

The role of sports brands in niche sport subcultures

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature

Date

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Ethical Approval

AUT University Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved the ethics application for this research on 30 March 2011. Application number 11/45 (see Appendix A).

Abstract

This research investigates the role of sports brands in niche sport subcultures, athletes' perception of brands and the role of brands in building group identity. The dissertation examines theory on 'subcultures of consumption', 'brand communities' and 'leisure activities'.

The research is based on two contrasting cases and adopts an ethnographic approach. The researcher participated in two trail running events, the XTerra Trail Festival in Rotorua and the t42 Central Plateau event at National Park. Three data collection methods were employed: observation, photography and semi-structured interviews. Observations aimed at understanding participants' brand use, the presence of sports brands and the quality of interaction between trail runners. Photographs visualised the overall presence of brands as well as the specifics of interviewees' gear. The aim of semi-structured interviews was to investigate the trail runners' perceptions of brands and the role of brands in building group identity. Interviewees were chosen through purposive sampling and the interviewing continued until theoretical saturation was reached. Data collