), and virtual ethnography (Morgan and Symon, 2004), bridges the method of ethnography with the reality that many consumers carry on much of their social life on online platforms. It allows for the conduct of ethnography over the internet. Kozinets (2010) compares an online ethnography to a traditional ethnography noting that

> *"it is naturalistic, following social expression to its online appearances; it is immersive, drawing the researcher into an engaged, deep understanding; it is descriptive, seeking to convey the rich reality of contemporary consumers; it is multi-method, combining well with other methods both online and off; and it is adaptable, moving effortlessly from newsgroup to blogs, wikis, social networking sites, podcasts and mobile online / offline communities".* Kozinets (2010: 4)

The research question requires an intimate knowledge and understanding of the online community and the identification of resources which members draw upon in constructing loyalty. Also, it highlights an interactive approach to loyalty; a focus on the constitutive process through which ways of understanding and thinking about what it means to be loyal come to be taken for granted. An online ethnography is useful in this regard as it is awake to cultural meaning which can be gleaned from observing online communities. Also, the interactive moments, and utterances of fans and consumers can be seen, as it plays out in a natural setting. Online communications are taken to constitute cultural artefacts embedded with meaning and open to interpretation and analysis (Williams, 2006).

There are different approaches which can be taken when conducting an ethnography based on the internet, depending on the extent to which research is balanced between online and offline environments. In the first instance, the integration of the internet in the daily life and culture of a community is examined. There is a combination of online

and offline activity, with offline activity receiving as much attention, (if not more) as actual research on the internet. This is the approach taken by Miller and Slater (2000) in their work on internet use among Trinidadians in diaspora. Miller and Slater do not start their ethnographic online study on the internet, but rather in Trinidad, learning how the people being studied form 'alignments' and 'elective affinities' with the platform provided by the internet. Rather than focusing on the internet as an entity removed and separate from the physical world and people that use it, they highlight the negotiation of purpose and meaning that compel people to use the medium of the internet in particular ways. They view the internet as a negotiation between the unique context and history of the individual and their particular goals. The internet was useful to participants, for instance, in order to accomplish their business of trading, and to ward off various dangers. There was, however, no observed separation of commerce, and e-commerce; real or virtual worlds. In studying the group ethnographically therefore, the researchers do not only spend time in online forums and chat rooms, but also in schools, cafes and offices where Trinidadians who use these online mediums could be found. The approach taken by Miller and Slater (2000) is important, for highlighting the fact that, in most cases, phenomena looked at online are actually anchored somewhere, and research conducted online should account for this physicality.

The second approach, to online ethnography focuses exclusively on the internet, as a site where culture and community thrives (Androtutsopoulos, 2008). The researcher in this instance is afforded greater flexibility for analysis. The existence of historical, archived data, does not only permit the accumulation of insights on an ongoing basis, but increases the reflective quality of online discourse. Also, archived interactions provide an easily traceable account that adds great exploratory power to the research endeavor (Cooke, 2000).

A third approach merges these two perspectives by treating the internet simultaneously as a cultural site with its own lived culture, and as a cultural artefact made meaningful within the context of the internet (Hine, 2015). Hine (2000) employs this strategy, investigating the reception of an event that exists outside of the internet (a court case) by following activity related to the case online, conducting content analysis of related websites and interviews with creators of the websites. This is the approach taken in the

current study. The study is an online ethnography of a groups' construction of loyalty. Though the group in question predates the internet, its online presence represents an extension of activities carried on offline, as well as a unique space in its own right within which to practice fandom. The online community has developed its own "norms, its rules (netiquette), and its own emotional vocabulary" (Denzin 1998:99). Participant observation, interviews with group members and key informants, and the examination of archived exchanges are the tools employed to explore the constitutive process of loyalty.

The online forum being studied (forum.atu2.com) is the more popular of two fan forums dedicated to U2. The forum was attractive because of the higher traffic and unique visitors (over 150 people online at any point in time, and up to 1000 people online during peak periods, such as when the band releases new music or is in the news). As of September 2017, the forum has over 12,000 registered members. To date, the most users online was in March 2014 at 1628. Also, richly descriptive interactions between fans were apparent (both as guests and registered members). The site consists of message boards which can be accessed by anyone with an internet connection. Participants interact by choosing, reading, and responding to posts in the form of questions or statements left by other fans. Posts on a thread amount to conversations engaged in by participants. The online ethnography entailed daily visits to the forum, at first casually reading posts and trying to get a sense of the tone of the community, and the range of discussions typically engaged in. This casual approach gradually became more analytical, as my interest in exploring the nature of the construction of loyalty through the interactions developed. Fieldwork ran from February 2016 through September 2017, continuing even as I started to write up the thesis.

5.5.2 Discourse Analysis

People engage in socially meaningful activities online in ways that leave a textual trace, making the interactions more accessible to scrutiny and enabling the employment of fine grained methods to shed light on macro level phenomena (Herring, 2004). Online interaction overwhelmingly takes place by means of discourse. Participants interact by means of verbal language entered on the keyboard and read as text on the computer screen, and these textual communications can be subjected to analysis in the search for meaning (Herring, 2004). All discourse analysis attend to language as the subject of

investigation, rather than simply viewing it as an objective tool for communication (Fairclough, 1992; Wetherell, et al., 2001). Discourse analysis is the analysis of "all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written text of all kind (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 7). Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out that social texts do not merely reflect events and categories pre-existing in the social and natural world. Rather, they actively construct a version of those things. "They do not just describe things: they do things". The argument can thus be made that each discursively active social domain focused on U2 is engaged in affecting meaning, action and perception on a range of issues.

One way in which meaning is affected is through the process by which particular versions of reality come to be taken for granted and perceived as the normative view, while at the same time opposing accounts of reality are suppressed or excluded. Part of the function of discourse analysis is unravelling the dialectic between what Fairclough describes as "the state of hegemonic relations and hegemonic struggle" (1995:134). Language embodies the struggle for meaning by way of the choice between alternative accounts of reality. By drawing on a particular 'corpus of statements' in speaking about and articulating meaning a construct is exposed to regulation and reform (Willig & Stainton Rogers, 2007:100). In speaking and writing about any topic, certain narratives are drawn upon in order to communicate meaning (Humphreys & Brown, 2008). Discourse is socially shaped and at the same time constitutive, and online in-situ interactions may be viewed as repositories for the construction and negotiation of meaning. Discourse analysis can be used as a means of exploring the narrative choices of fans within this platform. A key proponent of discourse analysis within marketing studies is Robert Caruana who explores how corporate communications shape moral concepts such as responsibility and freedom, and how this implicates various constituents such as consumers and employees by constructing and organising text and language (see Caruana and Crane, 2008). In relation to music consumption, Cluley (2013) demonstrates how a group of cultural producers use a specific discourse of consumption to describe their motivations for and methods of producing music, as a means of evading commercial logics in the art vs commerce meta-narrative.

Communities which coalesce around a brand both online and offline can be viewed as settings within which culturally negotiated ideas of what it means to be loyal, and how

best to practice it are debated. Claims on attributes, jargons, experiences, acts, to which participants must align in order to demonstrate fandom, loyalty or allegiance are managed through the interactions of fans within these social settings. Online communities are therefore seen as potent sites in which fans construct their self and collective understandings in relation to U2 through subjective and intersubjective arguments or discourses.

Discourse analysis (DA) lends itself to a variety of distinct forms that entail different understandings of discourse, and specify different methodologies including critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1992), conversation analysis (CA) (Sacks et al., 1974), and rhetoric (Perelman, 1982). The DA framework adopted in this study leans heavily on discursive psychology (Porter & Wetherell, 1987) as it provided a means of identifying the prevailing discursive resources and accompanying discourses within the fan community and analysing the ways these discourses were negotiated through fans' interactions. For similar approaches, see Dean et al. (2017) and Moufahim et al. (2007). The analysis of discursive resources was underpinned by the notion of interpretative repertoires put forward by Potter and Wetherell (1987), where talk is viewed as a means by which speakers position themselves and are positioned by others, as they produce a situated construction within a particular interaction (cf. Ellis & Ybema, 2010).

Potter & Wetherell suggest that discursive psychology is concerned with identifying a blueprint of "interpretive repertoires" which are repeatedly called upon in articulating and sustaining specific social practices (1987: 49). Interpretive repertoires are the language and grammatical elements / restrictions and cultural influences drawn upon in constructing discourse. Grayson (1998) describes the term as the "symbolic capital" of members of an interpretive community. Morley (2003) notes that a group of individuals might employ decoding strategies in relation to different topics and contexts. A person might make oppositional readings of the same material in one context and dominant readings in other contexts. Attention is therefore paid to construction and variability in discourse. Also, reciprocally, by acquiescing to a specific construction of reality, other alternatives are foreclosed (Brown 1994). There always exists a 'surplus of the signified' because what is expressed in language is a choice made from a larger body of experience and potential. As one version of reality becomes the standard, alternative ways of expressing the same phenomena are rejected. Hence

part of the job of revealing a particular construction is bringing to mind what is being rejected. The process of definition and exclusion entails attention to rhetoric and justification of the intentions of the text. Discursive psychology is particularly useful for processing 'naturally occurring talk', that is, "language produced entirely independent of the actions of the researcher" (Potter, 2016:192). In this sense DA serves as a medium for delving into the situated uses of a concept like loyalty.

With regards to the representation of DA on the macro-micro spectrum, a synthesized approach is taken. Krennmayr (2013) identifies two major approaches - the "top down" approach, where the researcher presumes the presence of broader conceptual or ideological issues, and the "bottom up" approach, in which case the goal of analysis is to draw attention to the organisation of language practices without an initial prejudice towards specific characterisations. Wetherell (1998) has argued against these divisions however, noting that each approach, taken independently, offers an incomplete construction of reality. The argument is made instead for the integration of the best of both perspectives - the attention to detail of conversation analysis and the deductive approaches linking to larger social issues.

5.6 DATA COLLECTION

In this section the various methods used in gathering data, including text as data, participant observation and interviews are discussed.

5.6.1 Text as Data

The value of discourse analytic practice is here understood from a broadly ethnographic orientation. The ideas and methods that have been developed in discourse analysis can be valuable resources for ethnographers, enabling a more detailed analysis of talk and texts (Hammersley, 2005). Ethnographic insights on the other hand ensure that interpretations of real world phenomena are dependent on relevance to the participants involved and conversant with their cultural reality.

Text as data consisted of interactions within the U2 forum. Traditionally both ethnography and discourse have as their analytic focus the structure and context of naturally occurring talk (Spencer 1994). Potter defines "naturally occurring talk" as "spoken language produced entirely independent of the researcher" (2016:192). Online

computer-mediated communications are forms of everyday talk, and so are appropriate for collecting naturally occurring data (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). These data are typically unaffected by the actions of the researcher and have been collected over a period of time. That said, the use of archival, naturally occurring data is not a rejection of so called "contrived" data sources, particularly as interviews also constitutes a source of data for this research (Silverman 2001:159). Naturally occurring community data, however, serves as a window into naturally occurring behaviours and provides an opportunity to deepen knowledge of the cultural context. Also, it allows categories for interpretation to emerge from the ground up. These text categories constitute both objects of analysis as well as sources of data constructing the phenomenon under investigation.

In collecting data for analysis, I initially read through a large number of posts and messages posted on the U2 fan forum between August 2008 when the forum was started and February 2016, across discussion threads. After this initial sweep I would subsequently go through newly posted threads at monthly intervals to see if new categories were emerging from new conversations. Coding and analysis was done manually. While reading through threads I made notes of what I saw and where I had seen it (Brown, et al 2003). On a second read through, I then focused in on threads and patches of exchange that discursively made any references to loyalty, fandom or allegiance, particularly those exchanges that seemed to imply a degree of conflict or debate. Searches were also made using those key words on the in-built search function available on the forum. At this stage I saved data in the form of postings and message threads. All postings and messages that therefore involved conversation and discussion of 'loyalty', 'fan', 'fandom' or 'allegiance' within the period highlighted were saved at this stage. It should be noted that the aim was not to facilitate representativeness of findings in relation to loyalty, but rather to achieve depth in terms of analyzing the way loyalty was talked about within the confines of the community in question. I then further narrowed my focus to particular categories and themes that seemed theoretically interesting, and related to the research questions. The downloaded threads were saved on a single word document that came to 220 double-spaced pages on Microsoft word comprising 106,000 words from 28 threads, as well as individual posts. Each thread typically had 10 to over 50 participants depending on the duration of the thread and the interest of participants in the particular topic under discussion. These saved pages were

then subjected to a more focused interpretive analysis. Recurrent actions, and themes within the text were identified in this way. Since an interactive approach is taken to brand loyalty in this study, in analyzing the text, analytical work that was focused on observing loyalty as constructed through interactions made use of discourse analysis. In these cases, the unit of analysis were patches of sequential exchange, drawn from relevant threads. In all other instances, where fine grained discourse analytic procedures were not being applied to extracts from threads, a traditional hermeneutic approach was taken, with individual narratives interpreted in relation to the whole – the collective practices of the community. In these cases, single posts were the unit of analysis.

Since discourse analysis is more concerned with language use, than with the people generating the discourse (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) the size of the data sample was of less importance than the value of the data in aiding the investigation of the phenomena. Selection of text was therefore focused on the extent to which it related to the research questions. Text for analysis were copied verbatim from online postings, including pauses, emoticons and the emphasis on words, to the extent that flow, readability and understanding was not negatively affected.

5.6.2 Participant Observation

In keeping with the ethnographic stance of the research, participant observation was also used as a method for gathering data. The use of participant observation is characterised by research goals where an intimate, situated interest in human meaning and interaction as understood from the point of view of people who are insiders or members of a particular community is necessary (Jorgensen, 2014). It situates the researcher in the everyday life of participants, and enhances knowledge of human life that is grounded in the realities of their daily existence. Part of the aim of this study is understanding the meanings fans draw on in constructing loyalty to the artist brand. While, to an extent, this aim could have been achieved simply by taking advantage of the unobtrusive element afforded by the netnographic method (Langer & Beckman 2005) it was deemed necessary to reduce the risk of making assumptions based on archival data alone, by seeking greater engagement with the community.

As has already been noted, individuals are in a constant process of making sense of the world around them; they give it meaning and they interact on the basis of these

meanings (Blumer, 1969). If people perceive of a situation as real, it is real in its consequences and effects in their actions and practices. Even in instances where reality is construed in a way that might be considered "wrong" by common sense standards, erroneous beliefs have real and valid consequences in action. The world of everyday life (including the domain of online communities) constitutes reality for its inhabitants (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). The insiders' view on meaning cannot be readily attained by non-members of a community, who might experience it as strange, or force their own reading on observed phenomena (Schutz, 1967). Only with a grasp of the inner workings, culture and language that is used to communicate within a particular space is a more than rudimentary knowledge of meanings and perspectives fully possible (Hall 1966). Greater comprehension therefore requires understanding language as it is used in particular situations. The use of participant observation benefits the researcher by uncovering and making accessible the meanings (realities) people use to make sense out of their daily lives.

In engaging in participant observation, and coming from an interactionist perspective, it is understood that the researcher approaches the online community with a set of beliefs and ideas about the nature of reality. Through interactions within the community the researcher affects the very construction of meaning which is being studied, while also drawing on personal values (Charon, 1995; Wood & Kroger, 2000). There is therefore a co-construction of meaning.

Participant observation was a very useful way for me to confirm or dislodge my assumptions about interpretations that were being made over the course of the fieldwork. I did this by using themes and categories that were emerging from the textual analysis to start more focused threads and discussions within the forum (for instance on perceptions of criticism, authenticity, relationship between heritage and loyalty etc.). By observing these threads daily, I was able to direct exchanges and bring them back to focus when discussions had drifted off topic. I could also ask follow-up questions based on initial responses. The focused discussions generated in this way were analysed in a similar way to the unsolicited data. Consequently, I was able to fill gaps in knowledge and enrich the overall analytical process. It was also easier for me to "internalize emic meanings, and speak with authority as a member who represents other members of the fan culture" (Kozinets 2012: 133).

Although treated separately, interviews as a way of eliciting data are closely connected to participant observation. A lengthy exchange in response to a post or question asked on the discussion board in the forum for instance could be construed as an interview of sorts.

5.6.3 Interviews

Interviews are a method for capturing the experiences and lived meanings of the subjects' everyday world (Kvale, 1996). Ethnographic interviewing entails establishing "respectful ongoing relationships with interviewees, including enough rapport for there to be a genuine exchange of views and enough time and openness for the interviewees to explore purposefully with the researcher the meanings they place on events in their worlds" (Heyl, 2001:369). It allows the researcher to make sense of the kinds of descriptions and accounts of a topic that are possible, the sorts of judgements they are based on, how varying means of accounting construct varying versions of the subject matter or produce different kinds of truths, and the meaning these versions hold for participants (Wetherell & Potter, 1988).

With regards to the conduct of discourse analysis, data from interviews and other such sources where the researcher plays an active role in eliciting data have been contrasted negatively with data from "naturally occurring" sources (Speer 2002). The argument is that interview data might not be reliable because participants, aware of the research context within which the interview exchange takes place, may not produce the exact same responses they would otherwise. Potter also suggests that "the formulations and assumptions of the researcher" affect the data collection process and ultimately the research outcome (2016:192).

Potter and Hepburn (2005) however highlight the fact that reflexivity on the part of the researcher could go a long way in limiting the "researcher effect" on data collection. This requires a degree of self-awareness - the ability to step back and observe oneself" and how the presence and actions of the researcher influence the situation (Wetherell et al 2001:17). Furthermore, Speer (2002) argues that rather than the researcher deciding what counts as natural or contrived data, it may be more beneficial to assess how the participants in a given conversation "orient to the context and to the influence

of the researcher".

The essence of conducting interviews was to add nuance and fill out any gaps in understanding that ensued from observational and archival data. I selected key informants for the interviews from the online forum based on their level of participation, which was assessed by the number of posts they had on the forum. I also identified forum members who, based on the opinions expressed appeared likely to add depth and richness to the data, or offer interesting perspectives. Members were invited to take part in the interviews via emails sent out on the forum website. Individuals who indicated an interest in participating in the interviews had the option of meeting face-to-face, via skype internet video calls or by mail. All of the respondents however opted for one of the online options. Interview participants were resided mostly in the US, UK, and Canada. Two respondents were based in Europe – one in Prague and the other in the Netherlands. The interview schedule was developed from the themes that were emerging from the unobtrusive observation, and from preconceptions informed by theory, though it remained unstructured to allow for flexibility and changes as might become necessary. The standard of informed consent and the right of the participants to stop the interview at any time was maintained. A total of 14 interviews were conducted, with each interview typically lasting between 45 and 60 minutes.

5.6.4. Semi-structured E-mail Interviews

The research aim is exploratory, seeking to generate descriptive accounts of how music fans make sense of loyalty within online communities. A semi-structured interview design is suitable for this purpose. Semi structured interviews maintain a degree of pre-determined order, while allowing for greater flexibility in the way issues are raised and addressed by the researcher and the interviewee (Longhurst, 2003). Interviews in this case are conducted mainly via email exchanges. E-mail interviews can be seen as a natural extension of participant observation. An important benefit of taking this approach is that it allows time for reflection by both parties, and makes it easier to pick up on interesting bits of information that relate to the research questions, and draw out detailed responses (Hunt & McHale, 2007). An important drawback with conducting interviews via this medium however is that communications only contain text and there is little detail about demeanour, body language and social cues as is the case with face-to-face interaction (Markham, 2003). Also, the interview process is likely to take a

longer period of time to complete, depending on the length of the exchange, and back and forth between the researcher and interviewee. Nonetheless the utility of semi-structured interviews for providing rich, original voices based on which narratives around loyalty within the online community can be drawn remains valid.

A total of 6 e-mail interviews (separate from the 14 noted earlier) were conducted. Respondents who made use of e-mail interviews preferred this medium to face-to-face or video calls. Interviews varied in length, with some respondents giving short answers to questions asked, and others providing lengthier answers to each question. The shortest of these interviews amounted to 4 single-spaced pages, while the longest was 7 pages long on Microsoft word. The email interviews tended to last for weeks in some cases, as respondents replied at their convenience, and follow-up questions were only asked after previous questions had been answered.

The same interview schedule used in the skype interviews was used as a reference to provide prompts during the interview. Over the course of the interviews I noticed the sensitivity of respondents to the use of the word 'obsession'. Although drawn as a category from the earlier analysis done on the forum, respondents seemed to react negatively when asked if they think of themselves as obsessed with U2. Respondents usually refused to answer this question or respond to subsequent questions, essentially bringing the interview to an abrupt end. Presumably this reaction was related to the negative connotations associated with the word, particularly in relation to music fans. Once I noticed the same consistent behaviour across three respondents I started qualifying my use of the word, noting that I was only raising it because it seemed to be used consistently in interactions on the forum, and this seemed to make participants more open to engaging around the term, and respond to subsequent questions.

5.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Although tools and methods of discourse analysis are applied to make sense of the content of talk of online music fans interacting within the U2 community, this study is still essentially an ethnography. The aim of the study is to identify the prevailing resources and discourses within the fan community and highlight the ways these discourses are negotiated and constructed through fans' interactions. Analytic work therefore placed emphasis on action, construction and variability of accounts within the

interactive text of the community (Potter and Wetherell, 1987), but the discourse analytic endeavor was understood and carried out within a broadly ethnographic perspective. While paying attention to fans' awareness and interpretation of their practices related to loyalty, a multiplicity of accounts on how discourses around fan loyalty are "put together" online were sort out, as well as what is accomplished by these constructions (Potter and Wetherell 1987).

5.7.1 Documentation

The data collected for this study is overwhelmingly textual, consisting of online conversations, interviews and field notes. Documenting and managing this data is an important stage of the analytic process since the intensity of engagement with the text means that many analytical insights are produced (Frost, 2011). A transcript "constructs a certain version of the talk or interaction which is to be analysed" (Wetherell et al., 2001:61). This naturally entails some bias towards certain aspects of talk, over the full body of discourse that might be contained in an exchange. The researcher selects out features they think should count as data. The process of collecting and managing data is therefore inherently constructive. The textual format of naturalistic data occurring online, and email interviews reduced some of the labor and cost that would have been involved in transcribing some of the data. Face to face skype interviews had to be transcribed however. The wholly textual nature of online interaction also presents its own set of challenges. Contextual details of the communicative event are embedded in the dialogue. The text contains not just the written words, but also the different dimensions of social interaction (Mann & Stewart, 2000).

Since the focus of the study is partly on meaning which is created through interaction, and jointly constructed within the community, excerpts were presented in sequence as it transpired within the community, with details included verbatim as far as they did not impede on flow, and readability or understanding (Wetherel et al., 2001). Symbols which are specific to online written text, such as emoticons were also included. Particular aspects of talk that had local meaning to the community were explained in context. In the case of interview and participant data, the prompts and input of the interviewer were also included in the transcript. Where visual images are used in addition to written text, as is at times the case in communications in informal online

communities, these were also described, or included as part of the appendix, depending on the assessment of their importance to the particular discourse or construction being considered.

Field notes of ongoing experiences on the forum, and in the research process were kept. Usually, I wrote these notes while online or immediately after spending time in the field for the day. The exercise of keeping these notes, with pointers and reminders of the key players was helpful for maintaining awareness of the nature of social relationships flow of meaning within the community. The simple process of documenting my engagement with the text was also beneficial, as analytical insights began to emerge at this stage.

5.7.2 Initial Reading

The U2 discussion forum is organized, in the first place, into various categories or broad subject areas such as 'general discussions', 'the music', 'lyrics', 'new member introductions', etc. These broad categories contain threads of conversations on diverse topics made up of individual posts. Each thread starts out as a single post and grows as more individual posts are added by different users. In combination with the transcripts from interviews these constitute a large amount of data. My first task was to find a way to sift through all of the data.

Before proceeding to analysis I did an 'initial reading' of the first message of every thread posted on the forum as at February 2016 (Wood & Kroger, 2000). This provided an opportunity to get a feel for what was contained in the interactions. I looked out for references to loyalty or fandom, whether these was implied or stated (Brown et al 2003), and proceeded to read the whole thread when it appeared relevant. At this point I was also on the lookout for themes and repertoires that might emerge from the body of data, while aiming to be as "inclusive" as possible (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). This process was guided by my theoretical interpretation of what was represented, as well as from explicit accounts. Reading through the community archives was vital in gaining a sense of the local culture and the issues relevant to the community (Gill 2000). It also ensured that the emic accounts of fans informed the generation of themes for my analysis.

It is worth noting that prior to settling on U2 as my research context I had spent some

time studying an entirely different music community – the online forum for rock music band No Doubt. The decision to focus on U2 as a research context, after discussion with supervisors, mostly sprang from the fact that U2 remains active in terms of releasing new music, and the band's online community was much larger. In retrospect the time spent focused on No Doubt served as a pilot study of sorts, as it provided me with some experience on how to approach and manage the data from the U2 community. For instance, in contrast with my initial approach to the No Doubt forum, I was more attentive to getting the support of the U2 forum administrator from the outset. By making the administrative team aware of my intentions before interacting with other forum members I easily earned their trust. The administrative team was more open to assuring other forum members on my behalf when enquiries were made to them about the study.

5.7.3 Coding and Categorizing

Both interview transcripts and online texts were coded in the same way. After identifying online texts that involved some form of engagement around the notion of 'loyalty' and 'fandom', an approach similar to grounded theory was used in coding the data (Glaser and Straus, 1967). Procedures recommended by Spiggle (1994) for the analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research was followed in this regard. In the first place, units of data that seemed to be representative of a general phenomenon related to loyalty (e.g. time, obsession, criticism, choice etc.) were labeled accordingly. In this sense, the 'coherent meaning' – the ability of the unit of data to stand on its own was considered. Building on these categorizations, empirically grounded categories were then related to concepts derived from the literature. At this stage, unexpected categories were seen as opportunities to broaden existing preconceptions, or conceive new ones (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Ongoing comparison to explore differences and similarities across incidents within the data, was undertaken, as a means of consolidating minor categories. Glaser and Straus (1967) describe this as the constant comparative method. In this way, attributes and properties of identified categories were fleshed out from the data. The properties represented conceptual dimensions that highlight varying manifestations of the categories or repertoires identified (Spiggle, 1994).

5.7.4. *Specific tools and procedures for analysis*

There are two units of analysis in the current study. These include extracts from threads and interviews consisting of multiple entries in conversations presented in sequence; and individual posts allowed to stand on their own. Extracts from threads were analysed using discourse analysis. The aim in taking this approach was to take advantage of the fine-grained analytic methods afforded by discourse analysis - to capture the meaning making process that contributes to embedding conceptualizations of loyal behaviour as it emerges interactively within the community in focus.

The following specific devices were used in analyzing extracts from threads.

- One way of conducting an analysis is to be guided by content, that is "what participants are talking about" (Wood & Kroger 2000). The aim is not simply one of identifying the content of the text; there is also a concurrent concern with function. The analysis aimed to form 'tentative hypothesis' about the functions of particular features of discourse (Gill 2000). The constructive and functional dimensions of the accounts of fans in relation to the phenomena in focus are explored, and evidence sought in the text (Potter & Wetherell 1987).

- Patterns in the data, in the form of 'variability and consistency' were also observed (Potter and Wetherell 1987). Where there are instances of variation "within or across participants, within or across sections, or within or across occasions", the participants' accounts were relied on for guidance (Wood & Kroger 2000).

- Thematic analysis is an especially interesting tool for organising discourse (Ruiz 2009). It allowed for a focus on the themes or topics around which discourses develop. The choice of themes, the order in which they appear, the relationship between the different themes and how they emerge and are negotiated within the community constituted a key part of the analysis.

- The analysis employed the concept of intertextuality to link the wider social, cultural and institutional context within which discourse takes place to

particular discursive narratives within the fan community (Fairclough 1992). A particular set of discourse conventions implicitly embody certain ideologies or "significations/ constructions of reality" (Fairclough 1992:87). This could, for instance be through fans use of media representations to describe notions of loyalty.

- The analysis was vigilant to the way in which communicative action is shaped by context. As Heritage (1984:242) states, "a speaker's action is context-shaped in that its contribution to an ongoing sequence of actions cannot adequately be understood except by reference to the context- including especially the immediately preceding configuration actions in which it participates". This is the case because 'current' action will itself form the immediate context for some 'next' action in a sequence. A participant in a conversation will either accept or resist a preceding assertion, for instance.

- Footing is the alignment we have to ourselves and others present as expressed in the way we manage the production or reception of an utterance (Goffman 1981). Claiming a certain footing, for example, that one is passing on information from a third party can serve to distance oneself from the reported event and from responsibility (Wood & Kroger 2000).

- Positioning constructs speakers and receivers in particular ways through discursive practices that are at the same time resources through which speakers and hearers can negotiate new positions. "A subject position is a possibility in known forms of talk; position is what is created as the speakers and hearers take themselves up as person (Davies & Harre 1990: 62 cited in Wood & Kroger 2000). By describing a different group as the "other" for instance, members of a community may seek to assume a position in contrast to the said group, and present themselves in a different light.

- Rhetoric analysis embodies a concern with the argumentative organisation of texts, and the different forms used to make them useful (Perelman, 1971). It

emphasises the relationship between opposing argumentative positions. Participants may use rhetoric to make their position more persuasive, in contrast to a different narrative.

- Metaphor is another analytic tool that can be used to reveal participants use of knowledge resources to constitute and construct meaning within a social context (Musolf 2012). Identifying metaphors as there are used in context, and pointing out the function it accomplishes in a discourse is another analytical tool which I will employ.

A hermeneutic interpretive approach was also taken, particularly in analyzing individual posts and quotes. Hermeneutics is a methodological approach that can be applied to analyzing ethnographic qualitative data. Thompson (1997: 441) suggests that

> "a typical feature of hermeneutically oriented marketing research is a methodological statement that the interpretation of textual data proceeds through a series of part-to-whole iterations… (which) engenders a holistic understanding of consumers stories, that is, to articulate the meanings that specific consumption stories have in relationship to a broader narrative of personal history. Because a holistic understanding develops over time."

Thompson also notes that a hermeneutic interpretation reflects a 'fusion of horizons' between the researcher's background knowledge, underlying assumptions and questions of interest; and the texts being interpreted. Arnold and Fischer (1994:64) provide specific considerations for producing a hermeneutic interpretation in consumer research.

- The interpretation must be coherent and free of contradiction. Themes must be documented. Observations should be supported with relevant examples.
- A command of the relevant literature must be evident.
- The interpretation should account for the prior knowledge of the reading audience

- The interpretation should 'enlighten'. It is 'fruitful' in revealing new dimensions of the problem at hand.
- The prose should be persuasive, engaging, interesting, stimulating and appealing.

In writing up the analysis, categories or repertoires are presented along with the function they appear to play within the discourse. The aim is to present the analysis and conclusions in such a way that the reasoning process from data to interpretation can easily be seen by the reader. (Potter & Wetherell 1987). To facilitate this process generous excerpts from transcripts are provided in context. As stated earlier this might be important because often a participants' response can be made meaningful only when it is looked at in light of what is said previously. Chunks of transcript are therefore included to the extent that it is necessary to highlight the particular discourse. Interpretations will attempt to link analytic claims to specific parts of the extract (Potter & Wetherell 1987). In writing up, themes and topics encountered in the literature are revisited as necessary in order to support interpretations. New literatures are also presented as necessary to highlight any findings within the data.

5.8 ETHICAL CONCERNS

Research into online platforms and communities raises certain ethical issues that need to be considered. These issues largely stem from the lack of clarity on whether forum posts, blogs and other communicative acts which are visible and readily accessible on the internet ought to be perceived as 'private' or as content in the public domain (Eynon, Fry, and Schroeder, 2008). Kozinets (2002) suggests that two key questions every researcher is faced with when conducting research online relate to whether online forums are to be seen as a private or a public site, and how the threshold of 'informed consent' is to be ascertained on the internet. Svenningsson Elm (2009) also introduced the idea of 'fuzzy boundaries', which put internet users at risk, since they may not be aware of how public their communicative actions online are. Clear consensus on these issues, and on specific procedures for conducting online ethnographies have not yet emerged. This partly relates to the rapidly evolving nature of communications on the internet. Kozinets (2002) however, urges researchers to fully disclose their presence and intentions to the communities being researched, ensure the confidentiality and

anonymity of informants, seek and incorporate feedback from community members and to exercise caution on the public-private impasse.

Walford (2005) takes the opposing view that efforts to protect the anonymity of community members online are unnecessary because, ultimately the protection provided can easily be circumvented. He notes that statements made online can easily be traced to their source, whether or not pseudonyms are used. Walford's (2005) assertion is valid, especially since a simple search of a quote on a search engine is likely to lead directly to its source, except in the instance that direct quotes are not used. The elimination of direct quotes, however, would defeat the aim of the current study. Other researchers (Langer & Beckman, 2005; Rafaeli & Sudweeks, 1998) are of the opinion that informed consent is implicit in the very act of posting a message on an online public forum, and seeking further consent only serves to take away from the unobtrusive benefits of online research. In their view, informed consent is thus unnecessary. They suggest that strict ethical guidelines make sense in restricted (semi-) private online communications, more so than should be the case with a public forum. Also, considering the embeddedness and normalization of current online communications, it is not out of place to assume that asynchronous chats based on a public forum, using handles and pseudonyms are posted with the knowledge of its public nature. Nonetheless, the ethical standpoint of academic research dictates that all that can be done to protect the group being studied should be done. This entails balancing the need to protect online research participants with the aims of the research.

At the start of the participant observation, I came out as a researcher to the fan community and got the permission of the forum administrator to proceed with the research. The forum administrator was also one of the interview participants. I posted a message on the forum stating that I am a researcher interested in finding out what being a fan of U2 meant to its fans. In order to ensure that participants understood what the research project was about, I also sent a description of my research plans to all fans within the forum using the inbuilt mailing system on the website. I made clear that I would change the usernames of all participants to help protect users' online identities. I invited participants who wanted to know more about the research project or who did not want to be involved to contact me to discuss any problems or fears they might have or to express their wishes to be exempted from being included in the research. Only six

forum members responded in the negative, stating that they did not want their posts to be used, and their wishes have been respected.

5.9 MEMBER CHECKS

Member checks are a means of verifying and confirming the output of a research endeavor. As a mechanism for verification, a member check "incrementally contributes to ensuring reliability and validity and, thus the rigor of a study" (Morse et al., 2002:13). Lincoln and Guba (1982) describe a member check as the process of soliciting the views of research participants on the completed research findings and interpretations of data. Kozinets (2002:9), suggests that, particularly for an online ethnography which in some cases makes use of unsolicited data, member checks present an opportunity for researchers to "obtain and elicit additional, more specific insights into consumer meanings and add the opportunities for added development and error checking".

Some interview participants had already expressed an interest in seeing the final research product. A draft of the three analysis chapters was sent to five of these interview participants (who had originally been drawn from the online forum) asking for their thoughts. At the time of writing three of them had responded. The participants expressed their endorsement of the interpretations, calling it 'interesting' and 'insightful'. One of the participants also suggested that the narrative 'made sense' when she read it and that it seemed liked a 'fair' assessment, although she also suggested more of an emphasis on tour attendance.

5.10 CONCLUSION

This chapter has focused on the research strategy used for the current study, detailing the ontological and epistemological stance, the methods for data collection, and the strategy for analysis of the data collected. The analysis of the data has been spread out across three chapters. Chapter 6, the chapter that follows next highlights the discursive resources employed by fans of U2 in talking about loyalty to the band.

CHAPTER 6

DISCURSIVE RESOURCES FOR LOYALTY

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter laid out the overall research design guiding this enquiry. Over the next three chapters an analysis of the data collected over the course of the research is presented. As noted in the previous chapter, data collection took place mainly through online ethnographic observation and interviews with fans. Taken together, the three analysis chapters present a picture of how fans of U2 construct loyalty and other associated meanings involved in the consumption of the U2 brand. Chapter 6 looks at multiple meanings for loyalty as constructed discursively in the U2 forum, and proceeds to explore some of these meanings for fans. Chapter 7 looks at some core tensions with regards to how loyalty to U2 is expressed, and how these tensions are negotiated within the context of the community. The final analysis chapter contends with why fans go through the trouble of negotiating what it means to be a loyal fan. It focuses on the symbolic meanings fans draw from the U2 brand, as embodied in the stories they share within the community, which represents a deeper and more engaged construction of loyalty to the band. The construction of fan loyalty, and the dividends in brand knowledge that this affords, provides legitimacy for fans to take an active role in the authorship and narration of U2's brand stories and associated meanings and these will be explored in chapter 8.

The current chapter looks at the different notions of loyalty as fans articulate and make sense of the concept on the online forum. The data used draws heavily from extracts on the U2 forum of fans discussing different aspects of their fandom. The online data is supplemented as necessary by interview exchanges and elicited information from participants both on and off the forum. The online space typically provides an avenue for fans to vocalize their positions on a range of issues including identity, the intersection of art and commerce etc. in a natural setting, hence its suitability in this scenario. The online platform provides a space for people (fans/consumers) to negotiate notions of loyalty both in the context of their relationship with U2 and their music, and because U2 can be seen as a mainstream commercial band selling a 'product', more broadly in contemporary consumer society. The music product lies at the heart of the exchange relationship in focus, and so the different perspectives offered by popular music consumption and marketing theory are able to inform our understanding of consumer behaviour and loyalty. To the extent that identity and status is attained and social integration accomplished through consumption of the U2 brand, the online

interactions between fans around U2 present a potent space for exploration and analysis.

This chapter focuses on particular discursive resources that seem to resonate with fans around loyalty. Four discursive resources that were utilized by fans around loyalty were identified from the U2 forum and interviews, including 1) loyalty represented by the time spent as a fan of the band; 2) the notion of obsession; 3) the opposing views of 'loyalty as an obligation' tied to emotions toward the band and 'loyalty as an economic choice' that can be exercised at will, and 4) loyalty ties that stem from fan's and U2's shared Irish heritage. Of these, the use of time and obsession as discursive resources was more prevalent, featuring in multiple threads and individual posts. Constructions of loyalty as an obligation and as a choice; and the use of heritage were less prominent, with the earlier featuring in discussion on two threads within the forum, and the later emerging initially from an interview session. Although loyalty as a word is rarely mentioned in these online exchanges, to the extent that fandom can be seen as a heightened expression of loyalty, the same meanings are being communicated. As highlighted in Chapter 2, fandom represents a highly engaged, intense, and productive form of consumption. It is here constructed as a heightened expression of loyalty irrespective of the type of brand being considered, in the sense that it encompasses repeated purchases (behavioural loyalty), positive feelings towards the brand (attitudinal loyalty) and engagement. 'Fan' serves as a means of capturing the richness of consumers' experiences and practices in their relationships with particular brands. Using discourse analysis, I consider the ways in which fans use these different resources to construct loyalty. An initial finding in this chapter is that loyalty is an ambiguous and complex concept that holds multiple subjective meanings for fans.

Table 3: Discursive Resources for Loyalty in U2 Forum and Interviews

Discursive Resources for Loyalty		*Variant*	*What it allows fans achieve*	*Example*	*Frequency*
Time	a	Asserting real fan status	Allows longstanding fans to position themselves as real fans on account of the length of their fandom, compared with recent fans.	**Tumbling Dice-** I think length of devotion is an important qualification to being a REAL FAN. I'd say that fandom stretching back to the 1980's is a good indicator of REAL FAN status. Not that being a Johnny or Jilly Come Lately can't *necessarily* be a REAL FAN, it's just that they'll likely be treated with some suspicion by us more longstanding and experienced REAL FANS. You see, we feel a kinship for having made the journey together through all the good times and the not-so-good times.	7

	b	Claims to cultural capital and connoisseur status	Allows longstanding fans to position themselves as having accumulated experience and cultural capital on account of the length of their fandom, compared with recent fans.	**Daniel**- I don't know how important it (time) is, but I can say that because I was able to witness the band in their prime it probably adds a little more weight in how good they are now vs their prime years. The last few U2 tours, while good, are not even close to the earlier tours in terms of the bands performance.	11
	c	Taking a defensive position when being critical	Allows fans to forestall claims from other fans that criticism is only being made because the speaker is not a 'real' fan.	**Vegas Patrick**: Here's what I hope, as a fan of the band for 25 years: If you don't really like this song at this point (which I don't), I hope you don't get castigated for expressing that opinion on this forum.	24
	d	Routine process of socialization	Offer up justification for belonging in the forum since they have been fans for such a long time.	**Jenny** - I'm Jenny from Minnesota. I should have probably been on this forum a long time ago. I've been a U2 fan since 1983, when I saw them perform Sunday Bloody Sunday at the US festival on TV.	158
Obsession	e	Financial expenditure	Allows fans to make loyalty claims on account of their purchases.	**Mariamontrea**l - I'm someone who has bought, sold, downloaded, and bought again every U2 album. I'm someone who knows the location and price of every U2 CD and U2-related item within a 100-mile area of where he lives. Obsessed? Not much.	63
	f	Collecting behaviour	Allows fans to construct fandom and loyalty as it relates to the size of their record and memorabilia collection.	**Sarah** - Ever since I came across Rattle and Hum, I have been not only a fan but obsessed. I collect anything I can that is U2 related.	22
Obligation	g	Bound by emotional ties	Allows fans to assert loyalty borne of emotional ties to the band.	**Olimar** - Announcing that the tour is going to be made up of pairs of shows, each distinctly different from the other, makes it almost essential for a fan to attend two consecutive nights, for fear of effectively missing half of the show.	4
Choice	i	Asserting rights and choices as consumers	Allows fans to emphasize their freedom of choice as consumers.	**Jeany13** - Um...you don't HAVE to go to a U2 concert. Really, it's okay if you don't. (By the way, I thought the prices were steep, as well, for those of us who want to go for a pair of nights. But the price of the tickets is not my decision. Whether to purchase those tickets at the price offered IS my decision.)	5
Heritage	l	Asserting Irish link	Allows fans to make links between their Irish heritage and loyalty.	**Riffraff** - I am proud to be a full half-Irish, and yes, I think it makes me feel more a part of U2 fandom.	1

6.2 TIME AND LOYALTY

Fans use the length of time a person has been a fan of U2, and engaged with the community, as a discursive resource for constructing loyalty. This takes different forms as listed from a. to d. in Table 3. Time is used as a means of asserting 'real' fan status, making claims to cultural capital, taking a defensive position when being critical of the band, and as part of the routine process of socialization. These are discussed further below.

6.2.1 Time as a Fan and Realness

Extract 1

Briscoteque – over — How do you know if you are a REAL fan??? There's so much confusion these days what constitutes a REAL FAN™.

Marsgirl- — I love the music. Isn't that enough?

Ayajedi - — Of course I'm a real fan of U2. And so is anyone else who loves their music. You do not have to be 'obsessed' with them and collect everything that appears with their name on it, you may not have ever seen them live, you may only like 80's U2, or 90's U2, or everything since 2000 and don't care for their earlier stuff.

If listening to some or all of U2's music gives you great pleasure, you are fan! End of.

Drowning Man – Is 30 years of loving the band enough to get me in? I think I am a real fan. (and no one is going to tell me I'm not).

Tumbling Dice- I think length of devotion is an important qualification to being a REAL FAN.

I'd say that fandom stretching back to the 1980's is a good indicator of REAL FAN status. Not that being a JohnnyorJillyComeLately can't *necessarily* be a REAL FAN, it's just that they'll likely be treated with some suspicion by us more longstanding and experienced REAL FANS. You see, we feel a kinship for having made the journey together through all the good times and the not-so-good times. **(forum.atu2.com: on: April 03, 2011)**

In the exchange above fans are engaged in a debate about what it means to be a fan of the band. Briscoteque's use of the word 'real' before 'fan' seems to suggest a belief that there is such a thing as a fan who might not be a real or genuine fan. By expressing his thoughts on 'real' fans, Briscoteque thus introduces the notion of social categories of fans. He expresses confusion about what exactly a 'real' U2 fan is. *Real fan* in capital letters, hyphenated with the trademark symbol, seems to be a way of denoting and contrasting fans that are accepted as meeting some sort of criteria acknowledged by those in a position to know or be aware from fans who do not meet such criteria. The two types of fans are contrasted to emphasize difference, and a state of fandom which should be preferred in relation to the other. The trademark symbol could also represent a type of fan sanctioned by the market, with emphasis on expenditure on U2, versus a kind of fandom that emerges from organic or authentic emotions towards the band, and therefore goes beyond moneys spent. The trademark symbol could also represent an attempt to articulate a stereotypical view of who a U2 fan should be, how they should behave or what they should know to be considered a real fan of the band. In any case,

Briscoteque's question raises the notion that defining fandom and loyalty, even within the same community of fans is problematic, and interaction with other fans is necessary to come to a shared sense and definition of what it means to be a fan, outside of what traditional marketing discourse might consider.

Marsgirl starts the process of co-constructing loyalty and fandom within the exchange by enquiring if a love for the band's music is not sufficient to be considered a real fan. Ayajedi makes reference to other ways fandom is constructed in the community which will be looked at in the next section, including obsession and collecting behaviour. She also believes that loving U2's music is enough reason to be considered a fan. At the point where Drowning Man enquires if '30 years of loving the band is enough', time is evoked as a discursive resource for constructing loyalty. Tumbling Dice picks up on this and builds on it. Her opinion seems to be presented with an air of authority that is missing from the preceding comments as she asserts that 'length of devotion is an important qualification to being a real fan'. She also goes on to expand on this position by confirming that 'JohnnyorJillyComeLately' (colloquial description of a new or recent fan) is likely to attract suspicion from older fans like herself who have been with the band since the 80's. By so doing, she positions herself and other fans like her, as real fans, because they have bonded through thick and thin over the course of their fandom. She also constructs recent fans as casual and needing to prove themselves further to be taken seriously by fans who have remained with the band for much longer. Labelling newer fans Johnny (for male) or Jilly (for female) come lately – terms which some might interpret as derogatory (Johnny just come or JJC is traditionally used to refer to African immigrants arriving in a Western country like England for the first time) - performs the function of establishing difference between what the speaker sees as two different groups of fans – real (longstanding) versus recent fans. It also allows the speaker to say something about both groups. Newer members are 'suspicious' and need to earn their stripes, while older members are 'experienced' and have stayed with the band through good and bad.

Tumbling Dice's comment is an example of a classic othering technique, a means of establishing difference and hierarchy. Othering is the process of categorizing an individual or group of people as 'not one of us' (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). It provides a means of dismissing others as less, in this case less worthy of trust, respect, or fan status.

The process of othering emerges from a need to define groups with which we identify with. People within the 'in group' are more likely to share the perspective of the person making such a definition. Seeking out others 'like you' breeds a stronger connection and sense of allegiance to those within the group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Levi-Straus (1955/1992) suggests that there are two strategies for dealing with the Other – they can be assimilated by the group, thus removing any boundaries; or they can be excluded through the erection of boundaries as a means of isolating the other. In this scenario the length of time as a fan is one such boundary used to categorize some fans as 'real fans'. Time therefore operates as its own currency within this community, to the extent that it establishes the realness and authenticity of the fan. The currency of time cannot be supplied simply by purchasing the band's music and merchandise. It has to be earned.

This exchange illustrates the co-construction of meaning in an online setting as Marsgirl, Briscoteque, Ayajedi and Tumbling Dice debate and negotiate understandings of what it means to be a loyal fan of U2 within the community. The length of time as a fan of U2 is used to position some fans as more invested than other 'casual' fans, and this also affects the interactions within the community as a whole. For example, in another extract drawn from the interview sessions, Diane expresses her frustrations about the use of time within the community.

> I felt like when I was there on the forum and I was younger, I think I was the youngest member on the forum, and I kind of had the feeling, the vibe from some people that, you know, you've just been a fan for like a year. We are bigger fans because we know them from like redrocks, and we saw the tours, and I'm like, sorry I wasn't born earlier. They did not tell me this directly but it's just like a vibe they were giving me. (Skype interview, February 27, 2016)

Although not expressed overtly to her, Diane feels that fans who have followed the band for much longer (since the 1980's) compared to her who at that point had only been a fan for a year, perceived themselves to be 'bigger' fans than her. Time is thus seen to not only be a constructive device for the depth of loyalty, but is also used to structure relations within the community. In their study on the punk subculture, Widdicombe and Woofit (1990) show how distinctions are drawn between recent members of the subculture and those who have had a longer involvement in the culture.

They found that later members of the subculture are subordinated in relation to older members. To accomplish this, older members label the new members or draw attention to the superficial motivations that make them join. Larsson (2013) also found similar results within the heavy metal culture that formed the focus of her study. In both these cases, the time the individual member had been involved in the culture had a direct effect on the level of status and accumulated cultural capital attributed to the member as a result (Bourdieu, 1986). While status and authenticity certainly play a role in this case, I would argue that the notion of loyalty is also being claimed through time. In order to provide evidence of the strength of their commitment and loyalty to the band, fans make reference to the length of time they have been invested in the same band.

6.2.2 Time and Cultural Capital

Another way of emphasizing time as a constructive device for loyalty relates to the claims some fans make to the role of connoisseur and gatekeeper (access to the right to assert opinions) with regards to the quality of the band's music and other issues relating to the band. Daniel alludes to this in the interview quote below.

> I don't know how important it is, but I can say that because I was able to witness the band in their prime it probably adds a little more weight in how good they are now vs their prime years. The last few U2 tours, while good, are not even close to the earlier tours in terms of the bands performance. Listen to One from the last tour and then listen to that Tacoma show from Zoo TV. Night and day difference. (Email interview, March 4, 2016)

Responding to how important he thinks length of time is within the U2 forum, Daniel suggests that his long term engagement with the band has positioned him to witness the band during an era when he considers U2 to have been at their prime, compared to their current state. By drawing on the fact that he was a fan of U2 at an earlier point in their career and is still a fan currently, he constructs himself as having accumulated experience and cultural capital in the U2 brand, and as knowledgeable enough to make such a comparison, something that, in his view, a recent fan might be unable to do. Fans have been found to act as gatekeepers of sorts. In this position they try to argue for a view of the fan object which is perceived to be the best, and set arbitrary standards for what the artists' best work is (Robinson and Price, 2015). The same can be said to be

happening in this scenario, and the length of time fans have invested in the band is a tool they use in exercising the discretionary right to curate U2's cultural output. In a way, this also relates to older fans' perceptions of themselves as informed and more experienced than newer fans. O'Reilly et al (2017) explore the ways consumption communities remember their pasts. A key theme in their paper is that remembering involves the active construction of heritage, part of which involves "originating and re-adopting scripts, symbols, and materials/objects/artefacts which are selected, or synthesized, and then gathered and curated to form the output of a collective memory produced from the collected memories of community members." The use of time within the U2 forum can be read as an instance of this. Time as a resource confers the right on some fans in the community to partake in remembering the band's heritage. Time invested in the band is used as a device to control and dictate what cultural artefact or products (songs, albums, concerts, performances etc.) resonate or should resonate with other fans. This point draws attention to yet another function time performs in the construction of loyalty.

6.2.3 Time and Criticism

The length of time as a fan is used to add heft to opinions expressed within the community, especially when those opinions take a critical position against the band and their music. The reason for doing this is to forestall claims from other fans that the criticism is only being made because the speaker is not a 'real' fan of the band.

Extract 2

VegasPatrick- Here's what I hope, as a fan of the band for 25 years:
If you don't really like this song at this point (which I don't), I hope you don't get castigated for expressing that opinion on this forum.

You shouldn't have to like everything the band puts out in order to be considered a fan of the band. If you really do like everything the band has put out, that's fantastic. I love probably 95 percent of their catalog, maybe more. And I've invested way more money and time into U2 than into any other entertainment outlet in my 40 years on this planet. In fact, if you combined the moneys I'd spent on every other musician/band in my lifetime, be it for albums/CDs/MP3s/Itunes, concerts, travel, books, posters, T-shirts, web site membership, etc., that amount would still be miles short of what I've spent to feed my U2 craving. It's not even close. **(forum.atu2.com: on: January 20, 2009)**

In the extract above, Vegas Patrick is responding to the backlash from some fans over a critical opinion about a song that he shared on the forum. With the opening gambit about being a fan of the band for over 25 years, he invokes time he has been a fan to

construct and legitimate his loyalty to U2. Employing this strategy achieves two goals. Firstly, the speaker draws on the authenticity of his relationship with the band, showing that his criticism is not made lightly, but rather is based on the reflection and knowledge afforded him by the length of his fandom. He also indicates that his views come from a place of genuine care and concern, love if you like; and seems to be disappointed that it has been interpreted negatively by other fans. Time is therefore used to stave off suspicions of other fans as to what his intentions might be, and to take a defensive position against further complaints. Later in the exchange he explicitly notes that 'he has invested way more *money* and *time* into U2 than any other entertainment outlet." By doing this he gives the length of time he has been a fan equal weight with his financial investments which he goes on to list. Whereas the traditional behavioural view of brand loyalty would consider these monies spent on concerts and merchandise to be a sufficient indicator of loyalty to U2, the time invested in the brand is here, given equal value as far as the consumer is concerned, if not more. The previous use of the trademark symbol to demarcate recent fans from real fans might indicate that money spent on the band is no replacement for the emotions and passion invested through time in U2 as far as this community is concerned.

6.2.4 Time and Socialization

Fans also make use of the time argument as part of the routine process of socialization within the community. In the following three excerpts it is clear that time plays a role in the introductory pleasantries that fans use to interact on the forum.

Extract 3

Bowman - Hi everyone, I registered here more than a year ago but never really took the time to actually post. I finally thought to myself, "What am I doing just lurking in the shadows?" That's what brought me back to the forum.!

So, anyways, I am only 17 years old but I've been a U2 fan for as long as I can remember. My earliest memories of listening to music were hearing Achtung Baby and ATYCLB in the car as a young child.
My dad became a fan as long ago as Boy and though he only has casual interest in U2 today, he still grew up with their music and introduced me to the 4 Irish lads at a young age. !

So, I suppose maybe I was bred to be a fan. I started to dive deep into their music a few years ago, maybe even deeper than my dad ever did, and I am sadly the only 17-year-old I know of who even cares about U2. **(forum.atu2.com: on: November 28, 2015)**

Extract 4

Bob - My name is Robert (Bob) from a little town in Oregon state called Sandy, I've been a

fan of the Irish Fab Four since the age of 7 in 1987 when a U2 fan introduced me to the band thru the brand-new U2 album (at the time) *The Joshua Tree*. He gave me his cassette copy a couple of months later on the actual day I turned 7. Been listening to them ever since, and at this time I'm amazed it's been 30 years of both my fandom and that record. **(forum.atu2.com: on: February 3, 2017)**

Extract 5

Jenny - I'm Jenny from Minnesota. I should have probably been on this forum a long time ago. I've been a U2 fan since 1983, when I saw them perform Sunday Bloody Sunday at the US festival on TV. After that I became pretty obsessed with them. I had a collage that covered one wall of my bedroom that was hundreds of pictures of the band all stuck together with peace signs and stuff. **(forum.atu2.com: on: January 15, 2017)**

In extract (1) above, Bowman's claims that U2 have been a part of his life 'for as long as he can remember', stretching back to his earliest childhood memories is constructed so as to indicate the taken for granted nature of his relationship with the band. Since he claims that he was introduced to U2 as a child by his dad, he emphasizes the fact that most of his life has been spent as a fan of U2. In his own words he "was bred to be a fan". His commitment to the band is thus narrated as a natural, uncomplicated, basic truth. By implication, he did not have a choice in the matter in so far as he was socialized into being a loyal fan by his father. He can also be said to be making claims to a sort of hereditary fandom, or fandom that stretches back in time to a period before he was born. Woermann and Rokka (2015) note that time can be experienced in different ways as it relates to consumption practices. On the one hand time can be perceived as the objective, universal measure of the duration of an activity as it unfolds in the general physical world. On the other hand, time can be seen as a subjective and internalized perception, based on individual mental processes as anticipated by personal timestyles. Time can also be considered "in action, as it unfolds in the consumers' experience of concrete, lived through moments" (Woermann and Rokka 2015: 1488). In this sense, perception of time is considered as a feature of the consumption practices that individuals are engaged in. It can be argued that Bowman, by making the assertion that his father 'became a fan as long ago as Boy' (U2's debut album, released in 1980), is attempting to transgress an objective experience of time, and claim an inherited fandom of U2 that traces back to his father's relationship with the band. Bowman's perception of the length of his relationship with U2 is thus constructed as foregoing the limits of his seventeen years of age, in so far as his fandom has been handed down from his father and predates his own direct experience with the band. Similarly, Bob and Jenny assert the depth of their fandom by applying a time logic, using the length of their fandom to tell their life stories. There are two immediate functional effects of

employing the use of time in these examples. First they assert their loyalty and consequently offer up justification for belonging in the forum since they have been fans for such a long time. Secondly, time is a tool for establishing the depth of their allegiance. They are implicitly saying that the longer they have been a fan, and engaged with the band, the more authentic, and genuine their relationship is with U2.

The continuing relations to U2 and their music being claimed through time by individual fans tend to be of a very personal nature, acting like badges or an embodiment of accomplishment and investment in relation to U2. They are used by fans to narrate and capture their unique and individual relationships with the band, and are infused with emotion, passion and deep meanings. Within the group time is used to make warranting claims with regards to ascribed respect, status, authenticity, and genuine love for the band. It also confers authority in terms of which opinions are elevated within the group.

6.3 OBSESSION AND LOYALTY

Also related to fandom is the use of obsession as a discursive resource for loyalty within the U2 forum. Fans frequently made use of obsession to describe their relationship with U2, although with varying meanings depending on who uses the term and in what context the term is used. Fans take different positions in relation to the notion of being obsessed as they individually try to make sense of the nature of their relationship with the band and what it entails, or should entail. Some fans take pride in their 'obsession' with the band and see it as a reflection of the extent of their fandom and loyalty. For some other fans however, obsession is a label to be avoided because of the perceived parasocial underpinnings. This relates to the tendency for obsession to be viewed in pathological terms, as can be seen in traditional views of fandom (Duffet, 2014). Jenson (1992) notes that obsession was typically seen as a description of deviant and excessive behaviour expressed towards low cultural forms. Fans were often represented as individuals engaging in artificial relations with celebrities in order to compensate for a lack of real social relations. The pathological fan was seen as an obsessed loner engaging in fantasy relations with celebrity figures, and as an irrational and passive victim of the machinations of the media (Jenson, 1992). Shuker (2016) suggests that although academic scholarship has gone on to emphasize a less stereotypical image of fans, these representations of fans as obsessed remain prevalent in popular discourse.

These stereotypes also inform the behaviours of some of U2's fans with regards to the discursive resource of obsession.

Claims to obsession are also dependent on the evidence used to defend such claims. Some of the ways in which fans provide such evidence include drawing parallels between obsession and money spent in engaging their fandom, collecting behaviour and frequency of activity on the forum. There were several threads in the forums that clearly contextualized the debate surrounding fandom, loyalty and obsession. One thread in particular clearly highlights the range of perspectives of participants.

Extract 6

Luieu2 -	are you all obsessed like me, i cant go a day without listening to u2
Evil Bono -	Yup!
Sydney_	After telling her all about my CD's, DVDs, LPs, bootlegs, books, Singles, remastered editions, T-shirts, Forum posts, concert attendances and photos, my psychotherapist reckons I'm totally obsessed. I say, I just like 'em a lot
StrongGirl -	Ummm, check the number of posts I have here. That should tell you my answer
Mariamontreal -	completely, totally, shamefully, shamelessly, unambiguously obsessed. For 20 years
Starfish -	Obsessed within reason, if such thing is possible.
Aburrow -	That's a strong word. I would say I have a very close connection with them and the music that I truly enjoy, and I get a nice feeling when I listen to their music, see them, & hear about them. I have a strong sense of understanding what they are made of and what they stand for. The connection happened since I first heard them in 1979 and I still feel the same today. Are they my favourite band? ABSOLUTELY. The word obsessed is creepy, although I know you mean it in a good way. I interpret it in my way.
Mariamontreal -	I'm someone who scoured every record and book shop in Dallas-Fort Worth for weeks looking for any sign of the Vertigo CD single (finally found it, after purchasing the 45 RPM single from my local bookseller). I'm someone who spent big money (well, bigger than your average CD price) importing the LP of Atomic Bomb from England. Who bought a turntable for the EXPRESS PURPOSE of playing Atomic Bomb on it. I'm someone who paid $100 for "U2 & I." I'm someone who's purchased 2 guitars to simply learn a few U2 riffs (the WOWY bassline is extraordinarily easy!). I'm someone who has bought, sold, downloaded, and bought again every U2 album. I'm someone who knows the location and price of every U2 CD and U2-related item within a 100-mile area of where he lives. Obsessed? Not much.
NothernStar -	I think I was more obsessed in my early days of U2 fandom (I've been a fan for 26 years) when I HAD to have everything that had anything to do with them. Now I have a much more "comfortable" relationship with them, I don't need every magazine they are in and I certainly don't buy every version of songs that are released and I don't listen to their music every day. But I am no less a fan nowadays and my excitement at the thought of the new album is as strong as ever.

StrongGirl - I feel the same way Northern Star. It's like a marriage. After 26 years, it changes. That doesn't mean it's not just as good!

Starfish - I like that comparison. Well put Girl!

U2yooper - Hmm, that marriage comparison is a good one. You're over the infatuation, you accept their flaws and still love them. And if every time isn't fireworks, that's okay there's always another... album.

Bloom - Yeah, I like the marriage comparison too, even though I'm not married! I think I might not quite be through the honeymoon stage yet though... But I have to say that what I've come to appreciate about U2 is that even after pretty much listening to them most days for the last eight years or so, reading the books, watching the videos, etc., I STILL have moments where they can blow my mind - and it can be anything, a part of a song or a moment in a concert that I've probably heard hundreds of times before! Weird.

You get more comfortable and familiar and relaxed about your fandom, but you don't ever get sick of them. I guess that's a lot like what you hope for in a partner! This all reminds me of something Matt McGee said, I think it was in one of those interviews on the U2 Diary blog, that I really liked, where he summed up when he truly became a U2 fan by saying that was "when I stopped dating other bands". (Hope I haven't misquoted!) I feel kind of like that - I love lots of other bands and listen to lots of other music, but nothing GETS me on quite that same level that U2 get me. **(forum.atu2.com: on: January 7, 2009)**

The use of obsession as a discursive resource can be seen in the extract above. In the opening post Luiuz declares himself to be obsessed with U2, on account of the frequency with which he listens to their music. His use of the term seems to carry no negative connotations, and leaves room for other fans to articulate the meanings that the word conjures for them.

Sydney begins to construct and come to terms with obsession as related to his investments in the band. He presents what he describes as the view of his psychotherapist that money spent on CD's, DVD's, singles etc. indicate his state of obsession with the band. The fact that the person identified here is a psychotherapist is significant, in that they are professionally qualified to spot 'obsessive' behaviour. It can thus be seen as a reference to the perceived 'abnormality' of fan obsessions (Duffet, 2014). By presenting this fact as reported speech however, he paints it as someone else's reading of his investments in U2. The psychotherapist in this scenario, could represent any other outsider looking in, a non-fan for instance, and any other person who is not in a position to understand his bond with the artist. He later uses the qualifying 'I' to frame his substantial investments in U2 in a normative sense, noting

that he ‘just likes them a lot’.

StrongGirl, by making reference to the number of posts she has made on the forum seems to be using obsession as a metaphor for the level of engagement and participation within the forum itself. The implication seems to be that the more active the fan is on the forum, the more obsessed and therefore the more loyal they are. Mariamontreal claims the obsessed label ‘completely, totally and unambiguously’. By suggesting that he is obsessed ‘within reason’ however, Starfish starts to put up boundaries to the level of engagement with the band that might be seen as reasonable and implies that within certain as yet unstated limits, it is ok to be obsessed. Aburrow explicitly states that ‘obsessed’ is a strong word, thus demonstrating her awareness of the often negative, potentially stigmatizing and pathological use of the word ‘obsession’ within the context of fandom (Jenson 1992). She goes on to describe her relationship with the band in terms she is more at ease with – “a very close connection”, and “a strong sense of understanding of what they stand for”. By so doing she attempts to navigate away from being categorized as obsessed entirely.

Mariamontreal sarcastically makes her U2 obsession visible by detailing the ‘big money’ spent on music and merchandise as well as the depth of her investment in the band. Northern Star keeps with this view by using a historical framing to construct her past fandom as obsessive because she was dedicated to ‘buying everything that had anything to do with U2’. She uses this past experience to legitimate her current ‘comfortable’ relationship with the band where she does not have to buy everything that relates to the band to assert her fandom. She also constructs fandom and loyalty not as situated in purchase, but rather as steeped in her state of mind about the band which remains ‘strong as ever’.

Subsequently in the exchange, participants use the notion of marriage as a metaphor for their on-going long-term relationship with U2. Stronggirl uses a lengthy marriage to capture the highs and lows of a loyal relationship which nonetheless remains worthwhile. By comparing the relationship with U2 to a marriage, participants co-construct loyalty as a fluid, constantly changing relationship that goes from periods of ‘infatuation’ and ‘fireworks’ to periods of minimal to no financial investment, which nonetheless remain grounded in love. After suggesting that “you get more comfortable,

familiar and relaxed about your fandom" similar to a marriage, Bloom points to the critical moment she truly became a fan, characterizing it as a relationship that progresses from 'dates' to something more 'serious' and intimate with U2, the band that 'gets' her (emphasized in capital letters) most compared to other bands, thus confirming Fournier's (1997) view of brands as relationship partners. One of the often highlighted criticisms of the relationship perspective to brand loyalty is that no person in their right mind would be in a relationship with an inanimate brand, even when that brand has been imbued with human like qualities (Patterson and O'Malley, 2006). In this case however the brand in question is a human brand. Interestingly, in the exchange above Bloom does not only anthropomorphize the brand, but also presents a band (made up of a group of 4 people) as a single unit/ person. There has been pervasive use of anthropomorphism in the marketing literature in discussing issues related to brand personality (Aaker, 1997), brand identity (Schmitt, Simonson and Marcus, 1995) and consumer-brand relationships (Fournier, 1997). Images of other humans have also been anthropomorphised (Belk, 2014). Real and fictional characters are used as alter egos onto which consumers project themselves. Celebrities and public figures are anthropomorphised as characters that can be emulated in the pursuit of identity ideals, and advertisers have been adept at taking advantage of this fact (McCracken, 1989). However, the complexities of anthropomorphising a single brand consisting of multiple human entities has yet to be engaged with. U2 fans seem to be able to move effortlessly from focusing on individual identities of band members, to the collective identity of the band. This highlights the ease with which consumers are able to draw on and embody diverse identities in the construction of the self.

By comparing their relationship with U2 to a marriage, a parasocial relation is implicated as the band is not personally familiar with its fans. The fans above obviously have strong feelings about the band and talk about them with familiarity, although the band members most likely do not know them personally. While it might be tempting to mock these representations as delusional, in today's highly connected landscape within which fans can connect directly with celebrities online, it could also be argued that perceived familiarity is not far from reality.

Obsession seems to highlight the intensity and level of engagement that fans have with U2 and their music. The heart of the debate can be understood in relation to what is at

stake for participants – the perceived defining qualities and attributes of fandom and loyalty in relation to the b®and in focus. Loyalty claims and obsession are linked to the evidence used to support it – active participation on the forum, and expenditure on the band, or not. Whereas some fans are at ease with describing themselves or being described as obsessed, others recoil at being categorized that way. Also, while some fans view expenditure on the band as a prerequisite for a loyal relationship, other participants argue in favor of a broader definition of fandom that is grounded in feelings about the band, rather than how much is spent on them.

Although obsession features prominently as a discursive resource within the forum, with some participants proudly declaring themselves as obsessed with U2, during the interviews participants consistently tended to avoid being described in those terms with some going as far as ending email interviews and holding back responses at the use of the word, even where the same participants had expressed comfort with the term on the forum. What this suggests is that what might be seen as acceptable within the shared safe space of the forum and with other fans might be interpreted differently if used by someone seen as an outsider looking in. This is in line with the findings of Kozinets (2001) with regards to the responses of Star Trek fans to the stigmatizing identity typically associated with the show. Katie, who I pressed on why this might be the case noted: "It just has a negative tinge because it implies that you' re blinded or interested at the expense of other things because that's all you want (Skype interview, November 5, 2016).

Another way in which participants repeatedly navigated the notion of obsession was by framing their obsession with U2 as a previous variation of their fandom which they have currently outgrown.

> I would say I used to be (obsessed) but I'm not right now. I was more into them when I was younger during the teenage years but I'm not right now. I would call myself a big fan, but I won't call myself obsessed (Anna Skype interview, February 27, 2016).

The tendency to steer clear of obsession, particularly outside of the forum does not come as a surprise. Though to a far lesser extent in recent times, and more commonly with particular fandoms than others, there has always been a shame or stigma attached

to obsessive behaviour in fandom (Larsen, 2017; Duffet, 2014). Mass culture fans were labeled as 'passive consumers', 'infantilized', 'alienated'. Explanations for fandom focused on the psychological shortcomings of participants or their social inadequacies. In fact, it was these labels that drove fans to communities where they had the freedom to express their enjoyment for various forms of content without feeling stigmatized (Sesek and Pusnik, 2014; Kozinets, 2001). Online outlets like the U2 forum, can therefore be seen as a safe space to express 'obsession' and bond with likeminded fans, away from the judgmental gaze of society, and might explain the reluctance of some fans to be associated with the term in relation to loyalty both within and outside the forum. However, it could also be argued that even within the safe space the forum provides, there is some amount of judgement (or at least tension) around using the term 'obsession', so traces of that stigma still remain.

The interactions around obsession highlight the ambiguity around loyalty in relation to purchase and fandom. The fluid and complex relationship fans share with brands to which they are attached is also on display. Although the link between obsession as a discursive resource and financial expenditure on the band can be seen to agree with some of the dominant views on loyalty, particularly from the behavioural perspective with its focus on purchases, these dominant views do not allow for the sort of nuance and context bound understanding with regards to meaning that participants have drawn on in the interactions. While some participants have framed their loyalty and fandom in terms of their financial expenditure on the band, others are not necessarily bound by those terms, and use other non-economic metrics – their understanding of what the band stands for, a close connection with the band, active participation within the forum etc. to construct their fandom and loyalty to U2.

6.4 OBSESSION AND COLLECTING BEHAVIOUR

Participants also draw on the discourse of obsession in making sense of collecting behaviour. In the following interaction, fans construct fandom and loyalty as it relates to the size of their record and memorabilia collection.

Extract 7

Sarah - I have been a U2 fan for 18 years - Sheesh, after doing that math I feel old!
Ever since I came across Rattle and Hum, I have been not only a fan but obsessed.

I collect anything I can that is U2 related. Even down to a few years ago my hubby gifted me a copy of U2-3! I cried when I opened it!

God Pt2- I have substantial mp3s of ultra-rare tracks, live tracks and unauthorized remixes; leaving those out of the list and going only with physical CDs that I own, the list is as follows:,,,,,,,,,…[Long list of record collection]

Nielson - I own 10 U2 albums, U2 by U2 and Bono On Bono. My U2 possessions are dwarfs compared with you guys

Boom Cha! - Mine too Nielsen but that doesn't make us any less of a fan! Hold your head up high!

Kev446- I kneel at the altar of your collection, GP2. You are some kind of completist geek, aren't you? (And I mean that in the nicest way possible!) **(forum.atu2.com: on: January 11, 2009)**

In the opening post, Sarah states that she is obsessed with U2, and as evidence for this she claims that she 'collects anything she can that is U2 related. At the point she makes this assertion she constructs collecting behaviour as a discursive resource for fandom, and by extension for loyalty. God Pt2 also declares that he has a substantial collection dedicated to U2 before going on to provide a long list of the content of his collection. Nielson expresses sentiments of feeling like a lesser fan since his collection is not nearly as large as those of the other fans. Boom Cha! however asserts that the size of one's collection does not make one any less of a fan. Some of the motivations for collecting behaviour have previously been explored in depth by Belk (2001:67), who views collecting as 'the process of actively, selectively and passionately acquiring things removed from ordinary use and perceived as part of a set of non-identical objects or experiences.'. More appropriately for record collecting, Shukur (2010:7) distinguished three coexisting modes of collecting - souvenir collecting, where the individual 'creates a romantic life history by selecting and arranging personal memorial material to create …an object autobiography', fetishistic collecting where the objects create the self of the collector, hence the need to collect as many items as possible, and systematic collecting where emphasis is placed on completeness of the collection. Shukur (2010:7) notes that each of this collecting modes is represented among record collectors with varying emphasis on "accumulation, completism, discrimination and connoisseurship". Collecting behaviour might be one way of explaining purchase loyalty towards the band as it ties in with the need for fans to keep a physical representation of their passion for the band/brand. It also provides material for showing off to other forum members as expressions of their passion. These collections and memorabilia also serve as material to further bond with other members of the community as seems to be the case in the example above.

Record and memorabilia collections do "not only embody personal history, they also represent the original historical artefact: how the vinyl single, EP, LP was originally recorded, and therefore the form in which it should be listened to" (Shukur, 2010:65). This appears to be just as prevalent among U2 fans. George describes:

> I want to have an **original** copy of every U2 track in its cleanest form. This means that if the track is available on CD, I want that. If it is not, then I must have the vinyl or cassette version. I don't really play those. Instead, I will obtain, somehow, a digital version of that track, but I must own the original item. I actually bought a turntable just to play the various U2 items I have bought.
>
> As my collection rule goes, I have no interest in alternate artwork or anything like that. It's all about the music - having a real copy of every track. (**forum.atu2.com: on: January 23, 2009)**

Thus collecting and sharing classic band memorabilia allows U2 fans to display their sense of identity and pride in the band and acts as physical evidence of their loyalty towards U2. Collection as seems to be carried out by fans of U2 is a highly involved and passionate form of consumption. As a consequence, fans tend to display an attachment to their collections that may appear irrational if only considering the functional aspect of consumption (Belk 1995). Considered from the perspective of fan loyalty however and the strong ties with identity that underlies this highly engaged form of loyalty, collecting behaviour constitutes a natural expression of passion for the brand. Belk et al (1991) suggest that collecting affords collectors the opportunity to mark out areas of individuality and presents tangible evidence of the uniqueness of the collector. This is because, almost by definition every collection is likely to be a one-of-a- kind creation and curation of the owner. Collections, therefore "confer a heightened sense of individuality, autonomy and specialness upon those who possess them".

Collecting behaviour has also attracted particular attention with regards to gender (Saisselin, 1984; Belk et al 1991; Pearce, 1998). This prior literature tends to recognize differences between men and women collectors with specific regards to the process or activity of collecting i.e. how collecting is done, the type of object collected, and in

how collectors use their collections to symbolically reflect gender identity (Maclaren et al. 2006). Although with regards to the frequency and intensity of collecting behaviour, male fans seem to be far more heavily active than female fans on the U2 forum, differences in the types of objects collected (CD's, posters, rare items, autographs, books, magazines etc.) and in the processes and meanings involved in their collecting behaviour were not discernable.

6.5 LOYALTY AS AN OBLIGATION/ LOYALTY AS A CHOICE

Yet another discursive resource for loyalty employed by U2 fans relates to the notion of choice in the purchase of the band's music. As an entity, U2 is located at the nexus of art and commerce – on the one hand seeking to create profound aesthetic musical experiences, and on the other employing traditional marketing principles and engaging in exchange with a mass audience, with the aim of producing profits from their music for themselves and stakeholders. They currently operate from within the mainstream commercial music industry. Commercial and artistic discourses, however, have traditionally been viewed as positions which evoke meanings and demands that are antagonistic to each other (Bradshaw, McDonagh and Marshall, 2006). This perceived separation of art and business serves as a backdrop for the construction of loyalty as an obligation borne out of emotional ties with U2, as opposed to a choice exercised by the consumer. This can be seen in the exchange below.

Extract 8a

Olimar – U2 have never felt more corporate. I know they have always been a business, but it just feels so calculated at this point. Announcing that the tour is going to be made up of pairs of shows, each distinctly different from the other, makes it almost essential for a fan to attend two consecutive nights, for fear of effectively missing half of the show. That's like going to Zooropa and being told you need to come back the following night to see the MacPhisto section. Yes, each night of the tour should have its own magic, a different set list, a unique song that maybe wasn't played on any other date, but broadly speaking, you shouldn't miss out on a whole part of the show because you couldn't afford to make it to two consecutive shows.

Then there are the prices which will help to dissuade people from wanting to go to both shows on consecutive nights, as I will. It's the first event I have ever known at the O2 to try and sell some Upper Tier tickets at the same price as Lower Tier (even the NBA didn't try that). And if the stage is as shown in diagrams, then the relatively cheap (relatively being the operative word) tickets are potentially going to be side of stage.

There is also the rapid manner of the tickets going on sale. Maybe every tour has been like this, I can't remember, but it all feels such a massive rush to get the tickets on sale so soon after the announcement.

Hopefully I will start to feel differently about it nearer the time, but at the moment I'm strangely indifferent and that's sad.

SlyDanner - My take is that the approach here was to do everything possible to block scalper access and make as many fans as possible have the opportunity to attend a show.

Olimar - Essentially, I'm not comfortable that the tour is in sets of two nights- both nights complete a set, the shows being independently different. Who knows, maybe I'm being totally unfair, perhaps when we see how the shows have been scoped it will feel totally different. But at the moment, there is the feeling that it might be a little exploitative- of fans who attend every tour, but now feel compelled to see both nights, because they don't want to miss a part of the tour production.

I'm a big football fan; the notion of a business overselling their product because they know they have a captive audience who have an emotional tie to their product is sadly familiar.

M2 - The quote from Bono was: "We are going to try to have a completely different feeling from night one to night two. "You've somehow turned that into "if I only see one show, I'm missing half the event." I think that's quite a jump. (**forum.atu2.com: on: December 5, 2014)**

At the start of this piece, Olimar shares his thoughts regarding U2 and an upcoming tour on which the band is about to embark. "U2 have never felt more corporate", he says, thereby framing the band as a money making venture engaged in business, and making 'calculated', strategic choices with the aim of making a profit. Though largely a cultural entity or music artist, this framing also positions U2, at least as perceived by this fan, within a mainstream commercial context. The intersection of art and commerce is important here to the extent that it allows us to zero in on perceptions of how an artist- fan loyal relationship emerges when layered with the exigencies of the market. The 'corporate' label fulfils the function of invoking an exploitative, profit at all costs, narrative with regards to U2 at the expense of the fan. Olimar feels his affection for the band is being exploited for business purposes. As evidence for this he highlights the way in which a show on the tour has supposedly been organized to run over the course of two nights, instead of one. By suggesting that it would be "essential" for a fan to attend the two consecutive shows, for "fear" of what might be missed, Olimar constructs loyalty and fandom as an obligation and positions himself as a victim suffering the consequences of his love for the music and being part of the experience. Also, purporting to speak on behalf of 'people' in general, or presumably other fans, he suggests the price of the tickets is prohibitive to attending multiple shows.

Olimar's proposition does not go unopposed however. SlyDanner challenges this overtly corporate view of U2 by means of proposing that the actions of the band are actually in the interest of fans, "to make as many fans as possible have the opportunity to attend the show". SlyDanner casts U2 in a far less harsh tone, effectively working to counter the 'profit at all cost narrative'. Rather than a corporate money machine, U2 is constructed here as caring about their fans. Olimar doubles down on his earlier position, suggesting that the tour is 'exploitative of fans who attend every tour'. He also reintroduces and fortifies the discourse of loyalty as an obligation, suggesting that fans might feel 'compelled' to see both nights to avoid missing any part of the production. He relates his experience as a music fan to his experience as a football fan, employing business vocabulary (businesses overselling their product) to make his point and continuing with the depiction of the loyal fan as a victim, who is 'captive' to U2 on account of having an 'emotional tie' with the band. In essence he is saying that where there is an emotional connection with the band, being loyal to them is not an option. Indeed, Olimar's assertion aligns with findings within sports fandom, where the actions and commercial intentions of club management have often led to discontent from passionate fans with tribal affiliations (Hewer et al., 2017). M2 attempts to dampen the assertions of Olimer by putting them in the context of the particular comments by Bono that might have ignited them. He suggests that Olimar's view is a bit of an exaggeration. Jeany13, however, introduces a competing discursive construct by suggesting that Olimar is not under any compulsion to attend a U2 concert.

Extract8b

Jeany13 - Seems to me that you're blaming your feelings on the band.
Um...you don't HAVE to go to a U2 concert. Really, it's okay if you don't.
(By the way, I thought the prices were steep, as well, for those of us who want to go for a pair of nights. But the price of the tickets is not my decision. Whether to purchase those tickets at the price offered IS my decision.)

Olimar - There are other sports teams to go and watch, but you won't go and watch another one, because your emotional tie is with your team. As long as they can find the money somehow, U2 fans will pay whatever they can afford to see U2 play, even if it's more than the market value (ignoring the issue of whether it actually is or isn't market value). So, as much as its your decision, of course it is, you aren't going to go and watch Foo Fighters playing next door because they are half the price. You will pay double the price to watch your band.

Jeany13 - I do believe that market value is based on what the market will bear -- yes?

And, I would think that, if a U2 fan doesn't have the money to attend a concert, a U2 fan simply DOESN'T attend a concert. As my daughter used to say when she was little, "That's just the way life is." No one's to blame for it.

Sure, I'd love to take 3-4 months to follow the band and see more of the world in the process. But, barring a miracle, that's not realistic for me. I'm not going to blame the band because their tickets aren't $5 a piece (or WHATEVER the price.... the amount isn't really the issue). If I can't afford something, especially a non-necessity, I just don't make the purchase.

Olimar - Take that argument to any organisation/newspaper discussing ticket prices in the English Premier League and see what reaction you get. The entire focal point is that the regular, long-standing fans, who have an emotional connection, are left with the choice of stretching themselves beyond their means, because that emotional connection compels them to, or simply cannot afford to go. They are then replaced by the corporate market, or the middle/upper classes who can afford it.

The argument "if you can't afford it, then you can't go", is well distanced from that debate, because there is general acknowledgement that the pricing IS either exploitative, or preventative. Id argue the same applies with U2 here, because I think there are comparative cases that say that they don't need to charge as much. (**forum.atu2.com: on: December 5, 2014)**

By asserting her agency in purchasing expensive concert tickets, if not in choosing the price, Jeany13 emphasizes her freedom of choice as a fan and consumer. Olimar continues with his sports analogy, again emphasizing the supremacy of an 'emotional tie' with the band. His assertion seems to be that any choice with regards to seeing as against seeing an alternative band is redundant, since the emotional bond lies with U2. He asserts a kind of monopoly of emotion wielded by the band over loyal fans. He is therefore obligated to buy tickets to see U2 irrespective of the price of U2 tickets compared with other bands. Olimar constructs his actions as a loyal fan as mandated by the emotional connection he has for the band. He also suggests that the emotional tie supersedes any perceived market value as a driver of behaviour in relation to U2. Jeany13 continues in dissent, remaining completely oblivious to any claims of emotional ties. As far as she is concerned time and economic resources dictate what is possible – "that's just the way life is", she asserts. If you can't afford it then don't make

the purchase. Applying the sports comparison again, Olimar draws on two different constructive resources for loyalty – time (long-standing fans), and emotional connection. Also at this point, these two views of loyalty are positioned in opposition to the corporate, profit driven motives of a commercial band like U2. Long standing and emotional fans are the real deal, the truly loyal fans, who nonetheless are left at the mercy of the market and high prices. Again, he describes the corporate strain of the band, similar to what you get in the Premier League, as 'exploitative', 'preventative' and stretching genuine fans beyond their means. Olimar also introduces what seems to be a puritanist, "indie" view of the relationship with the band that rejects all traces of the hand of the market in favor of emotion, passion, authenticity, respect for the working class, and a distaste for middle-class society while being itself middle-class (Fanarrow, 2006). This might also explain his sense of "sadness" and "indifference" at the corporate leaning of U2. At this point in the exchange the discussion shifts to an analysis of exactly what role the corporate label plays, or should play in relation to U2.

Extract 8c

Jick - U2 is corporate with no apologies!

Jeany13 - But what is this about "never felt more corporate"? They are artists. This is their livelihood. Is "corporate" somehow a bad thing? Seems they have SO much fun in their line of work (and play) and they've invited us to come along for the ride. But it's not a mandatory journey. It just so happens that a whole lot of people like what they do.

Jick - U2 make music for a living, and not for charity. You can call it corporate or commercial strategy. I can also call it common sense. Why turn down more money on the table if it's there?

Daniel - I'm as big a U2 fan as anybody else who makes an effort to post on these forums. I've been a fan for 20 years. Even though I make pretty good money and could afford it, there is no way in hell I'm paying $600 for a pair of tickets for a U2 concert. I just can't wrap my head around spending that kind of money for 3 hours of entertainment. I understand why they're charging that much… because they can. Those $300 tickets will sell… just not to me.

Mofomat – Your clearly not as big a fan of U2 as anybody else. You reached your price point. There are others who will pay $300 per ticket.

Furq - If you think the loyalty and devotion of U2 fans should be measured on their willingness or ability to pay for gig tickets then, well, you're in the right thread!

JohnnyFeathers - Posts are exactly right--being willing (or, just as likely, ABLE) to buy super-expensive U2 tickets does not necessarily make you a bigger U2 fan than someone who won't (or CAN'T) do it. U2 aren't necessarily wrong to charge whatever they can for tickets--because lord knows, just looking at the resale prices, SOMEONE will sell them for that price or higher even if they don't. But some lawyer looking to impress his wife and kids by getting them tickets to U2--because they all like that song, Beautiful Day--doesn't necessarily make for the most engaged audience. It's a very old debate. Let's just say I'm glad I was lucky enough to see U2 before the prices sky-rocketed, and with amazingly great seats at least once (Zoo TV, 2nd row). Much like being able to pay for expensive tickets doesn't make you a bigger fan, charging a small fortune for tickets doesn't mean it's a better show. (**forum.atu2.com: on: December 5, 2014)**

Jeany13 asks what "never felt more corporate means". She rejects Olimar's negative stance on the notion of U2 as a corporation, while also demonstrating her awareness and comfort with the notion of U2 as artists that also operate as a commercial entity, noting that music is their 'livelihood'. Corporate, she asserts, should not be seen as a 'bad thing'. U2's positioning within the marketplace, within the mainstream, is not lost to her. She however does not seem to sense any tension between U2 the artist and authentic creative entity and U2 the business. She also doubles down on her framing of following U2 as a choice. Jick also seems to further enforce her position, noting that the band as a corporate entity wanting to get as much as it can for its services is 'common sense'. His question "why turn down money on the table if it's there", i.e. why not charge as much for tickets as the market can bear" could well have come from a record label executive. This view legitimates the notion of U2 as a corporate entity. I would suggest that this episode serves as an example of the kind of discursive struggles that might appear when the notion of fandom and loyalty is being considered in relation to a commercial artist brand like U2. These struggles have an important function to play in the day to day construction of loyalty from a fan perspective. Is loyalty an obligation linked to the emotional bonds that form between artist and fans particularly when considering a product like music that, by its very nature, is engineered to evoke those sorts of emotions, or is loyalty a choice exercised by a rational consumer engaging in market exchange? How does the notion of music and artists as a business brand merge with the emotions and passions that emerge between artist and fan?

Daniel draws on a range of discursive resources to construct himself as a 'big fan' of U2 – the length of time he has been a fan (20 years), and his activity within the forum. These constructs are in competition with financial expenditure on the band as indicators of loyalty. Although he claims he can afford it, Daniel is not prepared to spend $300 to buy concert tickets for the tour. There is a sense of acceptance of the demands of the market, "those $300 tickets will sell…just not to me". Mofomat takes this as evidence of the limits of his fandom, when she suggests that other fans won't mind paying for the tickets. Furq speaks to the heart of the exchange noting that "if loyalty and devotion to U2 should be measured by expenditure" then Mofomat's view is correct. He seems to imply that this should not be the case. JohnnyFeathers also supports this position, noting that being willing or able to buy expensive tickets does not make you a bigger fan. Overall, multiple discursive resources for loyalty can be seen to be at play through the exchange, and competing for supremacy – emotional ties with the band, length of time as a fan, expenditure on the band and frequency of activity within the forum.

6.6 LOYALTY AND IRISH HERITAGE

Yet another way in which loyalty to U2 might be constructed is tied to the band's Irish heritage. More so for fans who have grown up in diaspora, the connection with U2 is a treasured reminder of their Irish heritage.

Interviewer –	I'm trying to make sense of how you talk about loyalty to U2, being a fan that you are.
Philip –	I can just give my insights…..my family is Irish, my parents were born in Ireland so I know a little bit about Irish culture, um, but I live in Canada and I kind of understand how people over here and in the United States kind of respect and follow U2 as well.
Interviewer-	But how did you become a fan of U2 in the first place, how did that happen?
Phillip –	Well, I'm 40 years old, and that's very important in putting it into context right, and em, my parents were always kind of attuned to Irish culture. In those days there weren't a lot of International Irish acts or superstars. Now there's a couple more, you have your Connor McGregors's, you have your Enya's, you have your Lee Missen's, but in those days there weren't that many international stars, so when anybody would come out it would kind of be a big deal and everybody would know about them. So my dad kind of tipped me off to U2, but then when the Joshua Tree came out in 1987 it was a big deal in Canada and the United States and obviously the UK as well. I was 11 years old when that came out and I remember getting a cassette copy of it.
Interviewer –	And, was there a particular critical moment when you knew, or went "I think there's something going on here, I think I might be a fan of U2". When did you start to feel like this was something special going on?

Phillip – Well, a couple of things. When you're exposed to a lot of television and music you only relate to about 5 percent of it. The rest is kind of garbage. There was sort of a connection through the music that you could not get with other international acts whether it be from the US or the UK. So, there was sort of a blood connection for me to U2, and I found it interesting as well that there were also, not just coming to the United states, but also conquering the united states with sold out arenas and time magazine and rolling stone and all those things. It was very important that they were not just coming here and doing it half-a** but they were actually going all the way. (Skype Interview, March 6, 2016)

The excerpt above, drawn from an interview session highlights, identity work that reflects the role U2s Irish heritage plays in grounding loyal behaviour for some fans and in serving as an initial point of contact with the band. For instance, Phillip, without prompting, tracks the history of his fandom to his family, and the fact that he was born to Irish parents who were 'attuned to the culture'. He constructs U2 and similar Irish acts (Enya, McGregor) as a thread that keeps him anchored to his origins. Similar to the process of socialization that allows for cultural codes to pass from one generation to the next, he was made aware of U2 through his father. Inward facing identity work is also evident in the sense of pride and ownership he displays when talking about U2's success internationally. His description of the relationship with U2 and their music as a 'blood connection' captures the familial meanings he assigns to the relationship, unlike other US or UK artists.

As a means of further exploring the link between Irish heritage and loyalty to U2, I enquired into the views of fans on the forum. Although some fans agreed that being Irish played a part in their feelings about U2, others expressed scepticism about such a connection, and instead stressed their love for the band and their music independent of their heritage. Miryclay, a fan in her forties who is part Irish and grew up in Denver, Colorado largely agrees with Philips' position. She notes that she is "proud to be a full half-Irish, and yes, I think it makes me feel more a part of U2 fandom, but I would be here even if I had no Irish in me!" (forum.atu2.com: on: April 4, 2017). Code, an Irish fan who lives in Ireland states that: "though there is a certain cultural affinity that comes from sharing being Irish with U2, in other cases it's just as silly as stating that an American must like Bruce Springsteen." (forum.atu2.com: on: April 3, 2017). Code and Miryclay both reference the idea, albeit with some reservations, that heritage and loyalty are linked.

Despite the links made by some fans between their affinity with U2 and their Irish heritage, it must be noted that, ironically, this sentiment is not typically shared by Irish who reside within Ireland. Fans gave different reasons for this.

> As a Dubliner I'm ashamed to say that a significant proportion of the Irish population despise Bono and will shout it to the rooftops at every opportunity. Any successful person in Ireland will be the subject of ridicule because we're a bitter little nation. We're never happier than when we're sneering at others. I have no idea why this is so. It's a cultural thing. (Preacher, forum.atu2.com: on: April 3, 2017).

> I'm Irish and I have to say I'm the only U2 fan among my friends.... bono tends to put some of them off the band, though a few others like the music. A lot of Irish people may be bitter about the whole "tax evasion" thing, not fully understanding the situation. (Imedi, forum.atu2.com: on: April 7, 2017).

The prevalence of the idea of indigenous Irish dislike for Bono and U2 is difficult to gauge, and is not necessarily the aim of the current study. What remains a fact is that for some fans, albeit perhaps a minority, the band's Irish heritage factors into the way they talk about loyalty and their fandom to the band. It is not far-fetched to assume that for individuals who have some Irish heritage, but have grown up outside of Ireland, U2 might mean something completely different from what the band means to those within Ireland. For such fans, as the example above highlights, the idea of U2 might represent a link to home; a connection to their heritage. Individual and collective heritage is significant to consumers. Consumers are inclined towards products that enable them understand their origins, and gain access to people that may be personally or historically significant to them (Otnes and Maclaren, 2007). With regards to the consumption of the music product in general, and the U2 brand in particular, I would suggest that heritage, while relevant, is not a primary discursive resource. Heritage is not the first consideration in whether or not a person becomes a fan of U2. More likely, it functions in the background, as a building block for identity and solidarity for some fans who are already attracted to the band, and as a source of pride. Focusing on heritage is nonetheless important, to the extent that it provides clues to how fans conceptualize their cultural history and how they integrate this history into their relationship with the band, and their current and future lives.

6.7 DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I have drawn attention to multiple discursive resources used by U2 fans to make sense of and talk about loyalty and fandom. Different aspects of experienced loyalty are highlighted depending on the perspective of the fan making the judgement. Real fan status and loyalty is argued for through the use of time invested as a follower of the band. The time construct is evoked to emphasize the quality and strength of the relationship with U2 and also structures relations within the forum. Long-term engagement with the band, or claims to that effect, also ascribe curator or gatekeeper status and is used to legitimate opinions and positions expressed within the forum. Notions of time as an indicator of loyalty are not necessarily new. After all, Jacoby and Kyner (1978) identify it as a key ingredient in their conceptualization of brand loyalty as "a biased behavioural response expressed over time". Accommodating the consumer's perspective, however, shifts the focus from the act of purchase, to the use of time as a resource for ordering and structuring the nature of engagement within the community of fans, and as an anchoring device for the self. Where the cognitive brand loyalty canon focuses on purchases of U2 branded products over a period of time, fans use time as a key aspect of their identity work both at an individual level of the self and as an outward facing demonstration of what the band and their music means to them in their construction of who they are or aspire to be. As has been shown in the examples above, drawing attention to a long-standing relationship with the band, and narratives that capture the roles played by the band and their music through time is indicative of the perceived importance and centrality of U2 to their fans.

Obsession as a discursive resource relating to collecting behaviour and purchases also seems to align with parts of the behavioural and attitudinal perspective on brand loyalty, to the extent that purchases of brand memorabilia and music are seen as evidence of obsession. However, fans also present a non-static view of loyalty that morphs in character through time and engagement with the band. Loyalty is constructed as a fluid and evolving relationship with the U2 brand irrespective of the presence of purchase. While some participants have framed their loyalty as linked to purchases, others allow for ambiguity around this relationship, instead focusing on emotions and active participation in relation to the band. Keeping with Fournier and Yao's work (1997), fans also draw on a relationship perspective in articulating their relationship with the

band. Relationships by their nature are fluid, and constantly changing in character according to the needs of the consumer.

The competing constructs of 'loyalty as an obligation' as against loyalty being a 'choice' also pushes to the fore the commercialized, mainstream position from which U2 operates as a player in the music industry. In their attempts at constructing loyalty to U2, fans are also forced to contend with an affective, familial, human relationship with the band on the one hand, and a commercial relationship with a band that seeks to operate profitably for itself and stakeholders and makes no attempt to hide this fact on the other hand. The opposing discourses this raises does not quite find resolution. The deep bonds evoked by the nature of music consumption, and the fannish relationship consumers develop with the band, leave room for feelings of being exploited on the part of some fans. Although U2 is a commercial band, engaged in a commercial relationship with their fans/consumers, some fans are not at ease with that dichotomy while some other fans do enthusiastically accept the commercial stance of the band. The producer/consumer divide is forced to coexist with the familial, tribal bonds fans have with the band, to jarring effect in some cases as seen above. The barefaced encroachment of the requirements of an economic exchange relationship in the bond between artist/band and fans leaves room for different constructions on what loyalty to the band is or should look like with regards to purchase.

The discursive resource of heritage, as an underlying basis for loyal behaviour is one that has not really been discussed in a commercial context, although examples of this brand of loyalty can be seen in calls to patriotism in political circles (Sidanius et al., 1997), and even football fandom (Bairner and Shirlow, 1998). It highlights the fact that multiple notions of loyalty are constantly in circulation, and being used by fans to make sense of their identities and beliefs in the context of the U2 brand and their fans. At the individual level, constructions of loyalty are dependent on an individual assessment of the position the band occupies in the mind of the fan, and in most cases are constitutive of their sense of identity in relation to U2. Time narratives, or notions of heritage for instance, are woven into an individual understanding of who the 'I' is in relation to U2. This then informs decisions on how much they are prepared to spend on the band, how many shows they are prepared to attend etc. These are all decisions that emanate from a personal determination of the position the brand occupies in the mind of the individual

fan. As fans interact within the forum dedicated to U2, they have the opportunity to compare their individual notions of loyalty with the positions of other fans. The enactment of loyalty at this group level will be looked at in the next chapter.

6.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has looked at multiple accounts of how loyalty is constructed by fans within the U2 community. A range of discursive resources that resonate with fans and the associated meanings with regards to loyalty have been explored. In the chapter that follows, I expand the area of focus from the individual discursive resources to the group as a whole and the way these resources interact, highlighting how fans negotiate their experiences and conceptions of the brand through engaging in discourse.

CHAPTER 7

COLLECTIVE CONSTRUCTIONS OF LOYALTY

7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the focus of attention moves from particular discursive resources for loyalty looked at in the previous chapter, to the effects of these resources as fans do what fans do – engage their shared passion for U2. I look more closely at the tensions produced by different perceptions on what it means to be loyal, and how that loyalty is expressed as part of a collective. While the previous chapter focused on individual repertoires at a unitary level, this chapter is more concerned with the interaction between these repertoires within the group and how attempts by fans to come to a collective notion of loyalty to U2 is managed. Using ethnographic data drawn from the forum, as well as interview data, I analyze how interpretations of the act of expressing criticism within a space that ostensibly functions as a place to celebrate all things U2 related, shapes the construction loyalty to the band in diverse ways. I consider some of the peculiarities of the music product that predispose some fans to being critical fans and the role of identity in that process. I also examine the ways in which different practices associated with conflicting expressions of loyalty to U2 are negotiated on the forum.

Multiple constructions of loyalty are constantly in circulation, based on a personal determination of the position the brand occupies in the mind of the individual fan. As fans interact with each other as a group bound by their shared love for the same band/brand, however, these different notions, narratives and perceptions have to contend with broader normative ideals of right and wrong ways to express fandom and loyalty with regards to U2. Within the social space of the group, U2 fans compare their individual motivations and positions on the band with those shared by other fans. This often leads to conflicting notions on how to be a fan of U2 or how to go about expressing that fandom.

Table 4: Core Tensions on the Expression of Loyalty to U2

Core Tensions	*Example1*	*Example 2*
Between **Critical Fans** and **Unconditionally Supportive Fans**	**Large7-** I like U2 also, so you could call me a fan. But I am allowed to say their new song is rubbish - which I think it is. **(Critical Fans)**	**DGordon1**- Of course you're allowed to say what you want. But if you make very bold and opinionated statements like you have, on a U2 fan site, can you really expect no backlash whatsoever? I wouldn't. Honestly, leaving my opinions out of this, if you heavily criticize a band on their fan page that's fine. But you'll have to accept that lots of people really won't like it. **(Unconditionally Supportive Fans)**

Between ***Aesthetic Appreciation*** and ***Idolization***	**Gee-** The band have lots of writers, and are not as creatively involved with their music as we think. Right down to the instrumentals. I mostly think this, because I still struggle to join any connection between the band of the 80s and 90s to the band we have at this moment. Not that I mind the newer output. But sometimes I just think... who is writing this stuff. **(Aesthetic Appreciation)**	**Tumbling Dice -**If someone follows U2 religiously, why would they criticize them? Would a religious follower criticize God? **(Idolization)**
Between ***Fan*** and ***Fanatic***	**darabois - T**he fanatics I've met along the way have widened the line between passion and obsession... I'm a fan of U2 and glad that I'm not a fanatic. **(Fan)**	**Midnight**-Fanatic…600 songs on my Ipod by them alone, and my 23000+ posts here. I say fanatic still. **(Fanatic)**

7.2 BEING LOYAL AND BEING CRITICAL

The disparity on how to practice loyalty can be seen to play out in the different interpretations of the act of expressing criticism on the forum as outlined in Table 4. Loyalty constructing practices at the group level and tensions within them tend to revolve around being critical of the band, within the dedicated fan forum, and how this affects claims to loyalty. Work tends to ground itself in the articulation of a desire to express criticism against the band/brand, band members, and the music as against expressing unconditional support for the band. While some forum participants repeatedly cling to what they see as their right to be critical of the band, others who see the fan forum as a dedicated space to celebrate U2, and express all round positivity in all that relates to the band are constantly contesting this position. These debates and disagreements reflect a fluidity and lack of clarity about what it means to be a fan of the band, and how best to express this fandom within the community. Although different participants take different positions on criticism, these positions can be distilled into two poles on a continuum. At one end is the *critical fan* who always wants to express his opinions irrespective of how antithetical they might be to the band and what it stands for, and at the other end is the *unconditionally supportive fan*, who believes the band can do no wrong, and goes into attack mode when criticism of any sort is expressed against them. All along the continuum, participants are concerned with what the role of the fan interacting with the band and their music, as well as with other fans should be. The extract from a thread below highlights this conflict.

large7 - I have just been accused of bringing lethargy to this forum for having the temerity to suggest the lyrics to U2's new single are rubbish. First of all, (and this being a forum), this is a place where people can debate and openly express their opinions, positive or negative. There's been lots of talk here about people posting negative responses to the new song. The reason may be that it's not very good? Or that people just don't like it.

U2 have written some great songs, some average songs and some terrible songs. Bono is an annoying sycophant completely obsessed with being the biggest and the richest. He will jump on any bandwagon that might further his exposure. That doesn't stop him having a sometimes great voice and being a good showman and part of a sometimes great band. Bono's activism in the third world comes from a good place but he is completely mis-informed - his Red campaign is a disaster. Whatever hanging around with George bush might have achieved (which isn't much given the state of the world), Bono made a complete tosser of himself - even his fellow band members agree.

The Edge gets some cracking noises from his guitar but he is a rather average guitarist surrounded by lots of effects. Musically U2 have always surrounded themselves by people with perhaps a little more musical imagination than themselves. Let's face it, they only became musically imaginative when Eno joined them for the Unforgettable Fire. That doesn't mean some of their music isn't verging on brilliant. (see: 'Bad' 'Bullet The Blue Sky' 'Kite' 'A Man and a Woman' etc etc.

Perhaps a more balanced view is what's needed regarding the relative merits of U2. For my money, their new song is average with lyrics that make me deeply embarrassed. Maybe the album will be better - let's wait and see…

lieu2 - do you realize this is a U2 forum, and there are U2 fans here, maybe I think the boots song is awesome

large7 - You're completely missing the point of what I'm saying - obviously. I like U2 also so you could call me a fan. But I am allowed to say their new song is rubbish - which I think it is.

Mariamontreal - I believe this is also going on in another thread. Everyone is entitled to their opinion whether it pleases you or not. It's ok, if he doesn't like the song and you do so be it. No need to continue on and on about it. We must respect each other's opinion good or bad. Freedom of speech. It is not a debate this forum. It's a bunch of cool people (because U2 fans are the coolest, I must say,) who share opinions with one another. No one is right and no one is wrong, opinions will vary. It's all good!

DGordon1 - Of course you're allowed to say what you want. But if you make very bold and opinionated statements like you have, on a U2 fan site, can you really expect no backlash whatsoever? I wouldn't. Honestly, leaving my opinions out of this, if you heavily criticize a band on their fan page that's fine. But you'll have to accept that lots of people really won't like it. So my advice would be to only say things like "U2 are a big corporation playing the game for big bucks", if you're willing to accept unappreciative responses. The vast majority of peeps here are proud U2 fans, so OF COURSE strong criticism of the band is going to attract a big debate! It shouldn't be a surprise. (**forum.atu2.com: on: January 27, 2009)**

Large7 takes issue with recent ongoing complaints expressed against dissenting voices within the forum. He presents what he sees as a taken for granted notion (first of all) that the online forum is a space for expressing all sorts of opinions, whether these be of a positive or negative nature in relation to the band. He then goes on to contrast this ostensible position with the negative reception to his criticism against the band by some fans, and attempts to legitimize the act of being critical of U2 within the forum. Later he launches into a critical outburst against the band which stems from a recent single release for a song which he does not like. His distaste goes beyond the particular song, to include individual band members for mediocre work both relating directly to the music, and in relation to what U2 stands for as a band - the activism of Bono, the lead

singer and the totality of the U2 brand. Large7 concludes by describing himself as 'deeply embarrassed' by U2's recent work. By expressing embarrassment, it is clear that large7 has incorporated U2 into his sense of self, since a person is more likely to be embarrassed or proud of things that they see as a part of who they are (Belk, 1988). This is interesting as it suggests that despite his criticism, he nonetheless possesses affection for the band.

Lieu2 accentuates the opposing view or interpretation of criticism. By posing the questions 'do you realize this is a U2 forum?', and 'do you realize U2 fans are here?' he demonstrates his assumption that the online forum is a space for celebrating the band and expressing favorable views about them. He also constructs loyalty to U2 and the expression of criticism as notions which cannot coexist. This is further evident in his suggestion that large7 should rather be stating how 'awesome' the song is, irrespective of his genuine feelings about it.

Large7 states his position in more explicit terms asserting the fact that he '*likes* U2' and he is a '*fan*' of the band. From his point of reference as a fan he restates what he nonetheless sees as a right to present his critical view that "their new song is rubbish". Mariamontreal acknowledges the ensuing tension, suggesting that 'everyone is entitled to their opinion', while encouraging respect for different opinions within the forum and freedom of speech. She tries to ease away the tension by highlighting the shared love for U2 and noting that 'it's all good'. In the final post of the exchange DGordon reinforces and fortifies the view of the unconditionally supportive fan suggesting that 'bold and opinionated' negative statements within a space dedicated to U2 is bound to attract unappreciative responses from 'proud U2 fans'. He concludes that criticism of the band should be carried on within the forum at the participants own risk. The heat of the debate links back to the perceived understanding of how to be a fan of the band and how that fandom ought to be expressed - the fan as a rational individual whose position as a fan remains unaffected by the expression of criticism, versus the fan as constantly and unquestioningly supportive of the band and their music. Different ways of being a fan and of being loyal are being contested and negotiated through the exchange.

Is it possible then to be a loyal fan of U2 and at the same time be critical of the band? Exponents of the tribal construct have previously shown how groupings of online

communities centered on specific brands could develop potentially dangerous opposition to the same brand (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar 2007). In contrast to the idea of harmonious communities of consumers who love a given brand, Cova and White (2010) provide a case study of the Warharmmer and Couchsurfer communities where some community members, not wanting to be pigeonholed generate communities that oppose or contest the management of their favorite brand (tribal opponents). Also, Gray (2003) in critiquing much of the work on cultural studies suggests that to fully understand what it means to interact with the media and their text, there must be a consideration of what he describes as anti-fans. Anti-fans are "not necessarily against fandom per se, but strongly dislike a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel." He continues that "fan studies have taken us to one end of a spectrum of involvement with a text, but we should also look at the other end to those individuals spinning around a text in its electron cloud, variously bothered, insulted or otherwise assaulted by its presence." (Gray 2003: 70). Haig (2013:12) also identified a critical fandom for the Twilight series, noting that similar to uncritical fans they display regular, emotionally involved consumption of the given text, since they "both devour each new book and film and engage in sustained passionate debates about the series and its flaws" despite their criticism. For Haig however, 'snark', as he terms criticism, is not incidental to the pleasure taken in the texts; they appear, in large part, to constitute that pleasure. "This form of critical fandom does not simply recognise *a text* as rubbish and enjoy it *in spite of* that recognition; the recognition *itself* and the analysis, discussion and parody that it permits, provide much of the fans' pleasure." (Herman and Jones, 2013:952). I would suggest that neither of these examples accurately describe the fans examined in the U2 community since their criticisms seem to spring from a place of genuine love for the band and frustration with some parts of their work. Even while expressing their distaste for parts of the bands' work, it is obvious that the critical fans retain affection for U2, and their complaints seem to stem more from a desire to experience a version of the band they have been used to in the past, or one they would rather experience in the future - an idealized version.

An even more apt description of U2's critical fans can be borrowed from the field of politics. Schatz et al (1999) evaluates the distinction between blind and constructive patriotism. They conclude that blind and constructive patriotism constitute two largely

different dimensions of positive identification with and affective attachment to one's country. That is, that patriotism based in unconditional positive evaluation and unquestioning allegiance could be empirically distinguished from patriotism based in constructive criticism and critical loyalty. Blind patriotism is positively associated with political disengagement, nationalism, perceptions of foreign threat, perceived importance of symbolic behaviours, and selective exposure to information. By contrast, constructive patriotism is positively associated with multiple indicators of political involvement, including political efficacy, interest, knowledge, and behaviour. Like nations, brands attract strong affiliations, particularly when considered in relation to its role in facilitating identification and the constitution of the self. Consumers look to brands as symbols of cultural ideals. They use brands to create an imagined identity that they share with like-minded people (Holt et al., 2004). These affiliations can serve as a backdrop for strong feelings, despite the differences between brands and countries as social constructs. In considering the feasibility of comparing these two terms, look no further than the recent attempts of nations to position themselves as brands, an act described as nation branding (Harrison-Walker, 2011). Although nations and brands are different, the relationship between a nation and its citizens can serve as a metaphor for the ways fans and consumers respond to the reputation of a brand like U2 – some with unquestioning embrace, and others with critical interest, nonetheless grounded in positive identification.

Further highlighting the tension between being a loyal fan and being critical, similar to the exchange in the previous chapter on loyalty as a choice or an obligation, fans noted the contrast between U2 as a commercial brand selling a product, and U2 as an artist that share an emotional bond with invested fans.

Imaginary friend - No band should ever listen to what their fans want when it comes to the music you make. You'll end up making the same album over and over.

Tumbling Dice - If someone follows U2 religiously, why would they criticize them? Would a religious follower criticize God?

Johnny Feathers - I was thinking, too--if David Bowie had ever done anything like this, he'd have never gotten past Ziggy Stardust, and still be in makeup and platform boots. The artist calls the tune, and doesn't take requests. It's just up to you if you want to dance to it.

JTbaby - As consumers of a product we are absolutely in the perfect position to be critical if said product is in our opinion lacking.

Eddyjedi - I meant to them personally as the question suggests.

JTbaby - Same answer. I don't think the question relates to their personalities or dress sense, but to their collective output as U2.

Tumbling Dice - That's the difference; some fans see U2's music as art while other, shall we say, commercially minded fans, merely see it as 'product.' The difference between real fans and unreal fans, perhaps.

JTBaby - The second they start charging money they have a product. It happens to be art they are selling. It can be both "product" and "art"

TumblingDice - I'm sure you prefer to describe it as product, while most fans would describe it as art.

JTBaby - I described as both. Do pay attention. The two are not mutually exclusive.

The second anyone charges money for the work of their labors they are a business selling a product. There's an art to IC design, making a quality car, or making music people want to buy or putting on a performance people want to see. (**forum.atu2.com: on May 13, 2013)**

The exchange above frames the question of whether or not fans should express criticism against U2 as a subtext of the tenuous relationship between art and commerce. Imaginary friend, Tumbling Dice and Johnny Feathers construct the artist as a reverential figure creating *art* who should not have to capitulate to criticism. Similar to a devoted follower of a religion who receives the word (or music) without questioning its potency, Tumbling Dice invokes the religious metaphor as a means of challenging any act of criticism against U2. By so doing she constructs the expression of criticism as contrary to what is expected of a loyal fan. Similarly, Johnny Feathers suggests that an artist responding to criticism only serves to limit the fullness of artistic expression. As he puts it fans should simply 'dance to the tune'. JTbaby however invokes the rights of a consumer purchasing a *product* as defense of his right to be critical of U2. In the same way that consumers in possession of a defective product might articulate their complaints, Eddyjedi believes fans have a right to be critical of U2. As JTBaby later concludes, U2 is neither just a commercial brand selling a product nor just an artist creating art. The band is both of these things at the same time, and so contrasting views as to how to engage with them seem to apply as fans try to articulate the notion of loyalty within the community. The debate among fans vividly demonstrates how the meanings attached to loyalty for a band like U2 which operates in multiple conceptual spaces – on the one hand a cultural space as artists, and on the other hand as a commercial entity actively and overtly engaged in exchange- are complex and

necessitate constant negotiation on the part of fans as to how to engage with the artist/brand.

Interestingly, in a personal interview, U2 fan Anna explained that critical fans tend to consist of the older fans within the forum.

> I do notice that there is this, kind of like a group of people in the forum that consider themselves more long term fans, and there is a specific group within them that are much less into the current incarnation of U2 and are much more into the 90's or late 80's incarnation of U2, and so they kind of have this superior thing where they are like, oh yeah, back when they were a group…. it's a really weird dynamic and it's something that has really put me off and gotten me tired of the forum. They seem to frame everything with that lens, and so anything that current U2 does they come on and be like 'they've sold out', 'their more straight up', 'they're embracing commerciality'. People don't just accept the present day U2 just on their own terms, they sort of go into it with an already cynical frame of mind (Anna Skype interview, May 5, 2016).

Anna highlights that at least some of the critical contingent within the forum have been fans of the band for a long time. This confirms the notion that some of the criticism leveled against the band is grounded in a more idealized view of what some fans feel the U2 project should look like. Particularly for a band which has been active for over 30 years, through that time the nature of the U2 brand has evolved. The band's musical style has continued to change, perhaps in a bid to remain relevant with younger audiences or in line with the band's artistic inspiration. Also the encroachment of commerce has not happened overnight. Although U2 is currently a massive global brand, the band had organic beginnings playing live intimate performances in Dublin. As the band's audience has grown from one project to the next, so also has the embrace and centrality of commerce. What this means is that the version of U2 that older fans identified with at the start of the band's career might not be the same version of the band that is active today. For example, Eric claims as defense of his sometimes critical positions against the band: "My point about big stadiums and being a corporation goes straight to the heart of what used to make U2 great and doesn't anymore. They were always about heart and so much of what they do now seems to be about marketing, being the biggest, being the richest and being seen with the right people". (Eric Skype interview, March 6, 2016).

Eric constructs the band's market centric position as an attack on the 'heart' of the band, or at least the version of the band he fell in love with. The glossy profile of U2 as a massive global marketing machine is at odds with the organic and intimate feel of the band he used to know. The question then that comes to mind is, why remain a fan and member of the forum? In a traditional consumer-brand relationship; and in a behavioural or attitudinal view of loyalty, a consumer like Eric who has grown dissatisfied with the performance of a brand should proceed to another band that better meets his needs, rather than remain in the community and express criticism. As a possible answer, consider Ollie's comments in the exchange below.

> Hawkmoon - But I guess the question I want to ask some of you, is why do you do it? Why do you spend so much time on a U2 forum when you haven't liked anything they've done since the late 90s? And I think that's a fair question – not that you don't belong here, but why does the band today rattle you so much?
>
> Zimmere- It's a slight concern that the answer to this question isn't apparent. Surely it "rattles them so much" because they care. They want them to produce the output of the 90s and earlier and they think they still can. To a degree, the fact that they feel so strongly about the current output, demonstrates that passion. As has been said elsewhere, it's the same with sports teams- if you follow a club that has had great success in the 80s/90s, but is now a pale shadow, the fan base is less, but many of them will be so strongly critical of the current setup because they care and they want it to be what it once was. Rather than walk away and give up. I'm not sure that view is particularly wrong, even if it might be a little naive in its expectation. (**forum.atu2.com: on May 13, 2017)**

For Zimmer fans engaging in criticism against U2 serves as a demonstration of their 'passion' and how much they 'care' about the band. This seems to be a variation of the emotional argument introduced in the previous chapter. The emotional investments in U2, similar to a football club that is underperforming, means that the fan is more likely to wait it out, hoping that the band returns to some ideal version. In this sense, loyalty is constructed as sticking with the band through thick and thin, even if that means expressing dissent and criticism aimed at changing the current situation, rather than leaving. Hawkmoon on the other hand, an administrator on the forum, is baffled by why

anyone that calls themselves a fan would want to express criticism against them, more so on a forum that is dedicated to the band. This tendency of some fans to take a romanticized view of the previous incarnation of the band seemed to be pervasive, but does not come as a surprise considering the length of U2's career, and the evolution the band has experienced in that time.

The question of why older critical fans remain on the forum, despite their criticisms with the band might also have to do with the extent to which the band is tied up with their sense of identity, as against a simple functional appreciation of their musical output. This is explored further in the next section.

7.3 AESTHETIC APRECIATION VS IDOLIZATION AND DEVOTION

In this subsection, I explore the reasons why fans might be attracted to music as a factor that shapes meanings and practices with regards to loyalty, as well as interpretations of the expression of criticism. Hargreaves and North (1999), building on Mariam's work on the functions of music (1964) identify a number of different uses of music. Among these reasons are emotional expression which points to the power of music to act as a vehicle for the expression of feelings which might be difficult to convey by other means. This is also connected to the emotional effects of music on mood at a more mundane level (Hargreaves and North 1997). Other identified functions are *aesthetic enjoyment* and *entertainment*. Aesthetic enjoyment of music entails a reflective appraisal and interaction between the characteristics of the person (such as age, gender, musical training and personality) and the characteristics of the music (such as complexity, style and familiarity.) It involves a cognitive appraisal of the music in question. Music is also *communicative* and *symbolically representative*. In addition to conveying specific information through musical structure and messages, extra musical information such as narratives, ideals and values can be actively interpreted and re-interpreted within the social and cultural world so that it makes sense to us. Music helps us to make sense of our world and our place in it, and by extension, plays an important role in helping us construct our identity or sense of self (Shanker 2000). It can be argued that a fan who is more interested in the aesthetic use value of music is likely to be a more critical fan, paying attention to tone, structure and formulation of the song.

Operator - Why are you so excited by Get On Your Boots? It is incredibly forgettable. Having

been a U2 fan for 20 years, I know that we are a one-eyed lot who melt at pretty much everything they do. This song suffers from the same over-involved, over-produced nonsense that led U2 to release technical-heavy duds like Discotheque & Vertigo. Listen to 'Pump It Up' by Elvis Costello; it sounds almost like a legal rip-off (Costello's version actually has rock'n'roll guts to it). The lyric style is a direct rip-off from Dylan's Subterranean Homesick Blues. Read reviews from non-partisan and partisan sites all over the web. People are incredibly under-awed and disappointed with the song. It will not catch on, it will not be popular, but Bono (who are obviously surrounded by 'yes-men'-a stance they used to rally against) will thrash it like he did Vertigo and bang on about it being the best thing they ever did - as he does with every long-awaited U2 single/album release

Singnomore - Can we get rid of this guy - Go annoy someone else!!

Starfish - I've heard the same story and so far GOYB has ripped off numerous songs since its debut. And it's also newbies that are hating....

Operator - Oops...this is what I mean by one-eyed U2 fans (I HAVE BEEN A FAN FOR 20 YEARS AND SEEN THEIR CONCERTS AROUND THE WORLD - in case anyone wants to call me a 'newbie-hater' again). A bit of subjective criticism about a much-hyped U2 release, followed up with rational, cited arguments and people want to burn me at the stake...It's this sort of blind, sycophantic fanaticism that makes non-U2 fans cringe. (**forum.atu2.com: on April 1, 2009)**

Operator in the exchange above refers to U2 fans, himself included (we), as a "one eyed lot", who keep faith, like or agree with everything the band does. By making use of the *we* descriptor he attempts to align himself with other fans and foster affiliation and identification with them, in spite of the critical stance he goes on to take in relation to the particular song. He also expresses a taken-for-granted awareness of the expectations of the forum that a typical fan of U2 should like the song. He unpacks different structural elements of the particular song to frame his criticism – the production, the sound compared to other songs, as well as the lyrics. The speaker is attempting, unsuccessfully in this case, to manage the reception of his criticism, with his inclusion and identification within the community. Also, his criticism is less towards U2 and more towards his aesthetic appreciation of the song, and its failure to meet his expectations. As displeasure with his harsh tone is expressed by other fans in the exchange, Operator underlines the length of time he has been a fan (I have been a fan for 20 years), and his concert attendance as a means of defending his right to be critical. The heart of Operator's criticism is the aesthetic appeal of the song, and this frames his particular view of himself as 'rational' in relation to other fans.

By comparison, a fan whose affiliation with the band is more grounded in devotion, idolization of the band and what they stand for, is more likely to support the artist irrespective of their output, and have blind, uncritical love for all they do. This seems

to be aptly captured in DGordon1's previous comments as he notes that criticism of any sort on a fan site dedicated to U2 is unwelcome since "the vast majority of peeps here are proud U2 fans". Consider the quote from Droo from one of the interview sessions as he responds to what it's like for him being a fan of U2: "It can be frustrating, especially with so much criticism leveled at Bono and the band, particularly after the Songs of Innocence iTunes fiasco. It's hard to watch people criticizing a band that means a lot to me." It's not just about the music for Droo. His investment of self in U2, 'a band that means so much to him' is so profound, that criticisms leveled against Bono and the band resonate with him on a deeply personal level. Compared to Operator who has no problem criticizing the band because the music does not meet his expectations, the way Droo understands meanings and practices around loyalty in relation to U2 is different, because attacks against the band are seen by him as attacks against his person.

7.4 LOYALTY AND IDENTITY

Taken together, the narratives of Operator and Droo suggest that the space between a aesthetic kind of loyalty focused on the attributes of the music, and loyalty that is grounded in idolization, devotion and the centrality of identity, is constituted of different shades of perception on how to be a loyal fan. By this token there are some fans who find themselves somewhere in the middle, aesthetically aware of the kind of music they would like from U2, while also idolizing the band and what they stand for.

> I generally feel pretty positive about U2 and their work, and …um I don't know if that comes from my own sense of loyalty, maybe I'm blinded in the opposite direction, but they put out new music and I always like it, and I would want to listen to it, and that's sort of the test for me, and even besides the music, because I've read a lot about the things that Bono gets up to because I'm kind of interested in a lot of those development issues his interested in I tend to see where his coming from in his efforts and I have a trust that his coming at it from a genuine place and not from a self-interested place, so I don't feel like I need to criticize him and it doesn't bother me, like when fans say they (U2) should just sing and leave the other stuff, I don't feel that way. I like that he tries to bring that awareness, I say great. I don't separate the music and the politics of the band, for me it's one complete package. It's all the same thing (Katie Skype interview, November 5, 2016).

As the interview excerpt suggests, Katie's love of U2's music seems to be tied up with her identification with U2's image, and the activism of Bono. Her consumption of the band is receptive to the 'complete package'. I would suggest that Katie's loyalty is of a more unwavering and balanced nature, because beyond the music she buys into U2's vision of what the world should look like. If her appreciation of the band's music were to wane at some point, it could be argued that the less aesthetic aspects of her attraction to U2 might be compensated by these other experiences which underlie her loyalty and the symbolic meanings she associates with the band. Her loyalty or fandom in this case has a more concrete footing because it forms part of the construction of her identity. Conversely, for a fan that is more intently focused on just the music, as is the case with Droo this might be different.

> When U2 releases material that I don't like I don't force myself to like it just because they did it. For example, I never listen to the Atomic Bomb album because I generally dislike most of the material on that album. Same with Boy. I also hated Invisible when it first came out. I think my ongoing fandom would be challenged if they released consistently bad songs/records. Fortunately, I liked No Line and loved Songs of Innocence so I remain an enthusiastic fan! (Email interview, March 13, 2016).

These exchanges convey the role played by identity in either enforcing loyal behaviours, or creating fleeting relationships with the b(r)and (Oliver 1999). The findings on identity can also be seen to play out in parallel with the earlier point on collecting behaviour. A fandom that is grounded in idolization of U2 is more likely to be interested in buying and collecting all they can find, to feed their passion for U2, and as part of the outward performance that collecting behaviour ultimately amounts to. The greater the distance there is between the fan's personal sense of identity and U2, the less interest there is in engaging in collecting behaviour. As Godpart2 puts it in relation to collecting brand memorabilia "the music's where it's at, so my thrills of just looking at band pictures all day is a bit limited".

Identity also highlights the transitional nature of loyalty. This can be seen in the interview quote from Craig:

> To tell the truth I'm not as into the band now as I once was. Things change. I have a family now and I'd rather spend time with my daughter then collecting U2 stuff. I still

> listen to them of course and follow them, but not like when I was in my 20's. I used to collect bootlegs, all the magazines they were in, buy all the books, etc.. Now I just buy the albums when they come out. I also think the band is a good band now, but not an all-time great band like they were in their prime. In search of relevance in the last decade or so they have sacrificed some of the things that made them great trying to find a hit single (Craig, e-mail interview April 8, 2016).

Craig suggests that he is not as focused on the band he has been in the past noting that he now would rather spend time with his family than in collecting band memorabilia. I would suggest that this has a lot to do with transitions in his personal sense of identity; where U2 once occupied a central position, his daughter and family now constitute a more important representation of who he is as a person, hence the waning interest in everything that U2 does and by extension in his expenditure on the band. Craig's loyalty to U2 plays a role in supplying his identity at different points of his life. The two are inextricably intertwined. Compared to his youth, his loyalty to U2 at present operates on a peripheral level - he still buys the albums, but the investment of self has transitioned through time. Craig's shifting loyalties allow him to claim different identity positions at different times, and narrate his growth by re-arranging or affirming the roles played by different characters (U2, family). Although consumer research has long acknowledged the fact that there is a link between the ways that people consume, and their current or aspirational sense of identity (Sirgy, 1982; Fournier, 1998; Kozinets 2001; Belk 1988; MCracken 1989) the current findings suggest a more nuanced view by highlighting the way in which transitions in fans' personal sense of identity also transforms the character and intensity of loyalty in terms of the ways in which it is expressed. Understanding the interaction between behaviour and identity and motivations for that behaviour at the level of experience is key to gaining a broader appreciation of how loyalty is shaped and ultimately understood by fans/consumers. In the next subsection I turn to an examination of some of the ways in which U2 fans negotiate the tensions between being loyal and being critical.

7.5 NEGOTIATING DIFFERENT WAYS OF BEING LOYAL

The tensions that emerge as different ways of being loyal to U2 become apparent within the forum play out in different ways. Fans initially compare and define their individual perceptions of loyalty in relation to other fans within the group, as well as with broader

social perceptions of normal behaviour. Where individual perceptions fail to align with the practices and expressions of other fans or with a perceived sense of normal, two options exist. Fans either label other fans who transgress normal behaviour in terms that function to normalize their own behaviour, or embrace and celebrate their engagement with the band irrespective of how this might be perceived by others.

darabois - Just like most all of you here, I've been a U2 fan for around 25 years, and thought I was a U2 fanatic... UNTIL, I've met with other U2 fans during Elevation, Vertigo and 360 tours. I felt I was a true fanatic for having organized the line outside the venue until I met others while camped overnight...these we truly FANATICS. During the last 360 concert, others in line seemed to be family or at least life-long friends by the way they interacted with each other - turns out they got to know each other while camping out for other U2 concerts, these people have seen U2 since their first concert, and will continue to see them. I live in the US and met fanatics who traveled from England, Germany and Australia to see U2 in Texas. Sure, most fans like myself know how U2 started out, own all of their albums, seen them in concert since the Joshua Tree - but these fanatics speak of U2 personally, as if receiving a phone call any second from Bono, Edge, Larry or Adam wouldn't be a surprise. Before the Vertigo tour, I remember reading an article where Bono mentioned how he noticed the same people in the front of the stage at every show, and he was excited about the new way people were going to screened into the venue - some randomly allowed inside the circle and the rest outside of it. Turns out, it didn't work - the fanatics found a way in front of the stage - sorry Bono. I don't have a need to prove I'm U2's biggest fan or need to see the first show of the tour, in fact, I'd prefer to see a more polished show, one where they have worked out all the kinks. The fanatics I've met along the way have widened the line between passion and obsession... I'm a fan of U2 and glad that I'm not a fanatic.

StrongGirl- I have learned from being on this forum that I lie somewhere in the middle - that dark gray area between U2 fan and U2 fanatic

Tumbling Dice- I'm just a U2 fan and more a fan of their recorded music (albums) than their live performances, not that I don't think that they are one of the premier live acts on the planet.

catcallmc - This clearly needs one of those personality type questionnaires to create a continuum. If you answered mostly A then you need to stop looking dreamily into Bono's eyes in every poster in your U2 shrine, if you answered mostly D then you've a healthy appreciation of quality music!

Tumbling Dice- You mean to say, **you don't** have their home and cell phone numbers? Jeez you can't be much of a fan.

Smee- From my many years on u2 forums (i can go back to the 90s here) I have often thought that u2 themselves would probably think a lot of the "fans" on these places were douchebags and be a little wary of em. I think they would like me tho, coz, while they mean a lot to me...im not derranged about it!

Midnight- Fanatic…600 songs on my Ipod by them alone, And my 23000+ posts here. I say fanatic still (**forum.atu2.com: on June 22, 2010)**

The stanza above highlights the negotiation of different ways of expressing loyalty. Darabois reflectively presents her individual views on what being a loyal U2 fan entails, and captures the process of evolution as her individual perceptions are confronted with

the views and practices of other fans she has encountered on and off the forum. At different points in her post, Darabois moves back and forth between the footing of a 'fan' and a 'fanatic', reflecting a self-awareness of different positions one can take as a loyal fan. Fanatic in this instance is used as a synonym for parasocial obsession as elaborated in the previous chapter. She uses *fanatic* in a negative and parasocial sense, to evoke excessive or obsessive behaviours in the consumption of the U2 brand. *Fan* on the other hand is used to represent a normalized expression of fandom or loyalty. These two positions are taken alternatively as Darabois negotiates her personal identity in relation to U2 and other fans. She articulates what she sees as the normal practices of 'most fans' – they know about U2's history and heritage, own all of U2's albums, and have seen the band on tour multiple times. Fanatics on the other hand seek out a more personal relationship with the band, travel long distances from their homes to see the band live, and always want to be at the front of the stage. Darabois works to legitimize the normal fandom practices, while at the same time, constructing the actions of negatively valorized 'fanatics' as obsessively transgressive and problematic. Even as a U2 fan herself, darabois's post conveys the willingness of some fans to emphasize stigmatic conventional perceptions of fandom when particular practices do not agree with widely held views on how to be loyal. Seeking out personal relationships with the band for instance might be viewed by some as mentally unstable behaviour, and demonstrating an inability to separate what is real from what is entertainment or fantasy. The tension between being a fan and fanatic is another example of the struggle between different ways of being a loyal fan of the same band. Engaging with the community has allowed Darabois to come to the conclusion that she is a fan and not a fanatic.

Subsequently other fans work to locate themselves and construct their identities as they compare their consumption of U2 to other fans on the forum. StrongGirl figures her loyalty "lies somewhere in that grey area between fan and fanatic". TumblingDice and catcallmc, again draw a distinction between the "healthy appreciation of quality music", and idolization of the band and its members. Through the course of the exchange excessively personal relationships with the band are sensitized, and presented as something the band itself would not approve of. As Smee puts it "while they (U2) mean a lot to me, I'm not deranged about it".

Midnight reflects an alternative reaction to differences in how to be a loyal fan – embracing and celebrating the fanatic label, and wearing it with pride in relation to her consumption of the band. Embracing the fanatic label can be seen as a form of self-acceptance and freedom of extreme consumption behaviour, at least within the safe space provided by the forum (Jenkins, 1996; Kozinets, 2001). Acceptance of potentially stigmatizing responses by other fans and society can also be seen as a barrier which once breached by self-acceptance, provides the ease with which Midnight spends on U2 (over 600 songs by her own account).

Also, the inability of some fans on the forum to handle negative criticism of U2, or U2's music is singled out as a threshold, which once crossed puts some fans in 'fanatic' territory.

Blueeyedboy - is a

> For me there is a fine line between being a sycophant and a super fan. A super fan(atic) lifestyle choice for the person who decides to put their obsession ahead of most other elements of their lives, such as sacrificing family holidays to go and follow the band touring, not relenting until they have all formats of released material and can reel off stats such as the name of Bono's aunties one eyed cat at the drop of a hat. This lifestyle choice is applied through the good times and the bad times.
>
> The more annoying and much less interesting sycophant refuses to acknowledge any weakness in the band, their back catalogue, or the existence of other good to great musicians out there. They don't know the name of Bono's aunties one eyed cat, but they are 100% certain that it better than the one eyed cat owned by anyone related to a member of Coldplay.
>
> I would class myself as a one-time obsessive fan, possibly bordering on sycophantic at one stage '89-93, but would struggle to class my interest any higher than passing nowadays. That said, my obsession with music in general has never been greater, especially in new and upcoming acts. (**forum.atu2.com: on October 17, 2015)**

In addition to highlighting any attempts at forming personal relationships with U2, and obsessive consumption through tour attendance and collecting behaviour, blueeyedboy categorizes fans who fail to 'acknowledge any weaknesses in the band or their music' as 'sycophants', or fanatic. By so doing, he indicates a preference for perceived normal levels of consumption of the U2 brand, while also framing behaviours that cross the 'fine line' as problematic and transgressive. This was a position that was also constantly maintained by some fans in interview sessions. Devin notes:

> In terms of myself taking someone serious or not on the forum it really comes down to can someone be objective. U2 have released some bad songs and have made some

> errors along the way. Some people think every single thing they've ever done is gold. That's just not reality. The forum members I don't take to seriously are the ones who are not objective and view U2 with rose colored glasses (Email Interview, 4 May, 2016).

The apportioning of stigma by some fans on other fans serves the function of allowing the actor define himself in relation to the collective as well as in relation to U2. For fans who are labeled as obsessed or fanatic within the forum, the acceptance of such labels demonstrates the depth of their loyalty towards the band and signifies a thorough acceptance of all that U2 means to them. Stigma is a threshold which once breached, leaves them free to embrace their intense devotion for U2.

7.6 DISCUSSION

In this chapter I have explored how constructions of what it means to be a loyal fan of U2 take shape based on fans' interpretations of the expression of criticism against the band and their music within the community. The mono-disciplinary, systemic approaches to brand loyalty often tend to approach the topic as if it is an objective thing (for instance by assuming that purchase is synonymous with loyalty). Even as brand focused consumption communities continue to proliferate and attract the interest of consumer researchers, these groups are often presented as unitary, homogenous entities, with the assumption that groups of similarly interested consumers act and behave in exactly the same way. The apparent in-group tensions between being loyal and being critical pose a challenge to the taken for granted nature of brand loyalty, highlighting the nuanced ways with which it manifests, and raising questions as to how the act of expressing criticism against a b(r)and fits with the identity and practices associated with being a loyal fan of the same brand. Both unconditionally supportive U2 fans and critical U2 fans represent different ways in which loyalty is constructed that, are tied to fundamentally opposed perceptions of the relationship between U2, their fans and the music, as well as different reasons for being attracted to the band in the first place. The nature and character of loyalty is influenced by these competing motivations, as well as by particular social classifications (e.g. age) and by broader cultural views of acceptable consumption behaviours in relation to a popular music band like U2. Through the space the forum provides individual fans negotiate these differences and define their own sense of identity and what the band means to them on a personal level.

The art-commerce dynamic is again used to frame perceptions of how to be a loyal fan of U2. In the marketplace music is not simply made and heard as an art form but is also produced and consumed. The language, practices and demands of the market and the music product are different from the appreciation of music as an art form, and these contrasts are seen bubbling to the surface as another dimension of the expression of criticism against U2, and by extension ways to be loyal to them. The framing of music as a product highlights a distinctly different view of loyalty. As emphasized by O'Reilly, et al, (2013), framed as a product consumers acquire music in order to avail themselves of particular experiences; with certain expectations in mind. Unlike other products, however, precise judgements on quality with regards to the music product are subjective, if not elusive. The variable nature of the music product also makes it problematic to invoke the rights of the consumer when these expectations are not met, leaves room for variability in notions of loyalty to U2, and demonstrates the need for a socio-culturally grounded understanding of brand loyalty as a whole.

Also related to the complexity of the music product is the reason why fans are attracted to U2 and hence why they remain loyal. The music product could be the music itself as well as the artist or composer. As was explored, consumers seek a range of different kinds of value from U2's music – from the aesthetic to the symbolic and expressive. They might focus on the music singularly or they might consider multiple touchpoints in their engagement with the band. All of these different use values create different interpretations for the expression of criticism, and trigger different behaviours and relationships with the band and several perceptions on how to be loyal to them.

Another factor that contributes to creating changing perceptions is the role of identity in defining the character of loyal behaviour. The relationship between identity and brand loyalty has already been well established in the literature (Oliver, 1999; McCracken, 1986). What is particularly interesting from the findings is the way in which transitions in fans' personal sense of identity also transforms the character and intensity of loyalty to U2 in terms of the ways in which it is expressed. As fans engage with U2 over an extended period of time, the centrality of the band to their identity is also open to transition, in relation to other priorities in their lives. This allows them to claim changing identity positions at different times, while narrating their personal

growth, positioning and repositioning themselves in relation to the band. These transitions also affect their ongoing behaviour- attending more or less shows, buying more or less albums etc. Of course as they interact with other fans within the forum fans also gain a sense of perspective on what their relationship with the band is or should be, and whether or not to make changes to their behaviour or maintain and defend their current positions.

The diverse expressions, perceptions and practices around how to be a fan, and how to be loyal to U2 necessitate negotiatory practices as fans interact on the forum. Negotiation can be described as the process of articulating critique, acceptance, or disagreement, debating and verbal fist-fighting; making sense of "experiences and conceptions" around loyalty to U2. (Thompson and Haytko, 1997:15). The give and take as fans engage within the forum plays an important role in crystalizing meaning, on the attributes of loyal behaviour. This process of sense making entails that the particulars of loyalty keep changing as fans interpret the meaning of the U2 brand to themselves, to the group, in relation to other bands and in relation to society at large. In order to bridge the gaps in how to be loyal to U2, fans either label other fans in ways that serve to cast their relationship with U2 in a normal sense, or embrace their transgression and obsession with the band as part of who they are. Subjective boundaries set by individual fans in relation to the group are by nature arbitrary, and these boundaries are more reflective of the person making the judgement, than of the group as a whole. Taken together the divergent views and practices ensure that there is no one objective way of defining loyalty to U2 as meaning is constantly being reshaped depending on individual realities.

7.7 CONCLUSION

In the previous chapter, Chapter 6, we considered a range of discursive resources that are used to construct loyalty by fans including time, obsession and the Irish heritage of U2. The present chapter has focused on the coexistence of multiple ways of being loyal within the fan community, as fans attempt to manage a collective notion of what it means to be loyal to the band. The attributes of music consumption that predispose fans to particular views on how to be loyal, as well as practices used in negotiating these tensions within the community were also considered. In the third and final analysis chapter attention is focused on another level of fan loyalty, the role of U2 fans as experts

and cultural intermediaries in curating U2's brand stories.

CHAPTER 8

FAN LOYALTY AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BRAND STORY

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Stories are an essential part of any successful brand. Herskovitz & Crystal (2010) note that stories are at one and the same time, a means of making sense of the world; a vehicle for the making and strengthening of emotional connections; and a way of recognizing and identifying brands of any type. Stories are therefore a medium for the movement and dissemination of meaning. In this chapter the focus of attention moves more fully to the symbolic dimension of the construction of loyalty to U2 as represented in the stories fans tell about the band. Chapter 6, the first of the three analysis chapters considered a range of discursive resources that fans use in making sense of loyalty in relation to U2. Chapter 7 focused on how fans collectively manage different ways of being loyal, and of expressing that loyalty within the group. This chapter highlights why fans negotiate meaning around loyalty – to earn the right to be involved in authoring the brands' stories. The focus is on the construct of fan loyalty and how it affords fans the means and legitimacy to author U2's brand stories.

There are a range of benefits that accrue to highly engaged consumers. Fan loyalty affords the loyal fan an anchor for their sense of identity and heritage. It provides an avenue for the fan to bond with other fans and consumers who share their passions and interests (Chung et al., 2008). As noted earlier in chapter 6 as part of the discursive resources for loyalty, U2 fans display different levels of loyalty to U2 as evidenced by their financial expenditure and collecting behaviours. They also invest their time, which serves as a means of ascribing respect and legitimacy to opinions expressed on the forum, as well as allowing for the accumulation of cultural capital. All of these investments with the object of their interests make fans uniquely placed to propagate and author U2's story and narrative as they see fit. Meaning is produced by consumers through the use and interpretations they give U2 in their engagement with the band. Loyal fans play a key role in this process through their engagement in online communities.

A key framework drawn on in this chapter is the circuit of culture (Du Gay et al., 1997). As noted earlier, the circuit of culture allows us to track the movement and circulation of meaning in a brand. Coming from a culturalist perspective (Holt, 2004), and the mutually constituted view it offers, all stakeholders have a role to play in shaping

meaning. The cultural lens affords a view of the different meanings around a brand and the process through which they take shape. Stories can be authored by organizations themselves. For a brand like U2 this could be through its choices of images, lyrics, performance style and sound that, together, signify its cultural production. Through their consumption rituals however, consumers also put their own signifiers and narratives into motion which may support meanings created by the brand or deviate from these in subjectively relevant ways (McCracken 1986). Fans play a key role in this process through their engagement in online communities.

Consumers appropriate meanings in brands, but not every consumer has the capital and knowledge to engage in the process of reworking these meanings and telling U2's story. Fans have such knowledge by virtue of their investments, passion and engagement with U2. The construct of fan loyalty highlights a group of consumers who are not content with consuming meanings as passed down through the circuit of culture. Through their engagement on the forum dedicated to U2, fans parse out which meanings should resonate around the band - they tell U2's brand stories. As such the construct of fan loyalty epitomizes an elevated functioning of the construction of loyalty to U2. The brand meanings referred to here are different from fan fiction. Fan fiction typically consists of narrative fantasies about characters or settings in fictional media works, created by fans of that work (Francesca, 2006). The brand meanings referred to in this chapter are the symbolic properties associated with the brand as experienced by consumers (Escalas and Bettman, 2003; McCracken, 1988). Consumers form connections to brands that hold particular meanings for them. Through interactions consumers assert control over these meanings and narratives.

This chapter will proceed to explore the role of fans as authors of U2's brand stories. With regards to U2 these stories tend to evoke strong themes of religiosity and sacredness, utopianism and authenticity. Using ethnographic data drawn from the online U2 forum I explore these themes and the ways in which they underpin the symbolic narrative of the U2 brand.

8.2 FANS AS AUTHORS

U2's fans play an active role in shaping narrative around the brand by constructing and negotiating meanings in the band's cultural texts. This process can be seen in the

exchange below which is drawn from a thread discussing the meanings in the band's most recent album, Songs of Innocence.

Parsons - If you're like me and are fascinated by the spiritual side of U2's music you've probably been dissecting SOI for hidden treasures looking for the fish in the sand as Bono puts it. With this album the messages are not as apparent as previous works but once you find them I believe they speak loudly.

Let's start with the cover itself, as awkward looking as it is (not a favorite) I believe there is strong Christian imagery going on. The Father/ Son image in itself echoes of early Christian art, secondly we have Elvis wearing a cross and Larry with a Sun compass tattoo. **update tattoo is a native American Pawnee morning star symbol or Sun rise (Christ was called the bright and morning star). Historically the sun was used by Egyptians to depict one of their many deity's. After Christianity conquered the majority of pagan customs the Sun was used as a metaphor for GOD the father, the spiritual ruler of the earth (north, south, east and west). So you could say the photo depicts Larry in the role of God the father loving / protecting his son (Christ) Elvis who's wearing / bearing the cross.
I know all art is subjective but IMHO that's what I think the photo is meant to convey (SON) GS OF INNOCENCE in the Christian faith Christ was Sinless (Innocent) a lamb as white as snow.

Track 1 The Miracle :
The title itself has spiritual significance, what throws most people off is the added tag (of Joey Ramone) but remember Bono has been using duality in his lyrics (physical / spiritual) since AB. According to Rolling Stone Miracle was originally called SIREN and had a line that compared The Ramones music to a sirens song. "Your a siren song"……

Borack - I admire your spiritual knowledge and your imaginative creativity on your interpretations. Keep up the good work and it will be interesting to read your next missives.

Johnny - I think Song For Someone is not only about the first time falling in love, but also about the first time finding and falling in love with God. This is made obvious in the lines "I'm a long way from your Hill of Calvary and I'm a long way from where I was and where I need to be." An older Bono is admitting that he has gone a little astray and his relationship with God isn't as strong as it once was.

Parsons - Good observation Johnny, I was kind of thinking along those lines. He could also be speaking to ALI In the line " I'm a long Way " because he's always stating she has the stronger FAITH.

Momo - CALIFORNIA -

The weight that drags your heart down
Well that's what took me where I need to be
Which is here
God uses our heavy hearts, our trials, to bring us where we need to be. To a relationship with Him, back on track in our relationship with Him, humbled before him, into His will not ours, etc.

Parsons - Awesome contribution mom thank you, I knew there was a reason why I loved the song.
Do you know the meaning behind the line " stolen days " ?

Momo - On "stolen days" - Actually, I just had another thought. What if it's along the lines of Jesus' 33 short years on this earth. It strikes me in the vein of what I've read in Anne

Rice's fictionalized (but also historical) accounts of Jesus' life as a man - *Christ the Lord:Out of Egypt* and its sequel, *Christ the Lord:The Road to Cana*.

Parsons - I've heard lots of criticism of Song for Someone, one being that it's lightweight and sounds like COLDPLAY. Nothing could be further from the truth this is a heavy song spiritually speaking. When Bono writes a love song it's never a phony baloney gag me with a spoon type. He often uses crucifixion analogy, self-surrender, death to self(ishness) give yourself away (self-sacrifice) type. That's what made WOWY so beautiful and the same could be said about SFS.

Meximo - Thank you Parsons, Momo and others that contributed to this thread. Indeed, I don't get why fans despise some songs only because they aren't Love Is Blindness 2. Song For Someone is not cheesy or corny. You may not feel related to a particular song, but lyrically, SOI is among their best. (**forum.atu2.com: on** November 02, 2014**)**

In the first post of the exchange, Parsons expresses his 'fascination' with scrutinizing and immersing himself in the meanings inherent in U2's music. By comparing these meanings to 'hidden treasure', he highlights the pleasure and enjoyment derived from delving into these meanings. This is important, because it points to intense engagement. A casual fan of the U2 brand might be content with receiving and enjoying the music for its entertainment value and aesthetic properties, without needing to delve too deeply into its meanings and engage with other fans around these meanings. The depth of Parson's consumption of the band's cultural text is therefore tied up with his experience of the brand. His engagement around these meanings highlights an advanced form of loyalty to U2 because he has gone past the stages of purchase of the band's music and superficial or casual consumption to *engagement* with and construction of meaning. Driessen (2015) similarly captures this proactive and engaged aspect of music consumption. Driessen (2015) notes that in the early days of Backstreet Boys fandom, Dutch fans of the group could depend on the media to provide frequent coverage of the cultural text. As the band became less popular and disappeared from the news cycle however, fans had to themselves become gate-openers and gatekeepers; and felt responsible for continuing to circulate news, created their own Dutch fan-sites and fan forums and befriended other (Dutch and international) fans online to sustain and maintain their long-term fandom. Where participants of that study were active around the coverage of the band however, the fans in this scenario are focused on meanings around the bands cultural text. The findings in both studies highlight a more advanced expression of loyalty than can currently be captured effectively under behavioural or attitudinal models of brand loyalty as presented within the core brand loyalty literature.

Parsons goes on to 'dissect' specific images and lyrics from the Songs of Innocence album, suggesting that messages being communicated by the band are not as easy to discern as on previous albums, thus positioning himself as knowledgeable and discerning enough to draw out these easy to miss meanings and fill in the gaps. In analyzing the album's cover image, it is obvious that Parsons's is not simply picking on messages communicated by the band, but rather is also inserting his own interpretations and renegotiating what these text represent or ought to represent. Parsons has thus assumed the role of interpreter, connoisseur, medium and author, standing in for the band. The use of the identifier "I" in talking about the image in question (I believe there is strong Christian imagery going on), highlights the speaker's role in constructing a particular (Christian) narrative around the visual text. Parson draws on personal knowledge and researched evidence that is not presented in the text as he attempts to make his case and argument for his particular reading of what the text means. Although acknowledging his 'subjectivity', Parsons claims to know what is being conveyed by the band. This assertion may or may not be true. The interpretation may agree with the intentions of the band, or it may deviate from it. Within this context, however, Parson takes on the role of author of the band's story. In making sense of the lyrics, Parsons is also constructing a story of U2 / Bono's own experiences which are part of the brand story. Parson's post illustrates the role of the loyal fan in constructing myths and narratives around brands to which they are attracted. In the rest of his post Parsons goes on to present further interpretations of the meanings of individual tracks on the rest of the album.

In the next post of the exchange, Borack embraces Parsons' narrative, and encourages him to keep it up. As other members comment on and engage with Parson's interpretations, these narratives begin the process of being digested by the community, and becoming embedded into the cultural field of resources around the brand. Each subsequent comment and reaction is a negotiation of the meanings in the text, with each contributing member drawing on personal investments in the band as fans, and the collective knowledge of the group, in stitching together their narrative. Negotiation occurs as fans accept, reject, and expand on meaning. For instance, in a later post, Parsons accepts Johnny's addition in relation to the lyrics to "Song for Someone", while also including his belief that Bono's wife (ALI) is being referenced. Similarly, Momo highlights and offers her interpretation for the lyric to another song, California, using

narratives that perpetuate the religious motifs that are already in circulation.

Later in the exchange Parson makes reference to criticisms leveled against a song for being 'lightweight' and sounding like a song by Coldplay, a band that is often compared with U2. Here too however, Parsons displays his in-depth knowledge and willingness to correct a narrative which he feels deviates from a version that is favorable towards the band. He provides context on the kind of love songs Bono writes (which he claims often uses crucifixion analogy), and compares the current work to previous songs (With or Without You), all in an attempt to argue his position. Casual consumers are rarely invested enough in the cultural scene to digest, accept, or renegotiate these meanings. Loyal U2 fans on the other hand, are versed in the bands' cultural space as a result of the degree of their engagement with the band. They are in a better position to pick up the signals being sent by the band, connect with prevailing meanings, or renegotiate these meanings through the stories they tell about the band within the community. According to Holt (1995), this can also be described as a process of integration through which fans enhance the perception that their engagement with a brand is a constitutive element of their identity. Engagement in online communities can be seen as an assimilation practice (Holt 1995) through which loyal fans become competent participants in the culturally constituted world. The findings from the U2 forum are also in line with previous studies within the music consumption literature that highlight the role of non-traditional producers (e.g. consumers, fans and amateurs) in playing active and productive roles. Fans have been shown to sustain markets (Choi and Burns, 2016), as well as participate as investors, promoters and co-creative partners (Choi and Burnes, 2013). Choi and Burns (2016) for instance explore how fans and consumers contribute to the development and continuity of a market by investigating the independent music market in South Korea. Driven by their passion, enthusiasm and commitment for independent music, participants in that study use a variety of mechanisms to promote indie music, thus usurping the role of traditional actors such as record labels. In the next section I look more closely at the types of stories fans construct about U2. Three types of stories are told by fans on the forum, as outlined in Table 5, which also includes examples.

Table 5: Stories Told by Members of U2 Forum

Story	*Example*
Religion	**Craig-** The thing that U2 has that not many others do is spirituality and passion. As a Catholic the lyrics in many U2 songs strike a deep chord with me. Faith is central to many of their songs and it makes a big impact on me.
Utopianism	**Pregory-** The band's social consciousness is something that really appeals to me. Knowing that some of their kind of Christian philosophy, and that kind of backbone to their music - that awareness, that ability to reach out to places that other bands and other philanthropists can't reach - speaks to me.
Authenticity	**Barry**- It's U2's willingness to wear their hearts on their sleeves, to express sincere emotion at the risk of being considered uncool, that gives them authenticity.

8.3 RELIGION AND SACREDNESS

> The thing that U2 has that not many others do is spirituality and passion. As a Catholic the lyrics in many U2 songs strike a deep chord with me. Faith is central to many of their songs and it makes a big impact on me. If I'm going to a party or out on a Saturday night, I'm probably not gonna play too many U2 songs, but if I'm looking for something that will impact me emotionally and spiritually there are two artists that I go to: U2 and Bruce Springsteen. (Craig, e-mail interview April 8, 2016),

> If religion is a path to God/higher goodness/ better afterlife, I'm sure there're multiple paths that will bring you to this higher goal you are looking for. U2/ Bono's ideas are one of them (Skelter, **forum.atu2.com: on:** July 14, 2011)

> Not a Christian, but I'm tolerant of any beliefs, as long as you're not trying to ruin anyone else's fun. Nonetheless, the element of faith is one of my favorite things in a good U2 song, it's ever present and very real, which is more to be said about a lot of other artists trying to use the schtick. (Noel, **forum.atu2.com: on:** March 2, 2010)

This section explores how fans read spiritual and religious meanings into U2 and their music, and construct the band as a means of connecting with something deep and emotionally affecting. As Craig suggests in the interview quote above, the texts and lyrics of U2's music evoke strong themes of spirituality. Rothman (2014), on a quest to discover what the most relevant contemporary Christian hymn of our time is, in the same vein as Amazing Grace, notes that If you're willing to construe the term 'hymn' liberally, then the most heard, most successful hymn of the last few decades could be 'I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For' by U2. That song makes reference to speaking "with the tongue of angels" as captured in the Bible. With or Without You, another U2 song also makes reference to the words of Apostle Paul - "See the thorns twist in your side". In Bullet the Blue Sky, they sing about Jacob wrestling an angel. Similar biblical references can also be found littered across other U2 songs. Besides

these obvious call outs to Christianity, Bono the bands lead singer has also been known to make unabashed reference to religion and spiritual themes in interviews. In one such interview he expresses his view of Christ's atonement for the sins of man: "The point of the death of Christ is that Christ took on the sins of the world, so that what we put out did not come back to us, and that our sinful nature does not reap the obvious death." (Merit, 2014). All of these examples highlight the infusion of religious narrative into the U2 brand by the artists. U2 fans use these hints in the band's cultural texts as the basis to draw and express spiritual meanings in relation to the band, in contrast to the superficial and profane world they live in. The intensity of engagement, which forms one of the key defining attributes of fan loyalty means that loyal fans, being invested, interested, and versed in the output of U2, take it upon themselves to interpret the band's cultural output and their possible meanings within the community, and by so doing play an important role in framing particular narratives around the brand, especially in instances where possible meanings are covert or polysemic. Their love and passion for the band also means that they possess the knowledge to do so, more so than the casual consumer who is either unable, or uninterested in engaging with the band at this level. For loyal fans however, it is a source of pleasure.

> For me, what I get out of U2 is the power of the music and, when Bono's on with his lyrics, the wonderful turns of phrase and fantastic imagery of his words. In addition, I love analyzing what his lyrics mean. I've always said with lyrics that it's what the listener interprets them as being about. Okay, sometimes it's obvious, but on the occasions when it's not ...
>
> That brings me to the point about the Biblical references, or any references to anything of a religious nature. Because Bono's lyrics do often tend to be more open to interpretation, I think it allows room for other meanings to be drawn. So, for the non-religious of us (I'm also an atheist) we can read into those particular lyrics what we will (Sherri **forum.atu2.com: on:** April 4, 2012)

Sherri's comments highlight the pleasure fans gain from parsing through meanings around the band that might already be in circulation, and reworking or creating their own interpretations as they see fit. She also draws attention to the fact that cultural resources, such as the band's music lyrics rarely have one meaning, and are open to diverse interpretations depending on the particular perspective of the fan making the

judgement. The ease with which U2 fans make religious associations with the band has been helped along by the band through its cultural production, especially by the content of some of its lyrics. The tendency to find religious parallels in the realm of brand related consumption is a theme that has been well explored in the consumer culture literature (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry, 1989). Belk and Tumbat (2005) have shown how Macintosh users can be compared to a religious cult consisting of a tight-knit network of emotionally devoted users who employ narratives of Apple Computers and the technologies that accompany them as liberating forces, delivering its users from the 'evil empire' of Microsoft, and confer on its then CEO, Steve Jobs, Christ like qualities on account of his charisma and vision. Muniz and Schau (2005) also document the tendency of (now defunct) Newton users to create mythological motifs in response to the performance and survival of the brand, as well as the return of the brand creator. These motifs invest the brand with powerful meanings and perpetuate the brand and the community, its values, and its beliefs. In this instance, religious interpretations are to some extent already being circulated by the band through its lyrics, but U2 fans still play an important role in perpetuating and expanding on religious' myths about the band that feed into the cultural field of meanings.

8.3.1. Take me to Church - The concert experience

The act of attending a U2 concert forms an important rite of passage for individual fans and as part of the interactive experience within the community. Members frequently recount to one another the rapturous experiences they associate with seeing the band live. Ordinarily attending a concert is a means of being entertained. For U2 fans concert attendance goes further than this, as it represents a means of celebrating U2 and their music and connecting to something real. In the following quote a member shares their experience seeing U2 live.

> I'm a born-again Christian and U2's references to The Bible and God have always been a source of inspiration to me. Songs like Yahweh, 40, Rejoice, Grace, and Love Rescue Me really feel like worship songs and I could easily see some of them being played in church. Hearing Bono sing Amazing Grace and then segueing into Streets on the 360 Tour was an awesome experience that I've rarely felt in church and I felt so close to God during those moments. That's what I love about U2's music: it brings me closer to

> God and makes me want to be a better person (Dan **forum.atu2.com: on:** July 14, 2010).

Dan compares his attendance of one of U2's shows to going to church, an act of worship that at times exceeds his experiences in church. This story perpetuates the narrative of U2 as a bridge to a deeper experience with God, and the concert as a sacred space for fans to receive upliftment. This narrative was also echoed through the interviews. One interview participant took issue with me for attempting to articulate something as visceral and other worldly as a live U2 show. In his view it can only be experienced: "U2 are an emotional experience band, they're all passion, heart, and trying to attach a cerebral aspect to a band like U2 is difficult. You need to experience it" (Phillip, skype interview, 6 June, 2016). Like Dan above, tales from fans demonstrated a commonality in the ease with which a U2 concert experience was being compared with traditional religious institutions. Often, the U2 concert experience was in these such cases, positioned as a deeper experience than the real thing.

> Going to a U2 concert really is like going to church and (forgive me father) often better. (Matt, **forum.atu2.com: on:** 5 June, 2003).

Note the attempt by the fan above to negotiate his experience with attending a U2 concert and the sacred nature of the real thing; and the expression of remorse that he feels more connected to the later. This can be read as an attempt to reconcile the sacred/profane distinction. Belk et al (1986) suggest that a fundamental distinction structuring social life is between what is set apart and regarded as sacred and what is regarded as profane or ordinary. The sacred fulfils a need to believe in something significantly more powerful and extraordinary than the self - a need to transcend existence as a mere biological being coping with the everyday world. One might think of a rock music band as something profane, ordinary, part of everyday life. Through the process of sacralisation, however, the band has come to mean more to fans. Belk et al (1986) note that for popular music, sacralisation occurs as fans draw their collective identity from the songs of rock stars. Goodman (1960) calls this "the sacramental use of noise." The ecstasy derives from the liminal experiences associated with the music, as well as deriving from the live music experience itself (Holbrook and Hirschman 1982).

Another narrative theme that surrounds the bands' concerts is that of transcendent celebration. The concert experience is presented as an opportunity to celebrate U2 and the music.

> I think that when you're lonely music has this ability to get to you as if it was a living thing...That's why I think that a U2 concert is about celebrating the music : we do it and the band do it as well, we're all grateful that music's here. (Slovayan, **forum.atu2.com: on:** December 27, 2008).

Slovayan describes the shared feeling of gratitude for the music. The use of celebration also carries with it the feeling of joy - a shared state of flow triggered by U2 and the music. These narratives by U2 fans imbue the band's live shows with an aura of magic and as something greater than the everyday experience.

8.3.2. The Healing Power of U2

Another recurrent narrative constantly used by U2 fans involves being saved or delivered by listening to U2's music. This usually involves some variation on tales of being brought back from the brink of suicide, or healed of depression through the music. These types of narratives serve as powerful metaphors for the type of deep underlying meanings fans associate with the band and their music. The following story posted under the heading, "How U2 saved me from depression" is one such example.

> It's actually been a year since a really, really bad time in my own life. I mean, one of the worst I can remember, and last Christmas was... not a good one. And I was miserable and depressed and... I wasn't quite considering suicide, but I was at a point where I could begin to understand why people would. And I was very, very deeply depressed and could see no end to it and... And the funny thing- the amazing thing is that it was just after the new year that I was in a car and my parents happened to playing U2- who I had no massive interest in at the time. I mean, I had seen them in 2005, loved them, but I wasn't big into music and I had only really heard HTDAAB and some of the big songs, and didn't' listen that much. And... it was ATYCLB that they were playing, and 'Stuck in a Moment'. And I had no idea what it was about, but... the line "You are such a fool to worry like you do"- it's that line, of all lines, that stuck with me. And I couldn't get that out of my head for weeks, and.... that was a HUGE, HUGE

> part of how I came out of that depression. And that was before I really learnt to love U2- but it's part of why I do. God bless U2!!. (Joe, **forum.atu2.com: on:** December 28, 2013).

This story is presented as a testimony of sorts, a narration of the role U2 has played in his life. By sharing the story within the forum the fan opens himself up to the support of other fans. Also, as fans share their individual stories with each other on the forum, the collective faith in the power of the brand is strengthened. Individual experiences become shared myths and narratives, invested into the brand that are harder to dispel and take on a life of their own. The fact that "his parents just happened" to be playing U2 constructs a narrative of being touched by a higher divine power through U2. Faith connected him to U2's music. Several members respond with affirmations ("It's amazing how such a song raises us up *big hug*") (Ivy **forum.atu2.com: on:** December 29, 2013).

The process of reflecting on, and discussing the meaning U2 holds for individual fans can be seen as a personalization or possession ritual (McCracken 1986; Hirschman 1982). It allows the fan to claim an individual and personal relationship with U2. It can also be seen as an attempt to draw from the b(r)and the attributes that it has been infused with by the artist and through marketing forces. Since possession rituals allow fans to lay claim to the messages in U2's lyrics and music, they constitute an important stage in the process of receiving and accepting or recycling meanings in the brand. These meanings can be in alignment with intended interpretations or they can deviate, depending on the views of individual fans. Within the community, however, discrepancies are hammered out, and a collectively constituted understanding is attempted. Possession rituals, especially those devoted to personalizing the object, also enact on a small scale, the activities of meaning transfer performed by the artist. It is an act of ownership. The new context in this case is the individual's lived personal experience, which has assumed a personal as well as a shared meaning within the group (McCracken, 1986). Through these personal meanings fans construct their loyalty to U2. After all, only a devoted fan would go through the trouble of sharing their deeply personal experience with the band on a dedicated online forum.

8.3.4. Come one, Come all - U2 as all Inclusive.

An important part of the U2 appeal, at least as narrated by fans is the ambiguity of the lyrics and the fact that it remains broadly open to any interpretation. Fans use this to construct U2 as a force for uniting people from all faiths and works of life. Also related to this is a rejection of traditional institutionalized religion which prescribes exactly how followers are to live and relate with one another; in favor of the core spiritual tenets of love and acceptance of all people. In this sense, the U2 brand is used by fans to navigate the difference between religion and spirituality. Religion is associated with the public realm of institutions, creed and rituals, while spirituality is used to represent a more private faith grounded in thought and experience. Spirituality is associated with higher levels of mysticism, experimentation and unorthodox beliefs, as well as negative feelings towards the church. It entails a personal journey of growth (Fuller, 2001). The following two quotes taken from a discussion of the role of U2 for Christian and non-Christian fans expresses this rejection of institutionalized religion in favor of a higher spirit or higher god.

> A religious person may emphasize the religious aspect of Bono's lyrics, while an atheist such as myself, or you, might interpret it differently. Also, just because you're not religious doesn't mean you don't understand the references. Bono doesn't really preach religiously in his lyrics- if he did I would probably not listen. He uses religious stories as metaphors and subjects like another artist might use a secular work of literature. (Mark, **forum.atu2.com: on:** February 14, 2010)

The following fan further affirms and builds on this assertion

> so Christian or Muslim or whatever other religious tradition one might follow, u2 transcends religious difference and offers the core spirituality that so many religions today lack, simply because they've been too institutionalized. This is why a u2 concert is a spiritual event. you don't just see those who are Christians or Jews feeling the power of a higher spirit, or god...you see everyone feeling something. (Zamil, **forum.atu2.com: on:** February 14, 2010)

Zamil's comments suggest an inclusivity to U2's persona – a means of connecting with a higher power. All religions are welcome to this spiritual event. These comments

highlight the symbolic meanings that bond U2 fans to the band and the ways these meanings are articulated and given life within the context of the community. Also the speaker here presents his views with knowledge and authority that is borne out of the level of his engagement with U2. He demonstrates a deep awareness of the content of the lyrics, as well as an ability to suggest meanings, or at least what he thinks it should mean in the broader sense of the band's message. He takes on the role of cultural intermediary on behalf of U2 along with other fans in the community. The ability and willingness to do this serves as an example of fan loyalty in action, in the construction of U2's story.

Durkheim (1912: 206) was of the view that religion has its origins in totemism. Totems are collective symbols that represent both god and society. The primary purpose of religion is to allow a people to imagine its society and express its social unity – this explains the enduring relevance of religion. As he puts it "the god of the clan … must therefore be the clan itself but transfigured and imagined in the physical form of the plant or animal species that serve as totems". By upholding U2 as a band, members of this community are also demonstrating their belief in what they think the brand represents or at least their interpretation of the same. The religious stories and narratives perpetuated by the community around U2 allows them to present their unique view of the of the world, and by extension underlies the depth of their loyalty to the band.

8.4 SEEKING UTOPIA – U2 AS A CALL TO CONSCIOUSNESS

> The band's social consciousness is something that really appeals to me. Knowing that some of their kind of Christian philosophy, and that kind of backbone to their music - that awareness, that ability to reach out to places that other bands and other philanthropists can't reach - speaks to me. Knowing they are giving back to the community, the world, is very important to me. I think they do carry through some of their themes, especially their social consciousness of helping other people and not just living for themselves." (Pregory, **forum.atu2.com: on: Se**ptember 24, 2009)

In this section I explore the utopian myths fans tell about U2, as champions of social justice and social responsibility in response to the poverty and inequality in the world. Similar to the religious narratives explored in the previous section, utopian stories about the band have largely originated from the musical text, and activities of band members themselves. Many of the band's songs carry strong political, and aspirational messages. Pride (In the name of love), for instance is one such song that covers political and spiritual ground. Inspired by the civil rights movement in the United States in the

1950's, the song is a celebration of Martin Luther King's non-violent struggle for equal rights, and carries a message of peace, freedom and human rights for all. It builds on the concept of love as sacrifice as used in the bible (John 15:13): "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend", a love shown by Jesus and Dr. King in their fight for freedom (Greer, 2008). One, another song with its message of acceptance is often used by the band to promote social justice causes and also doubles as the name of a foundation that pursues projects against debt and AIDS and in favor of trade and Africa. During the performance of the song on U2's 2005 tour, Bono usually took breaks from singing to discuss projects "to make poverty history" and ask concert goers to sign up with their cell phones (McPherson, 2015). The band's lead singer, Bono has also been known to meet with policymakers, and engage in direct diplomacy, successfully convincing political leaders like George Bush to increase foreign aid and provide lifesaving medicines at reduced cost to poor countries (McPherson 2015). Many fans draw on U2's music and the actions of band members to construct narratives of coming into consciousness, and becoming aware of the plight of the less fortunate, and of seeking to forge a better world.

> I like that he tries to bring that awareness, and tries to make people think about things that they are not really conditioned to think about. It's really not a natural thing to think about what things are like for people in Syria for example, it's easy to look away and not worry about the experience of refugees. But he tries to bring a kind of reminder that these are people, and this is actually what it's like there, instead of the fear based narrative that some people try to peddle. I don't mind giving up 10 minutes of the concert or 5 minutes of the concert to hear him talk about these things that people should be thinking about. (Katie, skype interview 05 November, 2016)

Katie affirms that her engagement with U2 and with the concert scene is a gateway to engagement with and awareness of social issues. She appears to stand in for the band in making sense of the importance and meaning of their actions. She interprets the band's actions as a difficult conversation which nonetheless needs to be had. Like many other fans, Katie's experience seems to be tied up with her personal journey of knowledge and sense of identity. U2 supports her as she takes a reflexive view on the plight of refugees. In narrating what she sees as the band's motivations she is also narrating her personal experience. Her story is fandom in action, and by default is

constructive of her loyalty to the band. Many fans take this personal standpoint as they reflect, narrate, and discuss the meanings of the band's music and actions.

> I absolutely love this band and Bono's activism has only inspired my own. Do I dote on every word he says? No. But do I go research why he is saying it? Yes. In doing so, I have discovered a whole world I didn't know existed outside my comfortable life where I just get to focus on whether my band will produce another album or not. I credit Bono for calling attention to dire issues in the world and doing his part to make a difference. His voice may be louder than mine, but thank God it is. (Mark **forum.atu2.com: on: Se**ptember 28, 2016)

Mark makes the link between his personal experience, discovery of social justice related issues and his engagement with U2. This can be seen as an instance of informal learning (Marsick & Watkins, 2001), which occurs through involvement in voluntary organizations or political activity. It is learning that happens incidentally, as part of the individual's ongoing daily experience, interest, passion and engagement. Mark's initial exposure to Bono's activism leads to conscious awareness and investigation, that makes him even more of an expert on the issues being discussed, and consequently, better positioned to frame meaning and symbolic narrative with regards to the band.

In his treatise on the development of an ideal society, More (1516) identifies three forces that induce men to behave in a manner that is conducive to a stable society. These are the law and the sanctions behind it; informal social pressure such as public opinion; and conscience – what he calls the small voice, be it of God or of society. According to More, the poor functioning of these forces leads to disorder in society. More was at odds with socially accepted conspicuous consumption, which he felt undermined the appeal of morality and conscience. For U2 fans, the band's music and activism are a reminder to embrace values and ideals that are awake the to the needs of the less privileged, in contrast to the individualist, self-seeking motivations of a society steeped in consumer culture. Fans shape a narrative of service and social justice around the band; and of U2 as the voice of conscience and source of inspiration.

> I just want to say that no matter what anyone says about Bono-he will always be my hero. He has inspired me to live for something greater than myself. I want to help

> women and children of Africa get the vaccines they need to live, survive and thrive. No matter how small my contribution is, I want to know that maybe one child (and mother) survived because of me. So I will continue to work for ONE, CARE, Keep A Child Alive and the African Well Fund. Bono is criticized for being wealthy while he speaks about poverty but in my opinion he gives something even more valuable than money- his time and his incredible way of inspiring others like me. (Diane **forum.atu2.com: on: Se**ptember 28, 2016)

The utopian aspects of consumption have been explored previously (e.g. Sherry 1998; Belk & Costa, 1998; Kozinets 2001). Kozinets (2001) for instance (2001) shows how Star Trek fans co-opt meanings and practices related to the show to construct a utopian refuge for the alienated and disenfranchised, and invest themselves into this social world in particular ways, and prior to that Firat and Venkatesh (1995) identified the emancipatory potential in consumption, as consumers attempt to either escape the market completely as is the case in Kozinets study, or contest the terms of their participation (Kates 2002). In relation to musical texts, Rhodes (2004) contrasts the dystopic work-related themes of another popular music artist – Bruce Springsteen, with the representations of work and utopia in contemporary management books. Though both examples use utopian representations as a major part of their arguments, Springsteen uses a "voice from within" to explore the gap between the utopianism of the "American Dream" and the hard realities of the lived experience of working life. Popular management books on the other hand typically speak with a 'voice from above' that serves to reduce complexity and ambivalence in order to push a contemporary capitalistic agenda. Rhodes (2004) argues that Springsteen's text presents an effective counterpoint to the uncritical support for an imaginary utopia, as championed by management texts. He submits that the work of Bruce Springsteen illustrates the ability of mass culture to provide critical approaches that complement more formal forms of critique. Podoshen et al. (2014) also focus on the polar opposite of utopia. The authors posit that the subcultures which surround Black Metal music actively embrace dystopia as opposed to utopia. They detail how this dystopian exercise is comprised by examining a variety of emergent elements. As observed from both production and consumption contexts, they identify signification and hyperreality (or "reality by proxy") as playing key roles in in the subculture, and that both producers and consumers

of black metal art cooperatively participate in a process of mythification that drives reconstructed versions of perceived reality.

Despite the employment of utopian narratives in these examples, the role of fan loyalty in determining who engages in the process of articulating utopian brand meanings on the part of consumers, however, has yet to be highlighted. Casual consumers are rarely invested enough in the cultural scene to digest, accept, or renegotiate these meanings. Loyal U2 fans on the other hand, are knowledgeable about the prevailing narratives around U2, as a result of their affection and heightened levels of engagement with the band. Since U2 are tied up with the ways in which they navigate their daily lives, they are more likely to pick up the signals being sent by the band, connect with prevailing meanings, or renegotiate these meanings through the stories they tell about the band within the community. Loyal fans therefore, through utopian narratives, play a key role in contributing to the pool of symbolic resources available around U2.

As alluded to by Diane, not every fan buys into the narrative of U2's call to consciousness. Some fans display some level of cynicism and this can lead to conflicting stories and narratives. Magda, a dedicated fan who loves the band's music and is very active within the forum is one such fan.

> As much as Bono gets personally involved in various campaigns at the same time he is a multimillionaire, one of the highest-paid musicians, so there seems to be a certain level of perhaps hypocrisy involved. I understand that being a celebrity can help bring awareness to global problems, but at the same time at the end of the day the thing that matters is not the awareness itself, but did the poor get to eat, did they get medical attention they need, etc. I can see how attending political summits can be looked at as the best one can do, but I don't share that opinion. I am a big fan of Peter Singer, an Australian moral philosopher, and his ideas of combating global poverty, so I believe personal involvement is key. I believe someone like Bono with access to - compared to most of us - unlimited resources, could do a lot more. (Magda, email interview. 11, May 2016)

Magda expresses reservations on the extent to which Bono's campaigns and advocacy can effect real change. While she acknowledges the awareness that his campaigns bring

to these issues, she is of the view that a more hands on approach to the problem goes further than raising awareness and hobnobbing with the political elite. Magda's total acceptance of the approach of U2 to issues of poverty seems to be at odds with her alternating fandom of Peter Singer and the contrasting ideas that her devotion to the philosopher evokes. There appears to be a commonality between Magda and some other fans with regards to the validity of U2's message and efforts. Like Magda these fans tend to base their cynicism on the wealth of U2, and the ability of wealthy celebrities to relate with the needs of the ordinary person. This can be seen in the exchange below drawn from a thread discussing U2's activism and hypocrisy. The exchange is a response to reports of U2 moving money from Ireland to reduce the amount paid in taxes.

> It's a sickening, vulgar, patronising thing to have to listen to during a CONCERT. let bono do it on a tv interview (even that's sickening), but not at a concert, f*cking please! we get the point, you're socially conscious, we're not all thick. and we don't need a rich rock-star to tell us how to spend our money or our time, especially when a band as rich as u2 switch their base to an expedient tax haven. c'mon folks. the hypocrisy is there for all to see! (Miami **forum.atu2.com: on:** March 28 2009)

Miami expresses his distaste for how vocal the band is about their activism, especially at a concert. The tendency to highlight what they see as the hypocrisy of the band for shifting parts of its business affairs from Ireland to the Netherlands in order to reduce the amount it pays in tax is a recurrent theme within the community, and demonstrates the ability of brand action to deviate from the prevailing narrative, causing conflict. Here too, however, devoted fans are always on hand to steer the story back to a narrative that is favorable to the band. On the same thread focused on "U2's activism and hypocrisy" another fan attempts to correct Miami's assertion.

> I would say that the politics, "preachiness", activism, social causes, etc are all a huge inherent aspect of who the band are as artists and performers. This is who the band is as live performers, it would not be the same animal if you attempted to take this aspect out (Mbeano. **forum.atu2.com: on:** March 28 2009)

Later on in the same exchange, Mbeano provides an alternative interpretation or explanation for the actions of the band, suggesting that activism and social causes are

a central part of the band's personality, and as such should be accepted for what it is. Rojo also affirms and strengthens this position.

> A great concert, especially with a spiritually-charged band like U2, is truly an extraordinary experience. It puts people on a whole different level of consciousness, one where their ears and hearts are more open than ever to messages. Bono knows this; U2's concerts are his best opportunity to speak into people and to inspire them to live differently, and such an important opportunity can't be passed up. Personally, I love the fact that my favorite band believes in many of the same causes that I do, and I feel it makes perfect sense for their front man to preach on these causes at their shows. Music is so much more than entertainment; it's a spiritual experience and an instrument for social change, and though some might just want to come to have a good time, I know I get the most out of concerts where something more is offered. (Rojo **forum.atu2.com: on:** March 28 2009)

The process of negotiating symbolic meanings relating to U2's activism and hypocrisy can be seen more clearly as it plays out in the exchange below.

Run - First, before I get my critique out I want to say that I am a big U2 fan and have stood by them through the many times in their career they have been dismissed. I became a fan before Zooropa and have a deep connection to their music and genuinely credit them with saving and improving my life. Ultraviolet, Mofo and white as snow are my favor songs right now.

With that said, I cannot forgive Bono's statement of defense regarding U2's status as tax dodgers. U2 are artists, they also set out to be rock stars. I have no problem with an artist making a ton of money in their field. They earned that money. They also have a right to be smart about how they invest their money. But, here is the hang up. Many U2 fans, including myself sing U2 songs because we live the song but we dig the integrity even more. Even when U2 flopped you could forgive them because they genuinely tried very hard to be square with their audience.

I have always dug Bono's drive to be around the powerful because I always felt like he was an outsider looking in. But that is no more. He is one of them. He is a 1% through and through. He jets around the globe, uses Africa as his pet cause, hangs out with billionaires and gets up at U2 concerts to say "look at me and how much I care join that toothless organization One and the world will be a better place- Now sing Pride!"

Let's not pretend that Bono of 2013 is the activist he once was or pretend that there is consistency between U2 of JT or Achtung Baby and the band of today. There is none. The band of today is desperately trying to stay relevant, they are 50 plus and are tired. Which is okay, what is not okay is to abuse your fans intelligence. If your a glorified tax evader then own it. Say yes! I don't care about Ireland's schools or Ireland's roads. Hell, I will even repurpose Sunday Bloody Sunday for another context. But don't pretend that it is because your band wants to be good in business as well as art.

Brim - I second your post sir

Willy - You hit the nail on the head - 'we live the song but we dig the integrity even more'. That was what I loved about U2 also when I was growing up. I just can't respect them anymore - the music has gone downhill yes - but their public image is just awful now. I could deal with it a bit better if their integrity was intact but the music wasn't so good. Or if the music wasn't so good but their integrity was shot. Unfortunately, both have gone.

Elevated - I bet Bono pays more in US taxes than you do....

Maxisingle - Doubt it.

Jacob - ok let's see. Assuming 200m profit from 360 tour, the US requires foreign corporations to pay taxes on their US businesses at a progressive rate of 15-35%. Putting U2 in the midpoint yields a tax bill of 50,000,000. Also, he recently paid 1.5 million dividend tax on his Facebook shares. U2 has sold 60,000,000 albums in the US and is understood to retain about $3 per record, so that's 180m, again, a 36,000,000 smack down. I haven't even started on Vertigo, Elevation, and other tours, so lets be generous and call tat just another 50,000,000. That's about 137.5 million right off the bat.

Is That more than you pay?

Livewire - We're talking personal income, not corporations, U2 gets paid by Livenation on tours.

Bono personally isn't paying taxes here, but even if he was he still doesn't get a pass on lobbying for MY taxes when he's (legally) avoiding his

Dire - Just a fact:
Bono's RED campaign has raised $ 207.000.000 for aids medicines.
That’s real money, saving real people’s lives.
My opinion:
This is the reason I don't give a rats ass if he is a hypocrite or not

Smith - I agree. Even though I think he is being hypocritical it doesn't bother me much 'cause the work he is doing is saving lives (**forum.atu2.com: on:** June 20 2013)

In the first post, Run, who starts the thread, begins by drawing on his investments and affordances as a loyal fan of U2 – the length of his fandom, going back to the Zooropa album; the ‘deep connection’ he has to their music, which can be read as the centrality of the band to his identity; and the fact that he remains an active fan. Starting his post this way is significant, because it serves as a means of forging affiliation with other similarly engaged fans as he begins the process of constructing an unfavorable story about the band. After establishing his credentials as a loyal fan he goes on to construct his critique of band members as hypocrites whose recent actions (such as moving their wealth to reduce the amount paid in taxes) do not align with what the band has been known for in the past. Purporting to speak for other fans (many U2 fans, including myself) he calls into question the band’s integrity. He contrasts U2’s current actions with what the band has done in the past in order to highlight a preference for the,

seemingly, more authentic activism of U2 of old. In essence, Run's comments serve as a competing narrative as relates to the construction of U2 as activists, and provides an opportunity for other fans to embed or correct this assertion.

The process of shaping the hypocritical narrative within the forum continues as Brim notes that he supports Runs comment. Thus a particular competing meaning begins to evolve and take root within the representations that are shared by members of the forum with regards to the band's activism. Willy also continues this process, picking up on an aspect of Run's narrative that personally resonates with him (the integrity of the band) and expanding on it. Elevated, however, begins the process of pushing a counter narrative by highlighting the amount that is paid by the band in taxes through their tour. Dire also continues the process of negotiating meaning by drawing attention to what has been achieved through U2's activism. Smith agrees, noting that he does not care about the band's hypocrisy because actual lives are being saved.

The exchange represents an example of the negotiation of symbolic narratives around U2. Through their engagement and interactions within the forum, loyal fans contribute to embedding these meanings, correcting them, or creating new stories all together. Despite the competing narratives, for a wide range of fans who are active on the forum and that I came into contact with through interviews, U2 represents a link to messages of social justice and hope for justice in the world. As narrated by fans, the U2 story is utopian not solely in the sense of escape, but as a means of engaging with the world from a place of hope that things can be better, and taking action towards its realization.

8.5 AUTHENTICITY

Another pervasive story fans tell about U2 relates to the band's authenticity, or 'realness'. This usually involves a rejection of other bands, artists and music that are viewed as artificial, impersonal, or overtly commercial. Dolinar (1996) suggests that the perception of authenticity that has become synonymous with U2 was

> "perhaps best encapsulated on The Joshua Tree. The photographs of the band on the cover and inside the album show them in the barren deserts of Southern California among the sagebrush and sand dressed in nondescript attire exhibiting a solemn and pensive countenance". Throughout this period "the image of simplicity and sincerity

> remained the same, staying true to their well-established following and providing a stark contrast to what was considered to be a lot of mediocre pop music of the 1980s." (cited in Kalm, 2001).

Later in the band's career, U2 attempted to deconstruct the image of authenticity around the band, as Kalm (2001:4) notes:

> "U2's struggle with their own image of authenticity, in particular the contradiction in being garage band millionaires gave rise to their dramatic change of image in the early 1990s with the release of Achtung Baby and the subsequent Zoo TV tour. In general terms, the band's change of image was about recognising the futility in resisting absorption into the popular mainstream and assuming the image of rock superstars thrust upon them. In an apparent blurring of what is authentic and inauthentic, a characteristic of the postmodern condition, U2, by mimicking and mocking, imitating and exaggerating…make the transition from the modern into the postmodern. Instead of continually trying to project an image of their own authenticity onto the world, they chose to instead embrace technology, the media and rock superstardom and use repetition and parody to deconstruct their image. The Zoo TV tour, conveying this whole new image of the band, became a pantomime of farce; a mocking extravaganza of absurdity impudently sending up technology and the video age, turning their silver suits and shades into self-mockery and the blaspheming of the pop star world"

As will be explored later in this section, these efforts though misunderstood by some, only added to the aura of authenticity around the band as perceived by fans.

Grayson and Martinec (2004) in their analysis of authenticity within the field of marketing suggest that the approach of consumers to the notion of authenticity varies depending on the object of their interest, and the conditions under which it is being assessed. They identified two types of authenticity as applied to marketing offerings. When an object has a factual, spatiotemporal connection to history (i.e., a context in which people and objects interact), it has indexical authenticity. In contrast, when an object is an accurate reproduction of the original, so that it resembles the original's physicality, iconic authenticity is present (Leigh et al, 2006). These types of authenticity are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor are they inherent in an object. With a closer focus on popular music, Barker and Taylor (2007) have also considered

the importance music fans place on authenticity in popular music, and its effects on perceptions of 'art' and the evolution of genre classifications in general. As suggested by Grayson and Martinec (2004), the meanings U2 fans attach to authenticity in their narratives about the band tend to vary, but certain themes are clearly identifiable. One such theme relates to the ability of the band to tell personal, and real stories, especially compared with other commercial bands.

> They don't just sing about sex and drugs and rock & roll, like some bands. Sure, they sing about those things, too. But they also sing about sorrow, joy, love, fear, family, friends, faith, doubt; They sing about LIFE. It makes them feel authentic to me. (Lara **forum.atu2.com: on:** June 21, 2017)

Lara highlights the ability of the band to engage with real issues and topics through their music. Presumably "sorrow, joy, love fear, family, friends, faith, and doubt" are issues that she personally identifies with and are representative of her personal experience. Through U2's music Lara is able to make sense of these issues in her own life. The feeling of authenticity emerges from the alignment between her personal experience and the experience of the band as captured in the music. As a close reader (Fiske, 1992) Lara is more likely to be aware of the subtleties of the band's style, music and lyrics, draw conclusions and make interpretations about what they mean, and articulate these meanings with other fans within the forum. Like Lara, Barry also highlights the genuineness of the band in his narrative.

> It's U2's willingness to wear their hearts on their sleeves, to express sincere emotion at the risk of being considered uncool, that gives them authenticity. That is the secret to their popularity (along with their amazing song-writing ability and transcendent live performances) and what makes them unique among bands. (Barry **forum.atu2.com: on:** June 22, 2017)

Barry associates what he sees as the sincerity and emotions of the band with its authenticity. Like Lara he also compares U2 favorably with other commercial bands. By orienting to an idealized notion of authenticity, grounded in the ability of the band to "wear their hearts on their sleeves", these fans introduce the basis for dismissing other bands which they construct as commercial, pretentious or superficial. "U2 ooze authenticity. None of that cheap flimsy pop on top40, or studio trickery, just

conventionally structured songs that sound honest and organic (Craig, **forum.atu2.com: on:** July 14, 2013)." The act of comparing different bands in this scenario is a contrast device (Atkinson, 1984), used as a means of persuading other fans to the speakers' particular views. Chuck also focuses on the perceived ability of U2 to tell organic, real stories.

> I know for me personally, it's nice to see the guys in the band being able to work in their flaws and sins and weave all that into their music. There are songs where I feel like the guys are letting us into their personal lives. SOMETIMES YOU Can't MAKE IT ON YOUR OWN really strikes a chord with me. You don't get MEANING like that from a lotta bands today. (Chuck, **forum.atu2.com: on:** June 21, 2017).

Chuck highlights what he sees as the personal story of the band, being told through the music, and the sense of connection from being able to relate to what the band is saying. The representation of personal struggle in the music fuels the narrative of authenticity around the band. Despite the views of fans, as noted by Barker and Taylor (2007), every performance is to some degree 'fake' – a construction. In this sense authenticity as articulated by fans is an unattainable goal. Sincerity and autobiography are techniques that can be employed by the artist in the service of personal authenticity, similar to using traditional instruments to create an aura of cultural authenticity. Authenticity can be manufactured, and "artificial" songs can resonate emotionally just as well as "authentic" ones. Nonetheless, for U2 fans' stories of authenticity are a means of making sense of the close personal bonds they share with the band.

Another sense in which U2 fans tell stories of U2's authenticity relates to the causes which the band champions. Fans believe that U2's engagement with social causes come from a place of genuine interest and care, and use this to frame stories of the bands authenticity.

> They believe what they sing/write. Whether you think what they sing/write is any good or not is not relevant, but that they write and sing from an integral stance. The definition of Integrity from a book I read on the subject that seems to make sense, and that U2 fall in.... (1) discerning what is right and what is wrong; (2) acting on what you

> have discerned, even at personal cost; and (3) saying openly that you are acting on your understanding of right from wrong. (Acrobat, **forum.atu2.com: on:** June 21, 2017).

Acrobat touts U2's integrity, and alignment between the music of the band and what they believe in. His assertion about the band acting on what they believe at the risk of personal cost, may relate to some of the negative backlash the band has received on account of their activism, or the spiritual stance of the band and their willingness to be open about these issues. U2 and Bono have at times been called one of the most hated bands in the world for a myriad of reasons, from being so outspoken about the need to fix the world's problems, to making their music available for free on apple music devices (Stice, 2016). Some have described the band as having a 'do-gooder attitude', and as 'holier than thou hypocrites' when it comes to helping those in need (Stice, 2016). For loyal fans however, all of these are simply examples of the band being picked on for their integrity and acting on what they believe in. The negative view of the general public only adds to the aura of authenticity around the band for standing up for what they believe in. Tammy relates this to her experience seeing the band live.

> Some tend to get a little cynical about "authenticity" when it comes to music and celebrities. It often seems it's become a marketing gimmick. But there was a moment at the DC show last night where, when speaking of the One campaign and its work (as well as the part that US taxpayers have played in helping those with AIDS live longer lives around the world), Bono got seriously misty-eyed, as if he was completely overcome with gratitude. You could tell he wasn't just "paying the bills"; he was genuinely moved and thankful that so many were helping with a cause he has championed. That's authenticity to me. Bono and the boys are the real deal. That's one of the reasons I love them so much (Tammy, **forum.atu2.com: on:** June 22, 2017).

Tammy highlights the genuine show of gratitude and emotion expressed by Bono in relation to some of the causes he champions, in contrast to the cynicism that is usually assumed with such campaigns when undertaken by public figures. She concludes that the band is not simply going through the motions, but are the 'real deal'. The alignment between personal values and actions, is used to create a narrative of authenticity about the band, and as indicated by Tammy, is one of the factors that underlies her love for the band. Clearly these deliberate comparisons of authenticity with personal genuineness on the part of U2 reinforces the utility of Holt's (2002) take on the subject.

Holt suggests that consumers are able to see through facades presented as advertising gimmicks. Consumers are attentive to contradictions between the brands espoused ideals and the activities of the corporation (artist) that embody the brand. He thus highlights a need to align a brand's practices with its values. He notes that 'brands must be disinterested; they must be perceived as invented and disseminated by parties without an instrumental economic agenda, by people who are intrinsically motivated by their inherent value. Postmodern consumers perceive modern branding efforts to be inauthentic because they ooze with the commercial intent of their sponsors' (Holt 2002:82). U2 fans look for confirmation that that the issues the band highlight as important emerge from a genuine sense of care, and try to fuel the narrative of the bands realness and authenticity when they find evidence to that effect. In a sense this also relates to the narrative on hypocrisy discussed in the previous section.

Yet another sense in which the story of U2 as an authentic band is told relates to the origins of the band which fans perceive to be organic, rather than a record label creation.

> I think they are authentic because they aren't a record label creation. Not all but so many now are just show pieces put together to make money for executives (Nash, **forum.atu2.com: on:** June 22, 2017).

U2 was formed when Larry Mullen put up a notice board at his Dublin high school. The band started out rehearsing in Larry's kitchen, gradually building a fan base and rising to fame as a band (McGee 2011). Fans view these humble beginnings as evidence of the organic roots of the band. Nash's position also plays into the narrative of scholars like Theodor Adorno (1941) and his derisive critic of popular music. It takes from broader discussions on particular styles of music and the perception of authenticity. In general terms, rock music falls into the category of what is seen as real or authentic music – music which is not manufactured and expresses a social conscience, in contrast to inauthentic pop music which is perceived to be music on a production line, created for a mass audience and utilizing simplistic lyrics with the goal of making profits for record labels (Held,1980). It could also be interpreted as playing into the traditional indie narrative. Within indie music - which shares similarities in style with some of U2's aesthetic, particularly the band's earlier work - fans express a need to experience a "true or authentic music". They feel that music should be produced by "independent

local operations" not by a "centralized authority (major labels)" (Fanarow 2006: 28).

The range of narratives around U2 relating to authenticity confirm the fact that authenticity is a subjective construction rather than a set of objective characteristics that can be attributed to any one brand (Berverland, 2006; Brown, et al 2006). Narratives of authenticity are consumer perceptions that occur through a filter of their personal lived experiences (Leigh et al, 2006). This view is receptive to the social constructionist perspective guiding this enquiry, in that none of the meanings that revolve around the term can be singled out as all encompassing. Rather "it is a socially negotiable concept that is relative, contextually determined and ideologically driven" (Leigh et al, 2006). Corciolani (2014) captures this negotiatory process for authenticity in the consumption of a popular music band – Italian alternative music group, Afterhours. Describing the negotiation of authenticity between opposing groups of subjects as 'authenticity dramas', Corciolani (2014) demonstrates the evolution of consumer reactions as they come to terms with the decision of the alternative band to perform at a mainstream commercial festival. By taking a longitudinal view of the process through which authenticity is socially constructed and deconstructed overtime, the negotiation of conflicting views of the performance by fans and producers is apparent. All parties involved subsequently come to perceive authenticity in relation to the band in new ways.

U2 fans externalize and project their preferences, ideals, expectations and ethics onto the band. What this entails is that authenticity is essentially symbolic. Arnold and Price (2000) describe this as the self-authentication process through which "self-referential behaviours that reveal or produce the true self" are pursued (p.8). Considered within the context of the community, the stories told by fans about U2's authenticity can be seen as the workings of an idioculture: 'a system of shared knowledge, beliefs, behaviours, and customs shared by members of an interaction group ... [which] can be employed to construct a social reality' (Fine, 1979, cited in Patterson and O'Malley, 2006 p. 16). The personal dimension of authenticity also highlights the close personal bonds fans share with the U2 brand. Narratives of authenticity are perpetuated by fans who sense in U2, a gateway to something real, in comparison to the perceived contrived and manufactured nature of commercial bands. Unlike narratives of spirituality and utopianism which to some degree can be attributed to the music and activities of band

members, authenticity has largely been propagated by the media and fans. Loyal fans invest more of themselves into the community. They have more of a stake in protecting what they see as the band's attractive values. Their engagement and willingness to share their knowledge and views with other community members and fans ensures the continuity of the authenticity narrative. These efforts allow highly engaged and loyal fans to gain personal fulfilment as ambassadors for the band, strengthen their connection with other fans and share in the pleasures related to being fans of U2.

8.6 DISCUSSION

Brand stories play an important role in the enactment of fan loyalty. They serve as a vessel for some of the complex and multifaceted symbolic meanings that underlie the relationship between loyal fans and the brands that attract their interest. To be able to partake in telling U2's brand stories, consumers require broad accumulated knowledge and intense levels of engagement with the band. Only consumers who, on some level, find the band central to their identities and sense of community possess the will and capital to engage with the band at this level. This type of engagement transcends the relationship typical with casual consumers and described in the stochastic and attitudinal literature on brand loyalty. For loyal fans engaging at this level is a source of pleasure.

Loyal fans take it upon themselves to draw on every available cultural resource – songs, interviews, performances, personal experience – in contributing to the myths and narratives that embody the U2 brand. These brand stories also constitute a key aspect of the circuit of fan-side culture, allowing consumers to play their part in feeding into cultural meanings and symbols around the band. By invoking religious narratives, fans display the depth of their devotion to the band. The state of flow, and spiritual connection described by fans as part of their concert experience, as well as the tales of being healed by the power of the music all speak to deep meanings fans associate with their consumption of the U2 brand. As has been noted in previous consumer research interested in the use of religious myths within the consumption arena, these findings highlight the powerful role that religion and spirituality continue to play even in a postmodern world (Holt, 1998).

Utopian stories also allow fans to construct narratives of coming into consciousness, and demonstrate their awareness of the plight of the less fortunate – to aspire to ideals of a better world. When dissenting voices appear to stray from this narrative, as a result of happenings in the personal lives of band members, loyal fans are on hand to recommend interpretations that are favorable to the band. Utopian ideals as experienced by fans transcend religion, allowing fans to engage with the world from a place of hope. Through utopian stories and the associated meanings and practices it invokes fans are able to "locate their own sources of identity and power, and invest themselves into the social world in particular ways" (Kozinets 2001: 82). The findings in this study, similar to other studies that draw on the theme of utopia in the music consumption literature (Rhodes, 2004; Podoshen et al., 2014) demonstrate the potential of popular music texts and artists to serve as a resource for serious critical commentary on a range of issues related to consumer behaviour and managerial marketing discourse. Popular music brands and texts allow consumers and fans to make sense of the social and cultural world in which they find themselves. More importantly, this study also contributes to the music consumption literature by highlighting the role of a particular type of loyal and highly engaged consumer in constructing, negotiating and managing utopian narratives in relation to the brand.

Authenticity narratives demonstrate the longings fans have for true and genuine experiences, in contrast to the inauthenticity that abounds in contemporary consumer culture (Brown et al., 2003). It also highlights some of the motivations for the close personal bonds they share with the band. By partaking in the construction of these brand stories, loyal fans construct their loyalty to U2. Their engagement in the process of discussion around these themes on the forum, and as part of the community of U2 fans allows them to display their intense passion for, and interest in U2. They play their part in dictating which meanings resonate, or should resonate with regards to the band. They are cultural intermediaries responsible for perpetuating brand stories and shaping brand narrative. The findings of this study also highlight the fact that authenticity is a highly subjective and socially constructed idea. This is similar to other studies where music consumers have drawn on the notion of authenticity (e.g. Corciolani, 2014), collectively negotiating and imposing their understanding of what the b(r)and in focus is or should look like. This study however further contributes to the field of music consumption by

pointing to the role of highly engaged consumers in driving and negotiating brand meaning on account of their interest, passion, and in-depth knowledge about the brand.

8.7 CONCLUSION

Taken together, the previous three chapters comprise the analysis undertaken on the construction of loyalty within the U2 online fan community. Chapter 6 looked at multiple accounts of how loyalty is constructed by fans within the U2 community. A range of discursive resources that resonate with fans and the associated meanings with regards to loyalty were explored. Chapter 7 focused on the coexistence of multiple ways of being loyal within the fan community, as fans attempt to manage a collective notion of what it means to be loyal to the band. The attributes of music consumption that predispose fans to particular views on how to be loyal, as well as practices used in negotiating these tensions within the community were also considered. Chapter 8, the current chapter, focused on the symbolic underpinnings of loyalty to U2 as embodied in the stories fans share within the community. The role of fan loyalty in making fans authors of these stories and intermediaries for the band was also considered. In the next chapter I proceed to take an overview of the material covered so far and the implications of the themes raised for the initial research questions.

CHAPTER 9

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

9.1. INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the previous three chapters an analysis of the construction of loyalty to U2 by its fans has been presented. A focus on the interactions of the dedicated online forum, along with interviews and elicited data, has revealed the key discursive resources used by fans to give meaning to loyalty. The coexistence and negotiation of different ways of being loyal, as well as the legitimacy loyalty gives fans to partake in articulating the band's narrative has also been considered. In this section I reflect on the findings in relation to the research questions and, more broadly, in relation to existing research. The chapter starts with a recap of the empirical chapters. This is followed by a discussion of the empirical work conducted in relation to the questions guiding the enquiry. I then present the fan loyalty framework as a means of highlighting the experiential and meaning based aspects of brand loyalty. Key themes emerging from the findings are also discussed, including the diversity and complexity of loyalty, the art-commerce dynamic, the role of identity, and the status of the community U2 as a tribe. Subsequently the theoretical contribution of this thesis is outlined along with some of the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

9.2. REVIEW OF ANALYSIS CHAPTERS

Chapter 6 looked at particular discursive resources that are used by U2 fans in articulating loyalty to the band. Using data drawn from the dedicated online forum and supplemented with interview exchanges, and elicited information on the forum, a range of ways in which fans make sense of the notion of loyalty were discussed. One such discursive resource was the use of time. There was evidence that the length of time as a fan of U2 is used as a means of determining 'real' or 'genuine' fans. New or recent fans of the band were viewed as more casual fans needing to prove themselves to be taken seriously by long-standing fans. Long term engagement with the band also meant that opinions were taken more seriously and those fans were more likely to possess gatekeeper status. The length of time as a fan was also used when opinions expressed took a critical position against the band and their music. This allowed fans to avoid claims from fellow fans that criticism was only being made because the speaker was not a 'real' fan of the band. Obsession was another discursive resource widely used within the community. Obsession was used alternatively by fans to express pride in their love for U2 or as a label to be avoided entirely because of the perceived negative associations. Claims to obsession were also dependent on the evidence used to defend

such claims. Such evidence usually entailed making reference to money spent on the band, collecting behaviour and activity on the forum. Obsession was usually used to highlight the intensity and level of engagement that fans have with U2 and their music. Competing constructs of 'loyalty as an obligation' as against loyalty to U2 being a 'choice' also highlighted the commercialized, mainstream position from which U2 operates as a player in the music industry. As an obligation, the emotional ties between fans and the band stood in contrast to the choice that ostensibly exists in a producer/ consumer commercial relationship. Finally, the less common discursive resource of heritage highlighted the shared Irish heritage between fans and U2, particularly for fans of the band living in diaspora.

Chapter 7 focused more closely on how a collective sense of what it means to be a loyal fan of U2 is constructed within the group. Multiple constructions and perspectives on loyalty were found to be simultaneously at play within the forum as captured by the different interpretations of the act of expressing criticism against the band. Although some fans were at ease with being critical of the band on its dedicated forum, others who saw the fan community as a space to celebrate U2, and express all round positivity with regards to the band were constantly at odds with this stance. The ensuing disagreements reflected a fluidity and lack of clarity on what it meant to be a fan of the band, or how best to express this fandom within the community. Views on the differences between art and commercial endeavors were also seen to frame perceptions of how to be a loyal fan. Since the language, practices and demands of the market and the music product are different from the appreciation of music as an art form, these contrasts were seen to emerge as another dimension of the expression of criticism against the band, and by extension ways to be loyal to them. The reasons why fans might be attracted to the band's music also contributed to shaping loyalty related meanings and practices. Fans who were more interested in the aesthetic use value of music were more likely to be critical, paying particular attention to tone, structure and formulation of the songs. By comparison, fans whose affiliation with the band were more grounded in devotion, idolization of the band and what they stand for tended more towards supporting the band irrespective of their output. The tensions that were apparent as different ways of being loyal were negotiated, played out in different ways. Fans either labeled other fans who transgressed perceptions of normal behaviour in terms that functioned to normalize their own behaviour, or embraced and celebrated

their obsession with the band irrespective of how this was perceived by others.

Chapter 8 focused on the symbolic meanings fans draw from the U2 brand, as embodied in the stories they share within the community, which represents a deeper and more engaged construction of loyalty to the band. Drawing on ethnographic data from the online forum and interviews, the aim was to explore the role of fans as authors of U2's brand stories. On account of their intense levels of engagement with, and knowledge of the band, loyal fans were found to be opinion leaders, experts and cultural intermediaries for U2. U2's brand narrative was found to evoke strong themes of religiosity and sacredness, utopianism and authenticity. I showed how fans draw on U2's music, and the actions of band members to read spiritual and religious meanings into U2 and their music, and construct the band as a means of connecting with something deep. Rather than being simply a means of being entertained, the concert experience represented a means of communal enjoyment of a deep spiritual connection. Fans also employed narratives of being saved or delivered by listening to U2's music. This usually involved some variation on tales of being brought back from the brink of suicide, or healed of depression through the band's music. U2 was also seen as a force for inclusivity - uniting people from all faiths and works of life. Narratives of inclusivity also allowed some fans to demonstrate a rejection of traditional institutionalized religion in favor of core spiritual tenets of love and acceptance. The aspirational themes in the music and actions of band members with regards to philanthropy allowed fans to construct narratives of coming into consciousness, and becoming aware of the plight of the less fortunate, and of seeking to forge a better world. Stories of authenticity narrated the realness and genuineness of U2 in relation to other commercial and artificial bands, as well as in relation to the causes they champion, and the organic beginnings of the band. This types of narratives work as powerful metaphors for the deep underlying meanings fans associated with the band and their music.

9.3. DISCURSIVE RESOURCES FOR LOYALTY

Chapter 6 of this thesis has been concerned with answering one of the research questions.

- What are the discursive resources which music fans use to construct loyalty?

The empirical work, focused on fans of U2, has given insight into ways of thinking about loyalty that are valid from the perspective of the music consumer. The evidence presented in the current research supports the behavioural view on brand loyalty (Ehrenberg, 1988; Kahn et al., 1988; Tucker 1964) with its focus on the action of purchase as the buying of albums, band memorabilia and tour attendance is seen as evidence of loyalty to U2 by fans. The positions on attitudinal loyalty (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Mellens et al., 1996) is also well supported as fans displayed a core belief in U2, their music and some of the ideals they represent. Also, extending the attitudinal perspective, and further demonstrating the relevance of the work of Fournier and Yao (1997) fans also draw on a relationship perspective in talking about the band. A dynamic view of loyalty that morphs in character through time and engagement with the band was evident. Fans constructed loyalty as a fluid and evolving relationship. Although some participants have framed their loyalty as linked to purchases, others allow for ambiguity around this relationship, instead focusing on emotions and active participation in relation to the band. A discursive resource that, from the findings, seems to carry far more weight than it is given in the attitudinal and behavioural literature is that of time. The length of time as a fan of U2 is used to emphasize the quality and strength of the relationship with the band. Time is invested with meanings of fortitude in relation to U2, and was found to constitute a resource for ordering and structuring the nature of engagement within the community. By focusing on the music consumer, the current research moves the focus with regards to time and loyalty from purchases over an extended period, to the use of the length of time invested in the band as a statement of loyalty in relation to other fans/consumers, as a badge of identity in relation to the band/brand and as evidence of the right and knowledge to take part in the conversation about the bands' legacy. The length of time as a fan is therefore a key indicator of loyalty, on a similar standing with purchases, at least as used by fans in relation to U2. Loyalty to U2 is also alternatively constructed as a choice exercised as a consumer, or as an obligation grounded in an emotional tie with the band. These discursive resources also reflect the perceived separation of art and commercial intentions (Bradshaw, McDonagh and Marshall, 2006). Also, for some U2 fans in diaspora, their shared Irish heritage with U2 produces a way of thinking about loyalty to the band that is grounded in pride of the home country. Although notions of obsession are typically framed as deviant and pathological within the context of fandom (Jenson 1992, Duffet, 2014), within the confines of the dedicated fan community, it was found

to also function as a discursive resource for loyalty, simultaneously celebrated by some fans and avoided by others. The findings in this chapter support the view of loyalty as an ambiguous and complex concept that holds multiple subjective meanings for fans.

9.4. LOYALTY WITHIN COMMUNITY

Chapter 7 of this thesis contributed to addressing two more research questions

- What are some of the core tensions around being loyal fans, and how are these tensions negotiated within the community?

Conflicts and tensions are a part of the normal functioning of inter and intra group ecosystems, even for groups that share an interest and passion for the same brand. Indeed, conflict within consumption communities is reflective of previous studies on tribes (De Valck, 2007), brand communities (Ewing et al., 2013) and subcultures (Ogbonna and Harris, 2014). The current research has focused on the nature and impact of conflict within a fan community that has implications for the enactment and constitution of loyalty in terms of the way in which it is perceived, understood and practiced by fans of a music brand. The empirical work conducted within this thesis has given insight into the nuances, complexities and underpinnings of loyal behaviour for a mainstream popular music band. Loyalty, as manifest within community reveals a wealth of information about the motivations that guide music fans. When fans are faced with normative ideals of how to behave within the collective, they are likely to declare in distinct terms their stance on loyalty. Through conflict and tension, fans gain the opportunity to define the real basis of their affect for U2 in all of its diversity. Research into brand loyalty has often approached the subject from the view of the marketer and management (Jacoby and Chestnut, 1978; Dick and Basu, 1994; Oliver, 1999). Research that is focused on the consumer (McCracken, 1993; Schouten and MacAlexander, 1995; Fournier 1994, 1998; Fournier and Yao 1997) has been rare by comparison. This research, by grounding brand loyalty in the social reality of consumers reveals unconditionally supportive fans and critical U2 fans who both represent different ways in which loyalty is constructed that, are tied to opposing perceptions of the relationship between the artist and their fans. The nature and character of loyalty is influenced by these competing motivations, as well as by particular social classifications and by broader cultural views of acceptable

consumption behaviours in relation to a popular music band like U2. Through the space the forum provides individual fans negotiate these differences and define their own sense of identity and what the band means to them on a personal level. As part of the process of negotiating a multiplicity of ways of expressing and being loyal fans set themselves apart by labeling views they differ from as views of 'the others', or embrace and celebrate their divergent practices and views, especially when these are potentially transgressive.

9.5. FANS AS AUTHORS

Chapter 8 has primarily been concerned with answering the research questions

- Why do fans negotiate the tensions that emerge from different ways of being loyal?

Fans negotiate the meanings around loyalty because it affords them the means and legitimacy to be active authors of the bands brand stories. As noted earlier in chapter 6 as part of the discursive resources for loyalty, U2 fans display different levels of loyalty to U2 as evidenced by their financial expenditure and collecting behaviours. They also invest their time, which serves as a means of ascribing respect and legitimacy to opinions expressed on the forum, as well as allowing for the accumulation of cultural capital. U2 might also be tied up with their sense of identity and heritage. All of these investments make fans uniquely placed to propagate the bands story and narrative as they see fit. Meaning is produced by consumers through the use and interpretations they give U2 in their engagement with the band. Loyal fans play a key role in this process through their engagement in online communities.

The construct of fan loyalty typifies a consumer who displays a relationship with the object of their affection that is characterized by a high level of engagement. Fans display broad knowledge about the object of their affection, exhibit strong emotional attachment and express their devotion to the brand as part of the fabric of their daily lives. Loyal fans engage with a brand to the point of obsession. They are what Fiske (1992) calls excessive readers, who are not content to simply consume a brand. Instead "fans are consumers who also produce, readers who also write, and spectators who also

participate" (Jenkins 1992:214). These unique attributes of fans contribute to making them opinion leaders, experts and cultural intermediaries for the brands that attract their interest.

Brand stories epitomize symbolic brand narrative. They give fans a way to make sense of different aspects of their identity. They offer a point of reference that fans can relate to, regardless of the specific story or message. According to Holt (2004) a brand emerges as various authors tell stories that involve the brand. These could be the brand itself, culture industries, intermediaries and consumers. For consumers, fan communities constitute an important space wherein the brand's narrative is debated. Within dedicated communities, myths are perpetuated and dislodged; a sense of heritage is fostered around aspects of the brand and meaning is crystalized (Patterson & O'Malley, 2006). Through the process of integration (Holt, 1995) fans are able to enhance the perception that their engagement with a brand is a constitutive element of their identity. Engagement in online communities can be seen as an assimilation practice (Holt 1995) through which loyal fans become competent participants in the culturally constituted world. The process through which fans/consumers narrate a brands' stories constitutes a facet of the construction of fan loyalty.

9.6 FAN LOYALTY FRAMEWORK

As part of the review of the brand loyalty literature which was necessary for the current enquiry into how consumers and fans of U2 construct loyalty to the band, it was apparent that there were some limitations with regards to the ability of the principal types of brand loyalty – attitudinal and behavioural loyalty- to capture highly engaged forms of consumption, where consumer relationship with the brand might be anchored in their overall sense of identity or socialization. Although particularly evident with cultural brands such as music artists, which was the focus of this study, this also applies to brands such as Apple and Harley Davidson which have been shown to attract highly engaged consumers (Belk and Tumbat, 2005; McAlexander and Schouten, 1995). In these cases, the nature of loyalty expressed towards the brand is different from both functional (behavioural loyalty) and psychological (attitudinal loyalty) models in terms of the depth and nature of engagement with the brand. Also, the experiential aspects of consumption play a role in these consumer-brand relationships that is as important as the rational and goal-oriented managerial perspective that tends to dominate the brand

loyalty literature. The fan loyalty framework highlights a means of supplementing the behavioural and attitudinal brand loyalty literature by drawing attention to the experiential aspects of brand loyalty. Fan loyalty is well established in literature associated with sports sociology (Funk and James, 2001), fan cultures (Jenkins, 1992) and cultural studies (O'Reilly, 2005). With regards to brand loyalty Chung et al (2005) have identified the usefulness of the concept for improving the understanding of intense forms of loyalty. This framework expands on their work by explicitly working fan loyalty into the core brand loyalty literature. As highlighted in chapter 2, brand loyalty began with a focus on behavioural loyalty. The behavioural view follows a largely rational decision making process where the consumer repeatedly purchases a brand that meets an identified need (Tucker, 1964). The focus is on the action of purchase, and argues that the brand that satisfies the identified need best, reaps rewards in the form of repeat purchases. This perspective flows from the 'economic man', or information processing (Bettman, 1979) model of consumption in which notions of the functional and utilitarian benefits of products, and of consumers' ability to make rational choices that maximize gain while reducing cost, are dominant (Simon, 1955). This approach is limited by its focus on purchase decisions and its inability to explain purchases that are not driven solely by utilitarian benefits.

With its psychological richness, and focus on preference, commitment, attitude, emotion, and mental attachment, attitudinal loyalty offers a vital improvement here, as it begins to accommodate some of the complexities inherent in consumer-brand relations (Bennett and Rundle-Thiele, 2002). Nevertheless, as with behavioural loyalty, attitudinal loyalty is limited in ability to elucidate the subjective meaning-based dimensions of loyalty which shape and alter behaviour in diverse ways.

Fan loyalty allows us to approach the subject of loyalty from an interpretive perspective which focuses on the cultural meanings and social influences that shape consumer experiences and behaviours (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Fournier and Yao, 1997; Olsen, 1993). This approach takes a more nuanced view of the relationships between individual meanings and the cultural milieu within which they develop, and situates these relationships within a dynamic marketplace context. It serves as a reminder that consumption, and loyal brand-consumer interactions do not occur in a vacuum, but rather, play out within a complex set of cultural influences.

Feature	Type	Behavioural Loyalty	Attitudinal Loyalty	Fan Loyalty
Focus		Repeat purchases	Brand preference, Psychological commitment	Meaning, Consumer-brand engagement
Nature		Functional	Functional	Experiential, Meaningful, Symbolic
Measures/Indicators		Sequence of purchase, Brand Share, Proportion of purchase, Purchase frequency, Probability	Positive feelings, Beliefs relative to other brands, Purchase	Centrality of brand to identity and/or as a locus of community/socialization, Intensity of engagement
Consumer Perceived as		Passive, Responding to marketing action	Passive	Active, Materially productive and creative, Constantly reworking and negotiating meaning in brands/cultural texts through consumption
Managerial/Marketing Potential		Measurable action, Directly related to performance	Consumer willingness to commit, Word of mouth promotions	Highlights underlying meanings that drive sustained loyal behaviour
Locus		Market focused	Market focused	Consumer focused, Social and cultural context of consumer
Paradigm		Positivist	Positivist	Interpretivist

Table 6: Typology of brand loyalty

It is the contention of the present study that by articulating the notion of fan loyalty as another type of loyalty, factors that affect the depth and intensity of engagement consumers have with certain brands can be accounted for (see Table 1). As investigated across a range of contexts (Belk 2004; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), the clearly identified links between identity construction and the meanings consumers weave into their interactions with particular brands, as well as the peer-to-peer dimension of interaction which serves to amplify relationships between the brand

and the consumer, can be more clearly represented within the concept of fan loyalty. The notion of fan loyalty serves to highlight the symbolic and hedonic aspects of brand loyalty that are otherwise only barely touched upon in theories of attitudinal loyalty. This perspective also allows for all brands to function as conceptual spaces where consumers can construct their identities and make sense of the things that matter to them (Grossberg, 1992). This recognition paves the way for an analysis of the reasons why certain brands may be elevated from mundane, everyday activities, objects and experiences to the realm of the sacred (Belk et al.,1989). The frame of the fan expanded to symbolize enthusiastic devotion expressed towards a brand in any context, allows us to explore fully the emotional engagement between the consumer and the brand, from functional to more passionate and highly engaged forms of loyalty.

9.7. DIVERSITY AND COMPLEXITY OF BRAND LOYALTY

With the retooling of marketing along relationship terms, and the professed importance of understanding the needs of consumers on their own terms towards forging long-term relationships (Gummeson, 2011), one might assume that brand loyalty research that is awake to the realities of consumer experience, and informed by their social reality would flourish. This has, however, not been the case. Most of the research on brand loyalty has approached the topic from a logical positivist perspective, with the inherent benefits and limitations that accrue as a result readily identifiable. A few accounts of consumer focused loyalty research can nonetheless be pointed to, including Solomon (1995), McCracken (1993), Schouten and MacAlexander, (1995), Fournier (1998) and Fournier and Yao (1997). Of these, Fournier's relationship approach to the study of brand loyalty has been the most impactful and often cited, as relates directly to brand loyalty.

Fournier and Yao (1997) articulate a definition of brand loyalty that is valid at the level of the consumer. A key aim of their work is to construct an understanding of brand loyalty that is sympathetic to an 'active, multifaceted and goal oriented consumer' as well as to the context of brand connections forged within the same product category. Towards this goal, relationship theory is used to highlight 'nuances of meaning, context and temporality' of consumer-brand loyalty interactions. As part of their findings the authors highlight the diverse nature of brand loyal relationships by tracking brand-self

connections formed through life themes. Life themes reflect differences in the locus of the relationship between brand and consumer, with one for instance grounded in commitment, another in feelings of love and a third in the process of intimacy. Though pioneered by Fournier's work, research on consumer-brand relationships have expanded to include a range of other perspectives (Escalas and Betteman, 2005; 2009; Park et al., 2010; Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence 2012)

There are similarities between the Fournier study and the current enquiry. There were loud echoes of the use of the U2 brand as a relationship partner within the study. For instance, participants used a lengthy marriage as a metaphor to capture the highs and lows of a loyal relationship which nonetheless remains worthwhile. By comparing the relationship with U2 to a marriage, participants co-constructed loyalty as a fluid, constantly changing but committed relationship. The evocative symbolic metaphors used by Fournier and Yao (1997), and individual participants in this study, was describing a one-on-one relationship between brand and consumer, without consideration of the tenor of loyalty in the instance of interaction within a community of consumers. In fact, the authors expressly suggest that "even within a group demonstrating strong brand bonds, important nuances in the character, depth, locus, and consequences of loyalty are found. These nuances are highly significant in that the various loyalty forms are likely governed by different process mechanisms" (p467). While this is true as confirmed by the current study, there are limits to what can be gleaned by focusing on the individual consumer. The range of cultural behaviours, and complex culturally defined patterns that shape individual behaviours are hard to observe fully by focusing on a singular consumer-brand relationship. This fact takes on greater significance when one considers the connected landscape within which consumers engage with brands. The proliferation of research on consumption communities and groups of consumers – tribes, subcultures, brand communities, etc. is testament to this fact. Much of the marketing and consumer behaviour literature is focused on the dyadic relationship between brand and consumer (O'Guinn, 2004). Although through social psychology there have been attempts to understand the influence of groups on the individual consumer's behaviour, this is a vastly different undertaking from examining loyalty as an inherently social behaviour, that is constructed and enacted within the collective; shaped by and grounded in the collective.

By looking at the enactment of loyalty to U2 as practiced within the group it has been possible to observe diverse motivations for loyal behaviour as articulated within the community. Two facets of loyalty, both undoubtedly grounded in affect for U2 have been identified. Although similar in many ways, critical fans and unconditionally supportive fans differ in their understanding of the character and attributes of loyalty and in how loyalty should be expressed to U2. It has also been possible to observe diverse responses to views of art and commerce. The ways in which groups of fans negotiate the different ways of expressing their loyalty to the band have also been highlighted. These subtleties in the experienced and grounded practice of being loyal would not be as apparent without the benefit of seeing the enactment of loyalty within the collective. The role of the collective in nurturing symbolic meanings around the band has also been clearly observable through findings. The diversity and complexity of fan experiences of U2 are articulated and managed within the collective. There are managerial implications of this, such as supporting, tuning out or subverting marketing messages. Perceptions and ways of thinking about loyalty that are negotiated within the group also translate to different practices associated with the band. As such, the socially embedded meanings fans give to brand loyalty are important.

The singular brand-consumer relationship has its role to play in understanding individual attitudes, motivations and decision making processes. For a more complete picture of brand loyalty, however, the meanings that emerge through interaction need to also be considered concurrently. By focusing on both the individual and group levels, loyalty can better be appreciated as the dynamic phenomenon that it is. An interactive view of loyalty that recognizes different ways of being loyal and of expressing loyalty, even to the same brand, is more in line with the experiences of today's mediated, active and multifaceted postmodern consumer (Elliot and Wattanasuwan, 1998). It also constitutes a step forward in terms of a meaning-based perspective awake to the lived experience of consumers as suggested by Fournier and Yao (1997).

9.8. THE ART-COMMERCE DYNAMIC

The dichotomy between art and commerce is an ongoing conflict that has played an integral part in work and academic research in the cultural industries (Hesmondhalgh, 2013). As noted in Chapter 4, the perceived antagonistic priorities of these two positions has formed the heart of examination into popular music for writers such as

Adorno (1991) and Bourdieu (1993). A lot of this work has tended to focus more on the effects of commercial interests on music production, than on the reception practices of consumers. Negus (1995) identified four broad positions among writers who have expressed a concern with the relationship between the arts and commerce in the production and consumption of music: the assimilation of art and creative concerns by capitalistic intentions; the realization of creative concerns by an active audience, through which the musical product is symbolically appropriated by various groups and consumers, and used to express subjective identities; the constant conflict between art and commerce which various groups in the cultural industries must confront and resolve; and the concurrent production of art and commerce which views the two positions as connected and complementary. With three of these approaches the major thrust of discussion is on the relationship and impact of sources of capital on the mechanism of music production and distribution. Although the second approach is focused on the consumer in so far as it looks at practices and meanings audiences invest in the musical text, it says nothing of how the art-commerce meta narrative shapes fans/consumers perceptions of their relationship with the artist, and loyal behaviour.

As a group, U2 fans seemed to be aware of these distinctions and it constantly affected the framing of their relationship with the band. The empirical work conducted within this thesis has given insight into competing discursive resources, informed by the art-commerce dynamic. With the discursive resource of obligation, the affection and familial emotional ties with the band means that irrespective of the price to be paid, some fans will go to any length to avail themselves of the complete musical experience; seeing as many live shows as possible and buying and collecting all that they can to feed their fandom. For fans who desire these things, but feel financially limited, this leads to feelings of being exploited or left out, since the strong emotional tie supplants normal notions of choice applicable in typical market exchange relationships. The perceived relationship with the band is seen in these cases as a deeply personal one that has gone unreciprocated, and the blame for this is automatically left at the foot of commerce. In the framing of collective views on how to be loyal, the expression of criticism also demonstrates the role of the art-commerce tension in dictating preferences on what the role of the fan in relation with the artist should consist of. There appeared to be the view by some fans that an appreciation of U2's sense of artistry should negate the need to be critical of the band or their music. For fans who felt this

way, thinking of the artist in a commercial sense is problematic. By contrast, some critical fans are at ease with invoking what they see as their rights as consumers to be critical when the band does not meet their expectations. These different views on how to relate with U2 are rooted in contrasting reactions to the band's simultaneous artistic and commercial intentions. The examples illustrate an aspect of the art commerce discussion that receives far less attention than the production perspective.

9.9 IDENTITY

As highlighted in chapter 2, consumer research has long acknowledged the fact that there is a link between the ways that people consume, and their current or aspirational sense of identity (Sirgy, 1982). Key contributors to this area of consumer research have drawn attention to people's use of consumer goods and brands to construct identities and communicate a sense of self to others, as well as to themselves (Fournier 1998; Kozinets 2001; Belk 1988; MCracken 1989). While some of this early research was more focused on broad conceptualizations of issues related to consumers and their identities, more recent work has started to take a more detailed perspective, delving further into the relationship between identity and consumption to consider the minutiae effects of different aspects of the consumer's identity on consumer behaviour (e.g. Ward and Broniarczyk, 2011). Looking specifically at brand loyalty, and the role of identity in forging the ultimate loyalty state, Oliver (1999:40) notes that "the brand is part and parcel of the consumer's self-identity and his or her social identity. That is, the person cannot conceive of him- or herself as whole without it. At the extreme, the object is present intentionally and extensionally. The consumer would say that the object is "part of me" and that it is an "extension of me" (see Belk 1988). He or she lives it."

An important aspect of the current research has been to further demonstrate this relationship, while also untangling some of its tenets. From the findings we see the ways in which transitions in fans' personal sense of identity also transforms the character and intensity of loyalty to U2 in terms of the ways in which it is expressed. As fans engage with U2 over an extended period of time, the centrality of the band to their identity is also open to transition, in relation to other priorities in their lives. This allows them to claim changing identity positions at different times, while narrating their personal growth, positioning and repositioning themselves in relation to the band. These transitions also affect their ongoing behaviour- attending more or less shows,

buying more or less albums etc. Despite the strong sense of loyalty and fandom to U2, it is possible for the brand to operate from the periphery, as one of many identity signifiers, called on as deemed necessary by the fan to prop up different aspects of their identity, as well as from the center. A high level of identification with U2 does not necessarily assert the centrality of the band to the fans identity, as the nature and expression of the relationship with the band changes through time. Of course as they interact with other fans within the forum, fans also gain a sense of perspective on what their relationship with the band is or should be, and whether or not to make changes to their behaviour or maintain and defend their current positions.

Other aspects of the relationship between identity and loyalty largely play out as represented in consumer research. For a lot of fans, the high levels of engagement and passion for U2 is supported by an alignment between their perceptions of what the band represents and their sense of self. This could be tied to the music itself, or the message and lyrics as well as the symbolic aspects of the bands image – the religious undertones, the example of activism and social consciousness lived out by band members, and perceptions of an authentic, down to earth band playing 'real' music. Nonetheless, the sometimes shifting and dynamic importance of U2 to fans, and the effects of these changes in relation to other priorities on the level of engagement, and manifestations of loyalty can clearly be seen. This contributes to a more nuanced appreciation of brand loyalty and consumer behaviour more broadly as it relates to identity.

9.10 U2 FANS AS A TRIBE

As noted in chapter 3, going by the notion of consumer tribes as championed in the marketing literature (e.g. Cova and Cova, 2001, 2002; Cova, Kozinets and Shankar, 2007), the U2 community can be described as a tribe. As key identifying characteristics, Cova and Cova (2001) argues that members of tribes are individuals who are bound by similar experiences and emotions in loosely interconnected communities. Members of the U2 fan community share a passion for U2, that serves as a unifying basis for their interactions both on online forums like the one this study has focused on and offline. Another key idea with Cova and Cova's (2001) notion of tribes is the ability of members of these groupings to belong to more than one tribe in contrast to earlier youth subcultures, and even brand communities, where the ephemeral and transitory nature is less salient if not missing entirely. Identifying as a fan of U2 and being active on the

bands forum does not preclude members from engaging with other artists and bands with whom they are similarly interested. However, O'Reilly (2012) asserts that the theoretical link between the work of proponents of consumer tribes, and Maffesoli's work, from which the concept is supposed to be inspired is weak. O'Reilly (2012) notes that a core number of Maffesoli's ideas have not been taken up or thoroughly integrated within the consumer tribes literature as applied in marketing theory, neither have his core theoretical constructs been used to develop empirical work. He takes this as evidence that the theoretical antecedents of consumer tribes have not been thoroughly appreciated.

Maffesoli (1996), in his book The Time of the Tribes, highlights five major themes in his discussion on tribes which O'Reilly (2012) suggests have never been explicitly and fully worked into tribal marketing discourse: the affectual nebula; undirected being-together; the religious model; elective sociality and the law of secrecy. The affectual nebula deals with the experiencing of the other which, he suggests, is at the heart of community - 'the feeling or passion which, contrary to conventional wisdom, constitutes the essential ingredient of all social aggregations' (2012: 243). U2 fans share a strong emotional bond both with the band and with each other that is grounded in their shared passion for U2. As seen in chapter 6, this emotional bond forms a key part of the discursive construction of loyalty to U2 as an obligation rather than a choice. The passion for the band is the basis for their high levels of engagement with U2 and their music as well as their participation within the forum. The affectual nebula, therefore can be said to be strong.

The undirected being together is described as a 'vital spontaneity that guarantees a culture its own puissance and solidity" (2012: 243). Puissance is the intrinsic vitality that holds people together, in contrast to institutions of power. This too can be said to be active within the U2 community. It is this organic 'heart' of the band that older fans have been attracted to, and feel has been under attack from the commercial intentions of the band. The nostalgic reflections on the humble beginnings of U2, and its resemblance to independent ideology is comparable to Maffesoli's notion of puissance. The religious model applies Durkheim's examination of the social as the most basic form of religion, to post-modern groups. He suggests that "the gods, their myths and rituals have changed their names, but they are still hard at work in both sociality and

environment" (Maffesoli 1996, 139). Maffesoli frames tribes as postmodern 'totems' in the Durkheimian sense. He also highlights a link between the emotional and religiosity. The strong symbolic themes of religiosity as encouraged by the band and taken up by fans both through the music and lyrics; and the ideals of care for the less privileged and love, point to the use of the U2 brand as a collective symbol of the spiritual for fans. Elective sociality refers to the choice which is exercised to be part of a collective and engage with other people (O'Reilly, 2012). The law of secrecy refers to the 'protective mechanism with respect to the outside world', a secrecy which allows for resistance (p.243). In this sense the U2 community deviates from Maffesoli's thinking. At least in its current incarnation, U2 cannot be described as an underground band, neither is any collective sense of resistance apparent among fans. For the most part U2 can be described as a mainstream commercial band. Nonetheless, the links between Maffesoli's views on tribalism and the U2 fan community hold true.

In any case, trying to fit the U2 community into one of the prevalent theoretical marketing boxes simply amounts to a trite classification exercise that holds little meaning for fans themselves. Despite the seeming characteristic alignment between the U2 fan community and tribes, fans referred to themselves as a tribe only in the very rare occasion, choosing to call themselves 'fans' in a simplified generic sense. As seen in Chapters 6 and 7 however, even within the community this description can be variously valorized positively or negatively depending on the intended meanings of particular fans, along with other terms like 'real fan', 'fanatic', 'obsessed' etc. Rather than fitting the right label to the right group, a more fruitful practice, as has been attempted through this thesis, is to explore why and in what situations particular identifiers are used by fans as they attempt to construct identities for themselves in relation to others and in relation to U2.

9.11 THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

As a research area, the field of brand loyalty is very well trodden. This thesis contributes to the field by bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue and carrying out empirical work that has not been done before. By approaching brand loyalty from the lived experience of music fans it has been possible to identify meanings around loyalty that are relevant from the perspective of the consumer, as well as make salient, nuances and uses of previously acknowledged loyalty components that serve to add depth and

complexity to brand loyalty discourse. The meaning-based perspective taken also highlights the socio-cultural underpinnings of brand loyalty which shape individual behaviours in diverse ways.

More importantly, this thesis situates the experience of what it means to be loyal within the context of community. It has looked at the process through which brand loyalty is enacted within the group. The discursive, social constructionist lens, and the use of ethnographic and discourse analytic methods for analysis have permitted a fine-grained, granular approach that reveals the emergence of a multiplicity of meanings around loyalty through exchange within the context of community. The process of negotiation, accommodation and conflict, engaged in through discourse is important in laying bare the preferences, value systems and meanings that frame loyal behaviour. They provide a possible basis through which precise insights can be gained into the meanings and practices of loyal fans and consumers, to complement the already rich research field of brand loyalty.

This study further contributes to theory by emphasizing the relationship between loyal fans and symbolic brand narrative. The fan loyalty framework describes a group of loyal fans who display intense engagement with, passion for, and interest in brands to which they are attached. They also possess broad knowledge about the meanings that resonate, or should resonate with regards to the brand. These factors make them uniquely positioned as cultural intermediaries responsible for perpetuating brand stories and shaping brand narrative. By highlighting different levels of engagement consumers have with brands, the study points to the role of a particular type of consumer in intercepting or supporting the meanings that resonate around a brand, and the role of community interactions in that process. As was shown through the findings, particularly in relation to music consumption communities, symbolic brand narrative has always been a preoccupation of consumers (Corciolani, 2014; Choi and Burns, 2016; Podoshen et al., 2014; Driessen, 2015). However not every consumer is similarly equipped to contribute towards shaping these narratives. The current study contributes to music consumption theory by highlighting the role of highly engaged consumers in shaping brand meaning and narrative.

This study also contributes to the field of arts marketing in a broad sense, and popular music consumption more specifically, by injecting complexity into the perception of the music fan. It does this by revealing some of the diverse ways in which fandom and loyalty is expressed, as well as some of the motivations that shape the nature of their engagement with artist brands. The idea of the critical fan challenges the taken for granted assumption of fans as an unquestioningly loyal group. The empirical work also reveals some of the ways in which the antagonistic identities and practices associated with criticism and loyalty to an artist brand is reconciled.

The study also contributes to popular music consumption by inserting music consumption into mainstream marketing discourse. The alignment of the lived experiences of popular music consumers with business and marketing discourse has allowed for interdisciplinary knowledge building towards in-depth understanding of both disciplines. Neither mainstream managerial marketing, nor consumer behaviour research have payed sustained attention to popular music and music consumers (O'Reilly, 2004). This study is positioned alongside other popular music studies (Rhodes, 2004; Driessen 2015) that demonstrate the potential of popular music as a serious field that can provide deep insights into consumer behaviour, in this case by delving into the construction of loyalty by music fans.

9.12 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

The research presented in this study has some important implications for branding. In the first place the study is consistent with previous attempts to broaden the kinds of behaviours associated with brand loyalty (Fournier 1998; Fournier and Yao 1997; McAlexander and Schouten 1998; Olsen 1993; Sherry 1998; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). It moves past a focus on repeat purchases, and the expression of liking and affect, to highlight culturally relevant ways that consumers of particular brands construct and frame their engagements with those brands. As such, it advocates a tailored focus on particular consumers to highlight grounded representations and meanings which might be associated with loyalty to a particular brand. This perspective highlights a view of loyalty and consumer brand engagement that is open to different meanings, depending on the particular set of consumers being looked at. This socially constructed view of loyalty is likely to facilitate a more sensitive and nuanced application of brand loyalty, with implications for segmentation activities.

The study also points to the role of a particular type of loyal consumer in contributing to the meanings that revolve around a brand. Highly engaged and active consumers and fans play a far more aggressive role in carrying the torch for the brand with regards to symbolic meanings, as well as in shaping these meanings. Loyal fans draw on their wealth of personal experience and investment in brands to which they are engaged in framing and perpetuating particular narratives. Within the context of mediated forums and communities this entails understanding the role of particular fans in affecting readings and interpretations of the brands' cultural texts.

9.13. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

It should be borne in mind that this study has a number of limitations that could be addressed in future research. In the consideration of the way in which loyalty is enacted within the context of community, this study has focused almost exclusively on the fan/consumer side of the loyalty phenomenon. The online community was used exclusively by fans, and interviews were also conducted with fans alone. The band/ artist/ producer side of this relationship was not engaged with empirically. A focus on the perspective of the artist, or a concurrent focus on artists and fans could provide some insights into their work, identity constructions and relationships as concerns the meanings around loyalty, as well as their marketing and branding practices as it affects the experiences of their fans. How do actions of artists operating from the mainstream music industry shape the meanings consumers come to attach to loyalty? Although the role of U2 in the symbolic readings of fans was engaged with in passing in chapter 7, a more comprehensive investigation of the artists' input in the construction of meaning would have allowed for an even deeper analysis. Keeping in mind the inherent issues of access such an undertaking might entail, this nonetheless suggests a direction for further research.

A further concern relates to the netnographic study, which for this research entailed drawing data and participants from a single dedicated online community. The study did not consider fans who had not been active on the online forum. It is unclear if and how the findings might differ if the study took into consideration the experiences of both online and offline fans of U2. Care therefore must be taken in interpreting these

findings. Also, due to the constraints of time and the degree of focus necessary, the study focused on a single brand. Future studies might consider other different types of brands besides cultural brands, or comparative studies, in order to see the extent to which the current findings can be generalized.

Also, as part of the process of collecting data for this study, some email interviews were conducted, in addition to asynchronous telephone and video chats and interactions with fans on the online forum. This eased the participation of respondents from the forum who were geographically dispersed, but also allowed for a few dropouts and incomplete interviews, especially in instances where the back and forth exchanges went on for a long time. This also meant that the length of time that was needed for some interviews was far longer than initially anticipated. Besides being a source of personal frustration, however, this did not impact on the quality of data collected.

As is the case with interpretive research, where the researcher attempts to present a deep reading of the lived experiences of participants, the role of the researcher cannot be ignored. Alternative interpretations might be possible on the same data in different hands, or using alternative frameworks. Although standards of trustworthiness and quality have been ensured, the possibility of generalization is dependent on future research.

9.14 CONCLUSION

This chapter has synthesized the findings and research themes emerging from the current study, highlighting a range of issues relating to the notion of brand loyalty and the way in which it is constructed by fans of U2. It has also spelt out the contributions of the study, as well as the limitations encountered in the course of the research.

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APPENDIX A: U2 DISCOGRAPHY

Traditional Albums	
1980	Boy
1981	October
1983	War
1983	Under a Blood Red Sky
1984	The Unforgettable Fire
1985	Wide Awake in America (EP)
1987	The Joshua Tree
1988	Rattle and Hum
1991	Achtung Baby
1993	Zooropa
1995	Original Soundtracks No. 1 (Passengers)
1997	Pop
2000	All That You Can't Leave Behind
2004	How to Dismantle an Atomic Bomb
2009	No Line on the Horizon
2010	Wide Awake in Europe (EP)
2014	Songs of Innocence
2017	Songs of Experience
Fan Club Only Releases	
1995	Melon
2000	Hasta La Vista Baby!
2005	U2.Communication
2006	Zoo TV Live
2007	Go Home: Live from Slane Castle, Dublin
2008	Medium, Rare, and Remastered
2010	Artificial Horizon (CD)
2011	Duals
2012	U22
2013	From the Ground Up
2015	Another Time, Another Place: Live from the Marquee 1980
Compilation Albums	
1998	The Best of 1980 - 1990 & B-Sides
1998	The Best of 1980 - 1990
2002	The Best of 1990 - 2000 & B-Sides
2002	The Best of 1990 - 2000
2006	18 Singles
Remastered Deluxe Releases	
2007	The Joshua Tree 20th Anniversary Edition
2008	Boy Remastered
2008	October Remastered
2008	War Remastered
2008	Under a Blood Red Sky Remastered
2009	The Unforgettable Fire Remastered
2011	Achtung Baby Remastered

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Greetings

2. Ethnographic Explanations
   - I'd like to talk to you about what being a fan of U2 means to you. I am interested in learning how fans talk about their relationship with the band, and how this is affected by interacting with other fans on the online forum. I want to know how you perceive your fandom of the band. I want to study fans from your point of view.
   - I'd like to tape record our interview so I can go over it later; would that be OK?

3. How did you come to be a fan of U2? Were there any critical moments when you knew you had become a fan or questioned whether you were a fan or not

4. What is it like being a fan of U2? If I were to call myself a fan of U2 today, what would I need to know to be taken seriously by other fans?

5. Could you talk to me about your online experience as a fan of U2?

6. Start at the beginning of your contact with the community as a new forum member, and describe to me how things developed? Also, what do you do when you go on the forum. Walk me through a typical day from when you log on.

6. You said that fans listen to and buy U2's music. Could you describe to me what that involves?

7. Can you describe any other things you do as a fan of U2?

7. What happens when you go to see the band on tour? Describe the experience for me. Walk me through the last tour you attended. How many shows did you see? Did you have to queue to see the band? Tell me about your experience from setting out to returning home. What was it like for you? What did it mean to you?

8. You mentioned that you have been a fan of U2 for….. Why do you think that matters? Do you think the length of time other fans have been a fan is important? What about online vs offline? Does it affect the way you perceive your relationship with U2?

9. Would you describe yourself as obsessed with U2?

10. What kind of fan would you describe yourself as?

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APPENDIX C: FAN INTERVIEW SAMPLES

ANA INTERVIEW

James: Let's start with how you became a fan of U2 in the first place. How did that happen?

Ana: I think it was the summer of 2001 (Laughs) I was actually looking at a TV program, that was counting down the best movie soundtracks, and I saw "Hold me, thrill me, kiss me, kill me", and I just got hooked on the song, I was listening to it on repeat all the time and I remember asking my parents, have you ever heard of U2? and there just looked at me like. There were a lot of cassettes of theirs and I just started listening to all of their discography and just got into it like that. So yeah, it was that song, hold me thrill me kiss me kill me. I had just gotten into Bat man too, so It was two obsessions at once.

James: So would you describe that as a critical moment when you became a fan or do you think it was something that happened gradually with time. What was that critical moment when you felt like, Ok, I think I'm actual a fan of U2, or when you questioned what sort of relationship you had with the band.

Ana: Well, to be honest I'm the kind of person who like, usually with the other bands I, I won't say I had a critical moment. I just get hooked on one song, and decide. ok they are pretty good at this, and then I will listen to other songs. I would say that was the critical moment, but I don't think I would say they was a moment were I went like "oh my God I am a fan now". I just remember I was really hooked on HMTMKMKM and listened to other songs and they were really great, so yeah.

James: What is it like for you being a fan of U2? If I were to call myself a fan of U2 today, what would you expect me to know or to say?

Ana: Like Criteria?

James: Yeah something like that.

Ana: I know a lot of people say that time is important for fandom. I was a fan for a short time, but I also got into them really quickly, and I would say just basically following their songs and updates, and discuss, knowing their discography and liking it. I don't think there is a person who likes every single song.

James: and do you separate the songs from U2 the band and the artist. Do you see them as two different things. Would you say you're more focused on U2 the music or U2 the band.

Ana: I would say that I'm more close to the music than the band. I'm still close to the band, for example my favourite song is "Love is blindness" and one reason for that is because of the backstory. Because edge was going through a very rough time and when he plays the song he would break a string and he never did that. But I would say I'm close to the music, because I usually have my own interpretations of the songs and

when I hear what the songs are actually about It might be something else entirely different from what I thought. Also I would say the songs because there was a huge age gap. When I first started listening to the song I was 12 or 13, and there was no way I could understand their point of view, but still the music spoke to me.

James: Let's talk about your experience on the internet. What was it that made you decide to start to connecting with other fans on the forum?

Ana: I think part of the reason is because I'm from Croatia, and most of my peers either listen to pop music or the sort, and I grew up in a rock household, and I did not have anyone to talk about it with, and when your young you just want to talk about it. When I actually think about it I joined the forum when I was I was 13 and nothing bad ever happened to me. Its A Very safe space and I met some of my best friends on there. I went with a member of the forum who is a good friend to see U2 in in Ireland, and she also came to Croatia. I believe also that the forum has helped me with English and I have a better vocabulary. i think that helped me a lot.

James: Walk me through a typical day on the forum. What is it like when you log o to when you log off? what do you do?

Ana: To be honest I've not been active on the forum for a very long time. I go now and then to lurk and see the news, what's going on. I would for instance if it's the afternoon shift in school talk a little bit about the summer and its always a problem because of my time zone chatting with people. But yeah basically I would just go to play the games. Someone is always online in the morning, she's always an early bird. And um then later after school I would go to the teens forums and people will come around and I would talk to them and chat with them. Basically It's just a U2 discussion, on anything interesting. Live band section, musical discussion section which I also like to participate in. I really came there to socialise. That's it.

James: If you had to describe that community in one word how would you describe it. What does it mean to you?

Ana: I don't know now cos there's a lot of people I don't know but back then I would say supportive.

James: You said that some fans talk about time when they are trying to consider who is a fan of U2. Tell me about that. What does that mean exactly?

Ana: I felt like when I was there on the forum and I was younger, I think I was the youngest member on the forum, and I kind of had the feeling, the vibe from some people that, you know, you've just been a fan for like a year. We are bigger fans because we know them from like redrocks and we saw the tours, and I'm like sorry I wasn't born earlier. They did not tell me this directly but it's just like a vibe they were giving me.

James: And how did that make you feel in terms of your own relationship with the band and with their music.

Ana: Maybe it bothered me for just a little while, because I was very young then. But after a while I just realised that it's just their opinion. That's why I believe that time doesn't really matter. Its more about what they mean to you, and that's it really. There was really nothing I could do about it so...

James: You mentioned that fans are likely to listen to the music and know some of their discography. Is there any threshold would you say? Is there a song I should know or an album I should have heard. Where would I get to and be comfortable in the fact that I'm a fan.

Ana: there was a lot of discussion in the forum that every U2 fan loves "Bad" and every fan dies to hear it live. And also it was also, I think like, I always got the feeling that if you like the Joshua Tree B-sides then you're a real fine. I always got that vibe. But to be honest I'm just someone that feels like If someone talks about one thing all the time I lose interest.

James: And where did you get that idea? Was it from the community?

Ana: Just from the community. Nobody really told me. But I think it's also based on generations. Teens times love Aching Baby, Pop and Stuff, and when Aching Baby came new teens joined the forum because of that album so it also depends on the age.

James: So does that happen a lot. New people coming with a new album and new cycle.

Ana: Yeah I think so. A lot of new people joined because of NLOTH. We live in the digital era, and so when they dropped the new iTunes album they must have gotten some new fans.

James: Is there any other thing at all you do as a fan of U2, besides listening to the music. Is there any other thing you engage in as a fan of U2 at all.

Ana: It depends on your personal situation I think. Some people say your true fan if you visit Dublin or whatever, but not everybody is financially buoyant to do that. After all you can just visit the library and read the back stories about some songs. For instance like I mentioned one of the reasons I love "Love is blindness" is because of the backstory. So you can just read about the band.

James: So is that something you do very often for every now and then.

Ana: I Just did it once

James: Tell me about your touring experience with the band

Ana: I saw them once when they came to Zagreb. I was only a fresh fan back then. I'd only been a fan for a year

James: And is that a year from when you first heard them the first time. Was the tour for that particular album

Ana: yeah it was the 360 tour for No line on the Horizon. So, yeah I remember it was really kinda stressful for me to get the tickets because that was the first time they came to Croatia at all, and I remember my Mum was up all night on Ticketmaster, and also she was up all night. I woke up in the morning and was like I did not get the ticket. And we tried to get them somewhere at a record store and there was already a line and I remember I came in, we came on the line and they were like there's only like 2 sitting tickets left. and 2 or three for standing, and my dad was supposed to come with us. And my mum looked at me and I was already like pale. But we she still got the tickets. But then A miracle happened and it turned out we had gotten the tickets on Ticketmaster. Just that the site was shutting down. So we went to Zagreb. I'm actually from a different town from Croatia, not from Zagreb. it was actually really beautiful. We were not up front we could see everything because of the screen. And It was emotional I was crying and jumping, my mum thought I was going to fall down. It was really beautiful. And then on the latest tour for Songs of Innocence I went at the end of November I went to Dublin to see them with my friend from the site, which was something we always wanted to do. I worked last summer, so I had some money saved up, and it was just on my bucket list to see U2 in Dublin, with her cos we have been friends since I was 13. It was all so beautiful. It was kinda surprising to me because I still love them, I still listen to them, but not as actively as I used to. I started listening to other bands, I now go to college. I was in elementary school when I first started, so of course your music taste will change, but I still love them I still listen to them. And when I got there I remember they were playing city of blinding lights and I just started crying cos it reminded me of a moment that I had forgotten all about. And so when I heard the song I could not help it.
A lot of things happened because edge broke his wrist, and there got this woman who turned out to be a transvestite to honour the gay, and also someone else who is really famous in Ireland I can't remember her name but they also sang with them. And there sang rare songs, October. it was all so emotional. There was also a fan behind us, who was from Paris, and it happened after the Paris attacks. We saw that he was really getting emotional during City of Blinding Lights, and we all cried together and the music just united us, it was all beautiful.

James: And what's the most number of shows you've seen on any touring cycle.

Ana: I Just saw those 2 shows. I hope they will come here to Croatia cos they said they will come back so we'll see.

James: How do you think it matters being a fan to see the band live. is it something that matters? How do you feel about it?

Ana: Personally I feel it's really important because I believe that a band is as good as they are live. There are that can write lyrics for you and auto tune and all of that, but what they really do live and how they carry the emotions is really important. But I know they are some people who don't like the crowds, and stuff so it might not matter to them. but for me it's important because you really feel connected and, and all the emotions from other fans. U2 are like that like to connect with fans. I think that connection is really beautiful and important forma. I know there are people that don't like crowds and stuff like that.

James: But do you get the sense that it's something that there fans feel is important seeing the band live.

Ana: I think it is. But it's not like you have to, I mean. But yeah

James: Do you separate your online experience with other fans of U2 from your experience outside of the forum. Are they 2 different worlds for you?
Ana: yes definitely, like I said. To be honest I think Europe in general, it's not really like the custom to be obsessed with a band. Croatia and the western Balkans are like that in general. You can like a band, but being obsessed and going to every show that's not really a thing here. When I said I went to Dublin to see U2, everyone was jealous but they were like "you went there just to see them", so.
James: So with all of this would you described yourself as obsessed with U2.

Ana: I would say I used to be but I'm not right now. I was more into them when I was younger during the teenage years but I'm not right now. I would call myself a big fan, but I won't call myself obsessed.

James: And how would you compare yourself with other fans of U2
Ana: Oh I've seen all sorts. There is a fan that really dresses up in costumes and go to every show I'm and I'm like you're going to be hot in that, its crowded and all, and I'm like ok.

James: And how do you feel about that?

Ana: I feel like it's a little bit too much but I always try not to judge people, but in my opinion it was a little bit too much.

James: Do you feel like it means those people love the band more than you do?
Ana: Um, to me, to be honest. No. But maybe they think they are bigger fans because they do that and others don't. Maybe they think that they are bigger fans then me but I just think they are slightly obsessed but I don't like to measure fandom.

James: So what is it like for you

Ana: I feel like music is like one religion. Everybody can put different version of songs and band themselves and kind of like if the music is really good you can feel so much. But I don't like to measure to fandom. In experience it's like a religion and that's why I don't like to measure. They don't know my story, I don't know their story. Ok.

James: So are they any other artists you would call yourself a fan of besides U2.
Ana: Yeah there are many. U2 are probably number 1. there are the longest I've been in a relationship.

James: Do you think it matters that you discovered U2 at an early age? Do you think it might be different if you discovered them much later.

Ana: think so, yeah. At that time when you're a teenager, is a normal time to be obsessed with a band and such. I'm almost 21. If I found them now I wouldn't go to

the forum. I'd probably just download the whole discography and listen to it like that's a cool song, but yeah, i think it influences

James: How do you feel about other things the band does outside of the music. For instance Bono activism and other stuff that might not be related to the music. Does that affect you in any way.

Ana: Yeah, for me, or example I don't like Coldplay because their singer is very arrogant. But i love the fact that he is really active and he wants to reduce poverty and everything, but um maybe it's getting a little bit too much. I mean he can't really change the whole world himself, its beautiful but.

James: Is there anything else you want to talk about with regards to your experience as a fan of U2.

Ana: I think they help me grow as a person in life. If not for U2 I won't be the same person. I've met a lot of amazing people through them so It's been great.
James: Ana thank you very much for sharing your experience with me.

CRAIG INTERVIEW
Thanks again for sparing the time for the interview. Will send you the first three questions now, but subsequent questions will depend on your responses to these initial questions, so I cannot send all at once.

1. Let's start with how you became a fan of U2. How did that happen? Was there ever a critical moment when you knew you had become a fan or questioned whether you were a fan or not?

2. What is it like being a fan of U2? If I were to call myself a fan of U2 today, what would I need to know or do to be taken seriously by other fans?

3. Could you talk to me about your online experience as a fan of U2?

Please, feel free to say as much as you can. Thank you.

Kind Regards

James

Hi James,

1. I am the youngest of 4 boys and 2 of my older brothers were casual U2 fans in the 80's. I remember hearing Under a Blood Red Sky and the Joshua Tree a lot when I was younger. When I was in grade 9 Rattle & Hum came out and became my favourite album. Songs like Desire and Angel of Harlem where very popular in my school. Rattle and Hum was the album that made me a big fan and of course I liked their older stuff as I had heard it growing up. Achtung Baby came out when I graduated high school and by then I was a mega-fan and followed everything the band did. There was never a moment when I questioned if I was a fan or not, but truth be

told I’m not a huge fan of their last few records. I feel while they still release good music, it is nowhere close to being as good as what they did in their prime (84-97)

2. Being a fan of U2 is like being a fan of anything else that's popular. A lot of people love them and a lot of people hate them. Even back in the late 80's/early 90's I had some of my brothers friends tell me how much they don't like U2 because of Bono. Many people think he's egotistical and pretentious. My oldest brother has never liked U2 and we have had many musical arguments over the years. He thinks they aren't good musicians and doesn't like Bono. I say it doesn't matter how well you play, it's how good the songs are.

In terms of being a fan today, you probably just need to know the music. It's really only the hard core fans who know everything about the members and the album details. The hard core fans read all the books and articles about the band and follow them on forums like @U2. The casual fan just likes to listen to their songs and there's nothing wrong with that.

In terms of myself taking someone serious or not on the forum it really comes down to can someone be objective. U2 have released some bad songs and have made some errors along the way. Some people think every single thing they've ever done is gold. That's just not reality. The forum members I don't take to seriously are the ones who are not objective and view U2 with rose coloured glasses.

3. The only U2 forum I follow is @U2. It is a good forum but the moderators are pretty strict and have kicked a lot of really good posters out over the years. Truthfully the forum is not as good as it once was. People become emotional in debates sometimes and things can get heated. In my opinion, that's ok. We are all adults. As long as nothing really wrong is said like racism or threats, etc... then i'm ok with a lively debate. Moderators don't really view it that way and now the forum is a bit dull. As we've lost lots of posters there isn't as much activity.

There a lot of nice people on the forum from all over the world, both young and old. I'd say the average age is about 40 or so. I'd say the posters fall in 2 different categories. The ones who love U2 but find something missing in the last decade or so and the ones who love everything they do. Most debates on the forum are either in the political section or between these 2 groups.

I hope this helps.

All the best,

Craig

Hey Craig,

Thank you for your responses so far. Will send you another set of questions now, and then a final set after this.

4. You mentioned that the music is an important part of your U2 fandom. Could you tell me a bit more about what this involves?

5. Besides the music and interacting on the forum can you describe any other things you do as a fan of U2?

6. You mentioned that you started hearing Under a Red Sky, and the Joshua Tree when you were much younger and that started your engagement with the band. Do you think the length of time that you or other fans have been a fan of the band is important? If so why or why not?

7. In terms of the ability of other fans to be objective about the band, is that something you find only on @U2 or does it happen when talking to those outside of the community?

Thank you,

James
4. Without the music there would be no reason to follow them. For me music was very influential in my life from an early age. When I was young in the late 70's and early 80's I heard a lot of music from my older brothers and I got into rock n roll from an early age. When I was in grade school I was into more hard rock bands but once hard rock went to hair metal it kind of lost me. I ended up looking back to the great bands of the past. I would listen to my older brothers albums like Hot Rocks by the Rolling Stones, Who's Next by the Who, and Led Zeppelin 4 and discovered some of the best music ever created. When Rattle and Hum came out it was a breath of fresh air for me. It had a common thread with bands like the Stones and the Who (Rattle & Hum is U2's most "classic rock" album). That started me on my way. When Acthung Baby came out in 1991 I remember listening to it for the first time in my room and getting to song 3 (One) and hitting the replay button about 10x in a row. It pretty much shot past The Who's Baba O'Riley as the best song ever for me. It usually takes me a few listens to truly get into a song but I knew the greatness of One right away. Achtung Baby and the Zoo TV tour were a great time to be a fan. An all-time rock band in its prime and I was there to witness it. The first U2 show I saw was Zoo TV arena show and it remains the best concert I've ever seen. Type in "U2 One Tacoma" on YouTube and you'll hear what I'm talking about. The last 3 minutes of that live performance is unbelievable. That is the U2 I love.

The thing that U2 has that not many others do is spirituality and passion. As a Catholic the lyrics in many U2 songs strike a deep chord with me. Faith is central to many of their songs and it makes a big impact on me. If I'm going to a party or out on a Saturday night, i\m probably not gonna play to many U2 songs, but if I'm looking for something that will impact me emotionally and spiritually there are 2 artists that I go to: U2 and Bruce Springsteen.

5. To tell the truth I'm not as into the band now as I once was. Things change. I have a family now and I'd rather spend time with my daughter then collecting U2 stuff. I still listen to them of course and follow them, but not like when I was in my 20's. I used to collect bootlegs, all the magazines they were in, buy all the books, etc.. Now I just buy the albums when they come out. I also think the band is a good band now, but not

an all-time great band like they were in their prime. In search of relevance in the last decade or so they have sacrificed some of the things that made them great trying to find a hit single. Songs like The Miracle, Get on Your Boots, Song for Someone, I'll Go Crazy Tonight, Ordinary Love, etc...are U2 trying to force out a commercial hit but end up with something pretty lacklustre. I will say that Sleep Like a Baby, The Troubles, and Cedar wood Road from the last album are a step in the right direction.

6. I don't know how important it is, but I can say that because I was able to witness the band in their prime it probably adds a little more weight in how good they are now vs their prime years. The last few U2 tours, while good, are not even close to the earlier tours in terms of the bands performance. Listen to One from the last tour and then listen to that Tacoma show from Zoo TV. Night and day difference.

7. It's really only the hard core fans on sites that will get into that kind of debate. When I saw the I&E show with my friends the majority of them hadn't even heard the new album. They were there for the classics. That's the reality for a band in their 50's or older. Majority of their older fans have companies and families, they just don't follow them anymore. The concert is a night out with your buddies to hear the songs of your youth. I went with 10 people to the show, and only 3 of us had Songs of Innocence.

Thanks,

DANIEL INTERVIEW
Daniel: Hi James

James: Hey, how are you?

Daniel: I'm good can you hear me?

James: I can hear you, can you hear me?

Daniel: I can hear you great.

James: Can you please tell me a bit about yourself?

Daniel: My family is Irish, I was born in Ireland so I know a little bit about Irish culture. But I live in Canada and I kind of understand how people over here in the United State kind of respect and follow U2 as well. Is it a paper or a thesis your working on?

James: It’s a PhD thesis. Hope you don't mind if I record this.

Daniel: Are you recording my voice or image?

James: Just your voice,

Daniel: Ok, that’s fine.

James: Let's start with how you became a fan of U2 in the first place. How did that happen?

Daniel: Um, ok. So well I'm 40 years old, and that's very important in putting it into context right. And my parents were always kind of um, attuned to Irish culture, and, you know, in those days there wasn't a lot of international Irish acts, or superstars. Now there's a couple more, there's Connor McGregor's, You have your Enya, Lea Micsence, but in those days there weren't that many international stars. And in those days when anybody would come out it would kind of be a big deal and everybody would know about them. And my parents kind of, my dad at least tipped me off to them, but then when the Joshua Tree came out in March of 1987 it was kind of a big deal in Canada and the United States and obviously the UK as well. So I was 11 years old when that came out and I remember getting a cassette copy of it.

James: Did you know back then, or was there a particular moment when you started to feel like there was something more than just listening to a particular song. When did you start to feel like there might be something special going on between you and the band.

Daniel: Well, a couple of things. you know, when into a lot of different music and television and movies, you might only really relate to about 5 percent of it. the rest is kind of garbage right, and um there was sort of a connection that through the music, that wasn't, you couldn't get from other international music whether from the US or the UK. And so there was kind of like a blood connection for me to U2. And I found it interesting as well that they were not just coming to the United states but actually conquering the United States with sold out arenas and Time magazine and Rolling Stones and all of those things. So it was really important that they were not just coming here doing a half assed but they were actually going all the way, nd thats their style right, they go all the way.

James: so would you call yourself a fan at the moment.

Daniel: I'm still a fan and I've kind of accepted that I'm gonna be a fan until the end. And I would say that they are kind of good to invest in as a person, because its not like they are here for three or 4 years and they leave right. So within that you can build up like community and people that you know over the years. It sounds kind of corny but the truth is you can kind of grow with them. And they keep life interesting going to new places, so we kind of, I think a lot of fans are kind of like voyeurs, like you know, when they did record in Morocco and stuff, you can kind of live through them and you can go check out new things with them. And I'm sure for a lot of people in Europe, the learned a lot about the United States through U2, through Sun studios, New York, Boston, they learned about those cities through U2.

James: What's it like for you being a fan of U2.

Daniel: I think that there's a lot of parts of who we are as humans like the tribal sense, right like a tribal gathering, you know. With modern life, interacting with big institutions and banks and schools and government we kind of get disconnected from each other a bit, and I just think that there is still sort of a need in the human brain for a tribal gathering or you know, a religious experience even without religion. So, you

have to kind of have to be a little irrational, you have to be evangelical and you have to be passionate to be a U2 fan. And what they do is they meet all that criteria.

James: If I were to call myself a U2 fan what would I have to do to be taken seriously by other fans.

Daniel: I think that's the difference James than a lot of other organisations. U2 their not really exclusive. they are more inclusive, right. They try to encourage new fans. It's not like a private club where you're not allowed. Your just going to go to the shows, get involved in the community and try and make friends, have experiences, share things, you know. Its not like a private club. you just kind of share a belief system and you want to participate in the experience, right. U2 are very inclusive. They are not exclusive. So, you kind of need to know about their history and the tours and the albums, but you know, you are welcome and people, if you have a wondering spirit and your kind of into new friends then its a good thing to get on board right. James: Are you very active on the forum online generally with regards to the band? Daniel: I am James: On the U2 forum I am because. The thing is its not just about the bands, the bands kind of philosophy kind of spills over into other things right. It spills over into politics and business, and there's a lot of discussion about current events and stuff like. If you want to talk about other music, If you want to talk about the US presidential election, if you want to talk about the Paris attacks, there's different things you can talk about on the forum and a lot of things that are close to my heart are kind of available to speak about online. You know that we are very interconnected now, like, you know if something happens, - for example a lot of people over the world have different opinions on the European migrant crises and its a hot topic on the U2 forums and different people offer different opinions and it can get interesting, so.

James: And whats it like for you interacting on the forum with other fans of the band. Daniel: Well, I'll teak you what, its a weird thing because your next door neighbour is not gonna be a super U2 fan, but there may be someone in Boston or Brazil or Poland, and you know even though there is a geographical distance, when you get on that forum your all sort of talking about the same topics that interest you. So, that's ah kinda important. And you know you don't have that face to face human contact, but you still get to interact.

James: And is there anything that goes on the forum that you prefer the most or don't like. Just tell me a bit about your experience on the forum.

Daniel: The thing about forums is that it's easy to say something that is inflammatory from a long way away, but generally I stay away from that. This forum is actually very well run its very civil, but I know other forums there's flame ups where people get upset, and they start to do all these different things but generally on this forum its not really an issue.

James: Do you separate U2 the band and what they stand for from the music. How do you engage with that.

Daniel: Well that's a good question. Some people don't like the politics of it all. But I think its kind of acceptable because I think. With politics they are kind of putting their

head in the sand because with U2 they are kind of the rare exception in that regard, but the music is connected to the politics right. And you can't really sing about songs that they do without mentioning other aspects and problems in the world. And a lot of western media and entertainment is kind of escapism to begin with. It's kind of uh well, we are not gonna worry about that problem, but with U2 they are trying to dig up problems and trying to solve them and get people to pragmatically work together. So yeah, the activism is not for everybody, but I actually find it to be a bonus.

James: You mentioned that you've bought some of their music. Tell me about your experience in that regard.

Daniel: the music has always been readily available. there's a lot of record stores here in Canada. Post internet like 2000 and onwards, there was a lot of online stuff you can get and now there's downloads, getting the music has never really been a problem, but I'm kind of a collector to begin with, so

James: is that mostly albums or memorabilia

Daniel: It wasn't really In my family to collect this kind of stuff, but for some reason I really like to collect stuff, and I've been doing it for a long time, so, yeah, I'm ah, I just collect. Its kind of a hobby, a habit, it keeps my brain occupied too right, you know, I like to ....it keeps my brain engaged, so, yeah.

James: Is that something you do with regards to any other activity besides U2.

Daniel: Actually No, well yes and No, but not as much as U2, yeah. I don't particularly collect other things. I don't collect cars or anything like that. I just collect music and books so yeah. It's something I enjoy and I see it as pretty harmless actually.

James: Ok. So we've talked about the music and the forum. Are there any other activities you engage in as a fan of the band.

Daniel: I play guitar too James, I played in local bands around my city, I've done different things, I've played sports and stuff but that's not really as connected to U2. I probably would have played music without U2 but they are definitely an inspiration to push yourself farther right.

James: What about touring have u seen them life.

Daniel: I have seen them live a bunch of times, have you seen them life?

James: I have not been that fortunate, I'm really hoping to catch them on their next tour. But I've seen a lot of the videos and live performances. Can u tell me a bit about your experience being them live and going on tour with them.

Daniel: I'll tell you what James, your PhD will probably change when you see them and when you not see them because, again a lot of the world of PhD's and stuff is kind of like cerebral stuff and U2 isn't necessarily a cerebral band. They are more a kind of emotional experience band. They are very smart people but they are not the type to sit

around and talk about a very obscure topic. Their more like a go out and get it done kind of band. Too describe them in adjective, they are passion, heart, meat and potatoes, get things done. I've worked in the university environment and I've been a student and those qualities are not usually a university type activity. So trying to attach a cerebral aspect to that won't work. It's something that needs to be experienced, and go out and meet people, and you know sometimes they are hostile and sometimes they are not, but you just gotta sort of go with it.

James: Just walk me through the last show you saw.

Daniel: The last show I saw was in Toronto, and it was, you know, I have a friend James, if you look him up on YouTube. If you look him up on YouTube his name is U2brothr. In Toronto he actually got up on stage with the band. It was in July of 2015. and there were four band members on stage and you can find the video on YouTube if you want. His name is U2brother.

James: You mentioned that you've been a fan of the band for a while.

DROO INTERVIEW

Droo: Hey. Yeah, that sounds fine to me. I could be free this Saturday afternoon (eastern time) to do this. Would that work?

James: Hey Droo, Please add me on Skype:facebook:chinex3, or if you prefer an email interview c.j.obiegbu@durham.ac.uk. Will be online all of Saturday. Cheers

Droo: An email interview might be easier so I can fill it out at my own leisure rather than responding to everything in one sitting.

Why don't you private message me the questions on here and I will email them to you once I have answered them?

JAMES Ok perfect! Will send questions one at a time starting and then we can get things going from there. You can expect about 10 questions in total, with some follow up questions based on your responses. If there is any of the questions you would rather not answer you can simply let me know and we will proceed to the next question. As noted in the initial email I am interested in learning what being a fan of U2 means to you; how you talk about and perceive your relationship with the band.

Let's start with how you became a fan of U2. How did that happen? Was there ever a critical moment when you knew you had become a fan or questioned whether you were a fan or not?

DROO: Sorry it took me a few days to get back to you.

I became a fan when I heard Hold Me Thrill Me Kiss Me Kill Me. I was a big Batman fan (still am) and randomly saw the music video. Thought the song was great. I didn't listen to U2 again until Beautiful Day came out and then got into the band for real.

I questioned my fandom after Atomic Bomb came out and it wasn't very good, but I had already dug into and loved the back catalogue, and the band won me back with No Line.

JAMES: What is it like being a fan of U2?

DROO It can be frustrating, especially with so much criticism levelled at Bono and the band, particularly after the Songs of Innocence iTunes fiasco. It's hard to watch people criticising a band that means a lot to me.

As for the second part of the question, I'm not exactly sure what you mean. Do you mean taken seriously by the public or by the rest of the fandom?

JAMES I mean by the rest of the fandom. Other fans of U2.

DROO That's hard to say. I think if you only know the big hits but nothing else, the hard-core fans will dismiss you as a "real fan." If you can't name a single song from Zooropa or Pop you likely wouldn't be considered a real fan by the rest of the members here haha.

JAMES Ok. Could you talk to me about your online experience as a fan of U2?

DROO -What sort of things would you like to know? That's a very broad question.

JAMES -What was the incentive to connect with other fans on the forum? What do you do when you go on? What does it mean to you?

DROO -I generally like discussing my passions with other fans. U2 isn't the only subject matter that I discuss on internet message boards. I like to discuss and compare my opinions with other fans. It's just a nice way to connect with other fans since I don't know many people in person who are as big a fan of this band as me.

James -Thank you Droo! Besides buying the music, and connecting with other fans on this forum, can you describe any other things you do as a fan of U2?

Droo -Not really. I perform U2 songs fairly frequently at karaoke. That's really the only other thing I do as a fan besides that.

James- What about tour attendance?

DROO- Oh, I do that too!

James -Cool, could you tell me a bit about that? What happens when you see the band on tour? What does it mean to you?

DROO -I've seen them on the 360 Tour. The very first concert was a very intense, almost religious experience for me. They did a bunch of unexpected songs that night like The Unforgettable Fire, Ultraviolet and Your Blue Room which amazed me.

Since then, concerts are still great although I'm a bit more critical of the set lists, particularly when it comes to being annoyed by certain warhorses that I don't find exciting to hear live like Until The End of the World and Pride.

To me, I'm far more interested in the new material and rarities. But I've heard Scarlet, Zooropa, Miss Sarajevo, Lucifer's Hands, and Ordinary Love live so I'm okay with it!

JAMES- Ok. Which would you say is more important to you? U2 the artist and what they stand for or the music specifically. If U2 were to stop singing songs you actually enjoyed listening to do you think you would remain a fan?

DROO-The music specifically. When U2 releases material that I don't like I don't force myself to like it just because they did it. For example, I never listen to the Atomic Bomb album because I generally dislike most of the material on that album. Same with Boy. I also hated Invisible when it first came out.

I think my ongoing fandom would be challenged if they released consistently bad songs/records. Fortunately I liked No Line and loved Songs of Innocence so I remain an enthusiastic fan!

JAMES - Ok. As a band U2 have been around for a really long time. How do you think this fact affects the dynamic of their fan community?

DROO -I'm not sure that it does too much. It certainly creates a broader age range of fans than someone like Britney Spears or Justin Bieber might have. It's a more intergenerational fan community, I'd say. And it's probably not a very popular group among tweens and teens, so it's probably a more mature fan base than a modern pop act might have.

MAGDA INTERVIEW

Hi Magda,

I hope you had a great weekend. As promised here's the first question.

Let’s start with how you came to be a fan of U2. Can you remember how it came about? Was there a critical moment when you knew you had become a fan, or questioned whether you were a fan or not?

MAGDA - I was 15 years old, it must have been September or October of 1988. A little youth club in the town where I lived advertised a showing of the Red Rocks concert. The poster was hand-painted, the club was very small and there were maybe 5 or 6 of us in total watching the video. I didn't speak English a whole lot at that time, I understood words here and there but not enough to follow what was going on. I hadn't listened to U2 much before, other than what I heard on radio. After watching Red Rocks concert I went to a fan club meeting at a nearby city and hooked up with other fans. So it was, you could say, a love at first conscious sight.

James - and what is it like being a U2 fan? What does a fan of U2 need to know to be taken seriously by other fans?

MAGDA - Being a U2 fan definitely gives you a point of reference with other U2 fans even if they are perfect strangers. There is an understanding that goes without saying, a feeling that since you are a U2 fan you belong to that "certain" group of people, and because of that we can understand each other at that level. I have developed several close friendships as a result of being a U2 fan, which crossed the line of being U2-related-only years ago.
I don't believe there is an objective definition of what is required to be considered a fan of any band, but I would say definitely basic knowledge of music, history, band members, etc. For example if someone said they are a U2 fan but don't know what The Joshua Tree is, or who is the lead singer of U2, I would not take them seriously.

JAMES You mentioned something really interesting earlier which I would like you to talk some more about. You mentioned that you attended a fan meeting in 1988 as you were just getting acquainted with the band. I'm guessing this was before the days of the internet? What was that like, and how does it compare with being a part of the online community? Also, what do you do when you go on the online forum?

MAGDA - It was sort of the same except everything was done in person, rather than online. We discussed our favourite band member, favourite song, shared the news. People shared pictures they had of the bad from different articles, except we couldn't download them then, we just made black and white copies of everything. We voted on the best song, best album, etc. I hooked up with a couple of people and we started hanging out together outside the fan club meetings. Basically the same, except now it's all done online.

On the online forum when there is something new happening like a tour, an album, something in the news about the band, there is a lot of discussion on that. Other than that there is a lot of just chit-chat, game playing, people talking about their days, etc.

James - Besides listening to the music, and interacting with other fans online, can you describe any other things you do as a fan of U2?

I don't think I do as much as I used to. I used to follow the news a lot closer, I used to bake a cake for Larry's birthday and celebrate.

I'm sure you're aware of the fact that (at least) the female part of fans is divided by who we adore the most. Larry is my man, hence I used to celebrate his birthday. I read some fan fiction written by fellow fans, when it involves Larry. I often wear U2 T-shirts, which sparks conversations. For example I recently found out that one of my professors saw U2 at the Arizona State University during The Joshua Tree Tour. I was wearing a JT t-shirt and he felt the need to tell me about his experience. I love when that happens.

James – Have you seen the band live?
Yes I have seen them live. I am not the type to follow them around during the entire tour. I'm more about "if they come to my town I'll go to see them" they didn't come to Texas on their last tour so I didn't get to see them.

I think any fan should definitely see them at least once in a lifetime.

Hi Magda

Thank you so much for getting back. it’s not late at all. I did hear about the flooding in Texas. I hope you and family were not affected badly.

MAGDA -Yes I have seen them live. I am not the type to follow them around during the entire tour. I'm more about "if they come to my town I'll go to see them" they didn't come to Texas on their last tour so I didn't get to see them.
I think any fan should definitely see them at least once in a lifetime.

JAMES - Thank you Magda. In your relationship with U2 do you separate the music and the output of U2 from what the band embodies and stands for, or are they one and the same for you? Which is more important for you between the music on its own and U2 as a band?

MAGDA - The music definitely matters more. I stopped following their activism a while back, maybe around the time of controversy of their tax evasion.

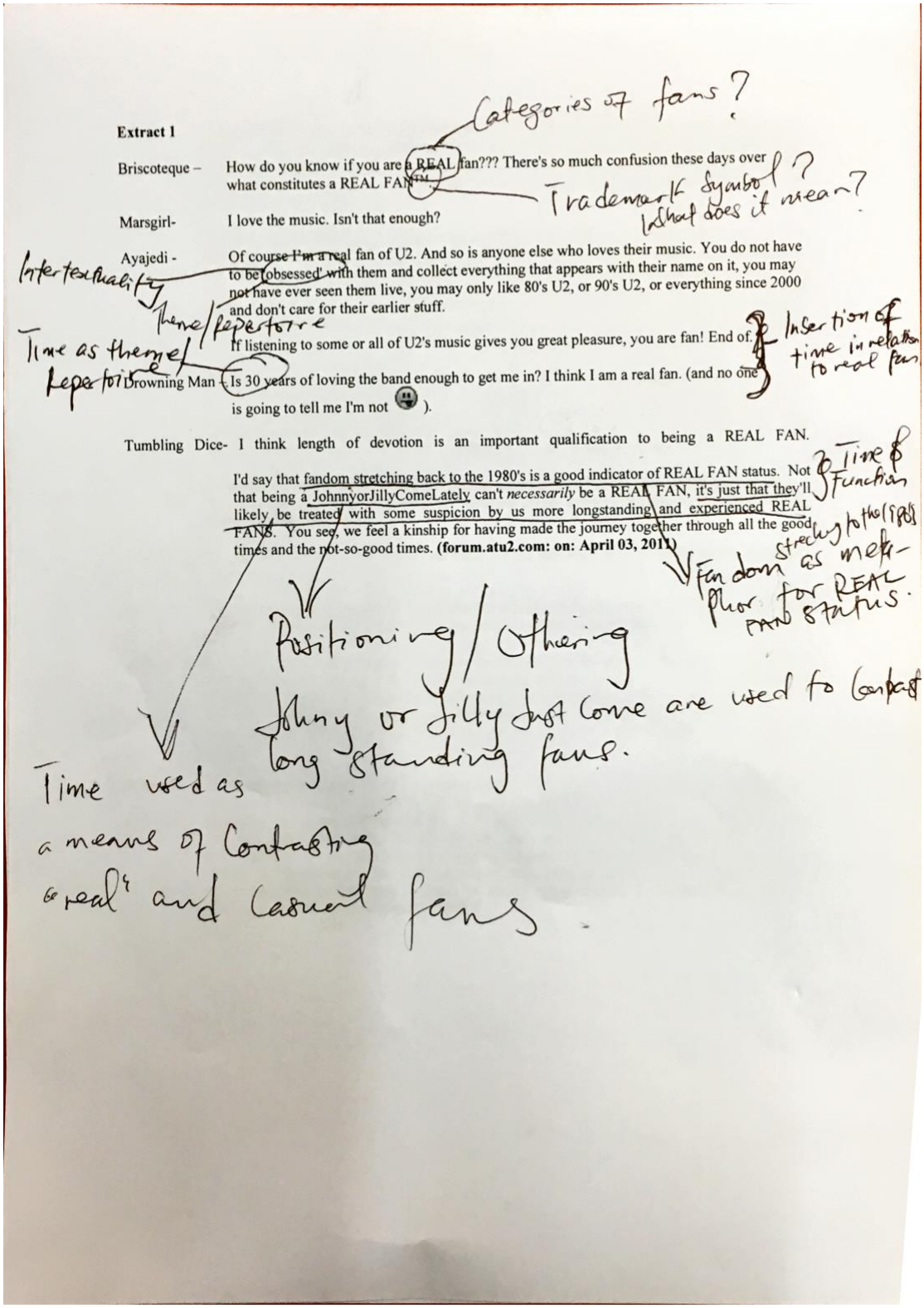
As much as Bono gets personally involved in various campaigns at the same time he is a multimillionaire, one of the highest-paid musicians, so there seems to be a certain level of perhaps hypocrisy involved. I understand that being a celebrity can help bring awareness to global problems, but at the same time at the end of the day the thing that matters is not the awareness itself, but did the poor get to eat, did they get medical attention they need, etc. I can see how attending political summits can be looked as the most good one can do, but I don't share that opinion. I am a big fan of Peter Singer, an Australian moral philosopher, and his ideas of combating global poverty, so I believe personal involvement is key. I believe someone like Bono with access to - compared to most of us - unlimited resources, could do a lot more.

Also I am an agnostic, so although I respect other people's religious beliefs I am not a big proponent of flaunting it onstage.

MAGDA -Thank you Magda. You mentioned earlier that you were 15 when you heard U2's music for the first time, and I am guessing you have been a fan of the band for quite a while. Do you think that matters? Do you think the length of time you or other fans have been a fan of the band is important, and does it affect the dynamic of your online interactions in any way?

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE ANALYSIS

Extract 1



Extract 1

Briscoteque – How do you know if you are a REAL fan??? There's so much confusion these days over what constitutes a REAL FAN™.

Marsgirl- I love the music. Isn't that enough?

Ayajedi - Of course ~~I'm a real~~ fan of U2. And so is anyone else who loves their music. You do not have to be ~~obsessed~~ with them and collect everything that appears with their name on it, you may not have ever seen them live, you may only like 80's U2, or 90's U2, or everything since 2000 and don't care for their earlier stuff.

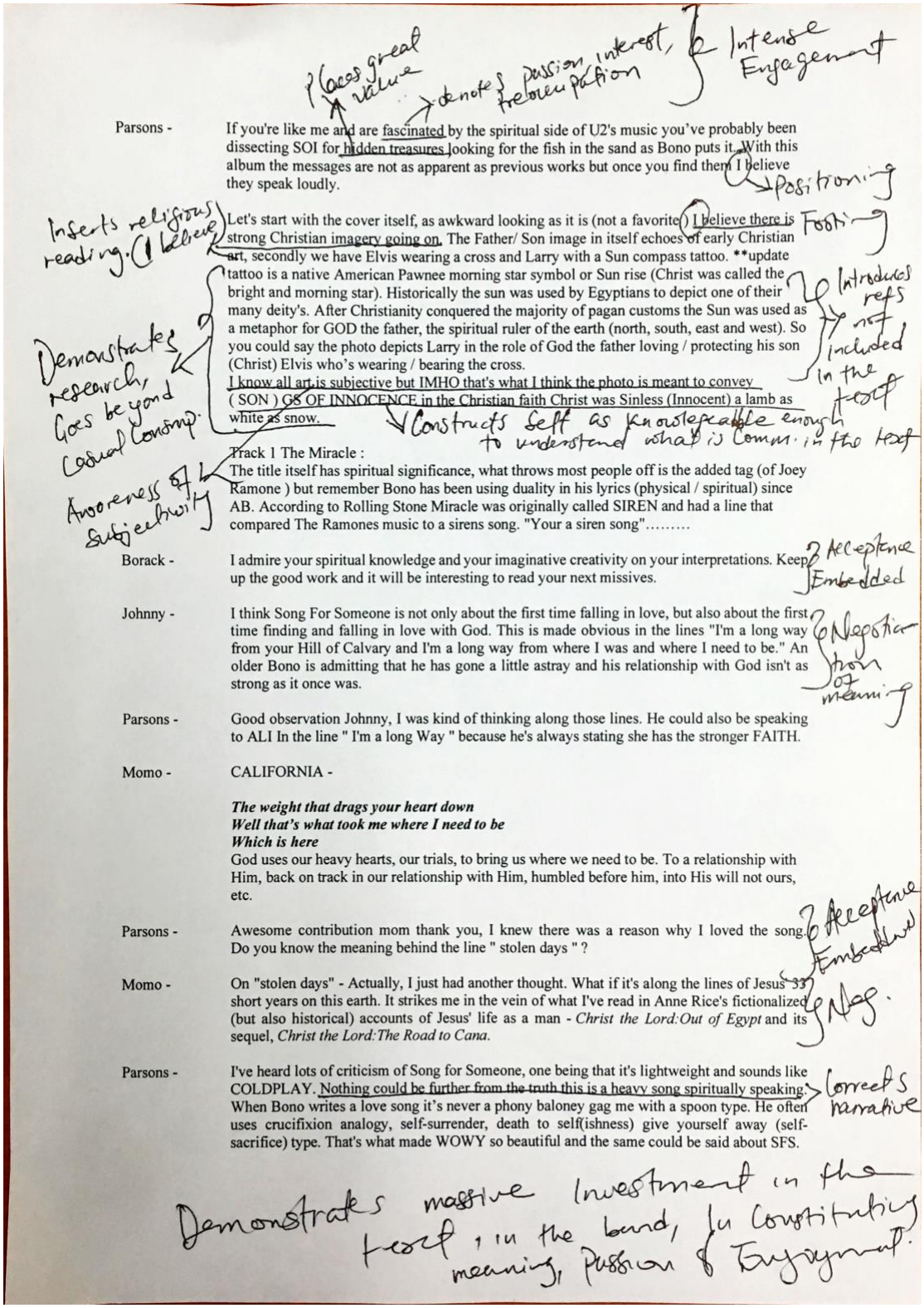
If listening to some or all of U2's music gives you great pleasure, you are fan! End of.

Drowning Man - Is 30 years of loving the band enough to get me in? I think I am a real fan. (and no one is going to tell me I'm not).

Tumbling Dice- I think length of devotion is an important qualification to being a REAL FAN.

I'd say that fandom stretching back to the 1980's is a good indicator of REAL FAN status. Not that being a JohnnyorJillyComeLately can't *necessarily* be a REAL FAN, it's just that they'll likely be treated with some suspicion by us more longstanding and experienced REAL FANS. You see, we feel a kinship for having made the journey together through all the good times and the not-so-good times. **(forum.atu2.com: on: April 03, 2011)**

Extract 2



Parsons - If you're like me and are fascinated by the spiritual side of U2's music you've probably been dissecting SOI for hidden treasures looking for the fish in the sand as Bono puts it. With this album the messages are not as apparent as previous works but once you find them I believe they speak loudly.

Let's start with the cover itself, as awkward looking as it is (not a favorite) I believe there is strong Christian imagery going on. The Father/ Son image in itself echoes of early Christian art, secondly we have Elvis wearing a cross and Larry with a Sun compass tattoo. **update tattoo is a native American Pawnee morning star symbol or Sun rise (Christ was called the bright and morning star). Historically the sun was used by Egyptians to depict one of their many deity's. After Christianity conquered the majority of pagan customs the Sun was used as a metaphor for GOD the father, the spiritual ruler of the earth (north, south, east and west). So you could say the photo depicts Larry in the role of God the father loving / protecting his son (Christ) Elvis who's wearing / bearing the cross.
I know all art is subjective but IMHO that's what I think the photo is meant to convey (SON) GS OF INNOCENCE in the Christian faith Christ was Sinless (Innocent) a lamb as white as snow.

Track 1 The Miracle :
The title itself has spiritual significance, what throws most people off is the added tag (of Joey Ramone) but remember Bono has been using duality in his lyrics (physical / spiritual) since AB. According to Rolling Stone Miracle was originally called SIREN and had a line that compared The Ramones music to a sirens song. "Your a siren song".....

Borack - I admire your spiritual knowledge and your imaginative creativity on your interpretations. Keep up the good work and it will be interesting to read your next missives.

Johnny - I think Song For Someone is not only about the first time falling in love, but also about the first time finding and falling in love with God. This is made obvious in the lines "I'm a long way from your Hill of Calvary and I'm a long way from where I was and where I need to be." An older Bono is admitting that he has gone a little astray and his relationship with God isn't as strong as it once was.

Parsons - Good observation Johnny, I was kind of thinking along those lines. He could also be speaking to ALI In the line " I'm a long Way " because he's always stating she has the stronger FAITH.

Momo - CALIFORNIA -

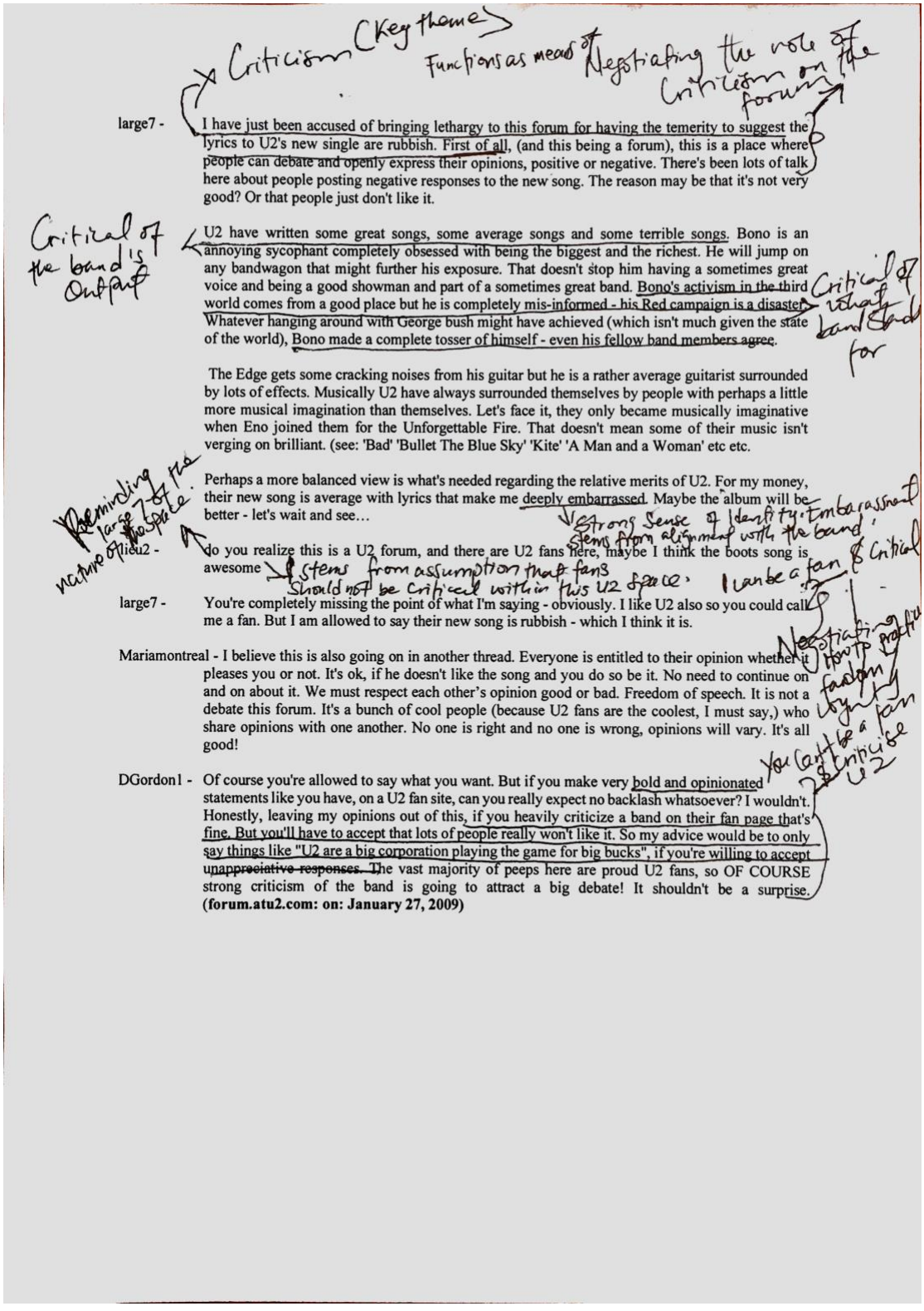
The weight that drags your heart down
Well that's what took me where I need to be
Which is here
God uses our heavy hearts, our trials, to bring us where we need to be. To a relationship with Him, back on track in our relationship with Him, humbled before him, into His will not ours, etc.

Parsons - Awesome contribution mom thank you, I knew there was a reason why I loved the song. Do you know the meaning behind the line " stolen days " ?

Momo - On "stolen days" - Actually, I just had another thought. What if it's along the lines of Jesus' 33 short years on this earth. It strikes me in the vein of what I've read in Anne Rice's fictionalized (but also historical) accounts of Jesus' life as a man - *Christ the Lord:Out of Egypt* and its sequel, *Christ the Lord:The Road to Cana.*

Parsons - I've heard lots of criticism of Song for Someone, one being that it's lightweight and sounds like COLDPLAY. Nothing could be further from the truth this is a heavy song spiritually speaking. When Bono writes a love song it's never a phony baloney gag me with a spoon type. He often uses crucifixion analogy, self-surrender, death to self(ishness) give yourself away (self-sacrifice) type. That's what made WOWY so beautiful and the same could be said about SFS.

Extract 3



large7 - I have just been accused of bringing lethargy to this forum for having the temerity to suggest the lyrics to U2's new single are rubbish. First of all, (and this being a forum), this is a place where people can debate and openly express their opinions, positive or negative. There's been lots of talk here about people posting negative responses to the new song. The reason may be that it's not very good? Or that people just don't like it.

U2 have written some great songs, some average songs and some terrible songs. Bono is an annoying sycophant completely obsessed with being the biggest and the richest. He will jump on any bandwagon that might further his exposure. That doesn't stop him having a sometimes great voice and being a good showman and part of a sometimes great band. Bono's activism in the third world comes from a good place but he is completely mis-informed - his Red campaign is a disaster. Whatever hanging around with George bush might have achieved (which isn't much given the state of the world), Bono made a complete tosser of himself - even his fellow band members agree.

The Edge gets some cracking noises from his guitar but he is a rather average guitarist surrounded by lots of effects. Musically U2 have always surrounded themselves by people with perhaps a little more musical imagination than themselves. Let's face it, they only became musically imaginative when Eno joined them for the Unforgettable Fire. That doesn't mean some of their music isn't verging on brilliant. (see: 'Bad' 'Bullet The Blue Sky' 'Kite' 'A Man and a Woman' etc etc.

Perhaps a more balanced view is what's needed regarding the relative merits of U2. For my money, their new song is average with lyrics that make me deeply embarrassed. Maybe the album will be better - let's wait and see…

native of lieu2 - do you realize this is a U2 forum, and there are U2 fans here, maybe I think the boots song is awesome

large7 - You're completely missing the point of what I'm saying - obviously. I like U2 also so you could call me a fan. But I am allowed to say their new song is rubbish - which I think it is.

Mariamontreal - I believe this is also going on in another thread. Everyone is entitled to their opinion whether it pleases you or not. It's ok, if he doesn't like the song and you do so be it. No need to continue on and on about it. We must respect each other's opinion good or bad. Freedom of speech. It is not a debate this forum. It's a bunch of cool people (because U2 fans are the coolest, I must say,) who share opinions with one another. No one is right and no one is wrong, opinions will vary. It's all good!

DGordon1 - Of course you're allowed to say what you want. But if you make very bold and opinionated statements like you have, on a U2 fan site, can you really expect no backlash whatsoever? I wouldn't. Honestly, leaving my opinions out of this, if you heavily criticize a band on their fan page that's fine. But you'll have to accept that lots of people really won't like it. So my advice would be to only say things like "U2 are a big corporation playing the game for big bucks", if you're willing to accept unappreciative responses. The vast majority of peeps here are proud U2 fans, so OF COURSE strong criticism of the band is going to attract a big debate! It shouldn't be a surprise. **(forum.atu2.com: on: January 27, 2009)**

APPENDIX E: FIELDNOTES ON U2/NO DOUBT

VERBATIM ACCOUNTS AND OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FORUM (taken directly from the community, organised by threads.)

The forum is organised according to threads related to different topics. The first topic, "New Member Introductions" allows members who are new to the forum to introduce themselves. As the forum is described "New to the Forum? Tell us a little about yourself!". New members can come on and talk about how they came in contact with the band. and their experience with it. The next topic, "Fan Plans and Meetups" allows fans in related geographical regions to organise and meet up with each other "Looking to meet up with fellow U2 fans? Get started in here." Next is "General music discussion" where fans can "Talk about bands and artists not named U2." Real World "This is the place for non-U2 conversation." The next set of topics are more U2 focussed or U2 related. the first of these "General U2 Discussion' describes as "If you can't figure out where it belongs, this is the safest place to say it!". "News and rumours" describes as "Chat about the latest U2 news, or tell everyone the news you found." "The music" is about "U2's albums and music". Next, "The lyrics" describes as "What's Bono singing in that song? What does it mean? Talk about it in here." "the Band" describes as "Talk about Adam, Bono, Edge, and Larry." Next, tours talks about "Discussion of U2's tours and live performances." Videos has discussions on "Concert videos, DVDs, music video discussion -- it all belongs in here!". A separate section provides a help desk, announcements, and FAQs. There's also room for feedback on the site.

At the time of current observation there are 92 guests and 14 users online including 1 hidden. Current users online include DPardue, missey, samko, robgalloway, Librarian85, jick, camelia, Achtungbaby23, sbEdge, lazyboy, Droo, K2, STEVIEC66. "Members who post comments are registered and keep maintain a profile where there have an actual picture of themselves or an avatar which shows up with every post, along with the number of posts they have made on the forum, and their location and their forum name. I have chosen to start my observation within the general discussion thread as I feel that this is where I will find the most information directly related to my research questions, although I plan on looking through every one of the threads and forums by the time I'm done. In reading through archival data on the U2 forum i will focus in on threads and patches of exchange that make any references to loyalty, fandom or allegiance, particularly those exchanges that imply a degree of conflict or debate. At this stage I will save data in the form of postings and message threads as they appear verbatim.

> -Members seem to be really welcoming to new members and share a certain brand of humour. Not sure whether it's a British/ Irish thing or more related to the language of the forum. Will need to figure it out soon and learn the language in any case so I can communicate and understand better. Although I would say that there's more of a distinct language on this forum compared to the No doubt forum which I have been looking at for a while. It's almost the way I would imagine men talking if I went into a pub and listened in on conversations.

(I find it interesting how conscious fans are of positioning themselves as fans in terms of the extent of their loyalty, and trying to avoid being considered as obsessed. Though sometimes they do not mind embracing the label. They are those who feel there's no such thing as an obsessed fan or "super fan". A fan is a fan. Others feel that some fans go too far in expressing their love for the band. Some choose to position themselves in the middle.

I need to look more closely at the community to figure out the cultural rules for behaviour. Constantly ask yourself, what do they know about loyalty? what do they know about fandom? Focus on what people say, the way people act, and the artefacts that they use.

I would argue that in this case, culturally inferences can be made fairly easy, because knowledge is communicated or appears to be communicated in a fairly direct and explicit manner. You need to look past this explicit knowledge for the more tacit, and taken for granted knowledge. You have to observe more closely.

STEP 1: Understand the language. Ask yourself is there a language in use within this community? Pick at some of its features. Learn it. Note that the differences might be subtle. You must pay close attention to notice it. Spend this week picking at and learning the language.

FIELDWORK JOURNAL (A record of my experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs and problems that are arising during field work).

-I have spent the past three months focussed on the No Doubt community. All together I would say this has been a very good learning experience and I have picked up a lot. Some of my conclusions are that the community is typically preoccupied with the performance of the band on the charts. They spend their time discussing what band members (particularly Gwen Stefani) are doing, and debating whatever is the latest news available in the media.

-Some of the major articulations and constructions with regard to the notion of loyalty include the extent to which fans on the forum should be critical of the band, or voice their opinions on aspects of their relationship with the band they do not like or agree with. The 'hard-core fans' feel they should always be supportive of the band no matter what, and see this as the major pre-occupation of a fan base. Some others feel they have the right to air their opinions and this divide in outlook is a constant source of rift among community members. Another important construction of loyalty or fandom seems to be time. Most members of the community repeatedly tout the length of their relationship with the band and wear it as a badge. they can recall the first time they interacted with band and the length of time spent as a fan serves as a device to measure or weigh the depth of their fandom, and also serves as a device of distinction. Themes of meaning of the band's music in the lives of members also come up. touring is another important device used by members to make sense of how loyal they are to the band. relatedly, purchase of band related merchandise is used as another device for constructing loyalty.

-That said I am not feeling confident about the suitability of the No Doubt community for my research for a couple of reasons. first of all. The band has not been active for long stretches of time., and their only recent release was a commercial flop. This tends to be the major preoccupation of discussion of forum members. Also, unfortunately the archival data available to me is limited because the band moved the location of the forum to a different site sometime in 2012, and all the data that predates that date is unavailable on the internet. The only album that has been released by the band since then was a flop, Considering that the band has put out over 5 albums this is not an ideal situation. Also, the pool of contributors on the forum is really small. Although the entries are rich and informative, the number of contributors that I would describe as devotees or insiders cannot be more than 20.

-U2 on the other hand is a better known music brand, with a much larger fan base, and this is easily observable within the bands community. Also of importance is the fact that because the band has a lot of fans who are based here in the UK, I might be able to approach some of them for interviews far more easily than might be the case with No Doubt which is based in the US. Unfortunately it might not be possible to catch either band on tour as U2 is winding down its promotional cycle for its current album, and No Doubt has not been active for a while so we'll see how that goes.

-For now though, I am going to focus on the No Doubt community. I plan on paying attention to collecting as much archival data as I can, while being attentive (far more attentive than I was with No Doubt) to the language of the community. And also to document all of my thoughts more readily on this journal.

-You may think of your experience on the No Doubt community as a dry run for a better and more thorough observation and ethnographic analysis of the U2 fan forum.————————————-

-I suspect U2 fans are likely to be older, and by reading some of the post I'm seeing, politically savvy too. Probably that is part of the attraction of a band like U2 whose brand seems to be tied closely with the activism of the band as a whole and the front member,. Bono. (look at What If….) thread.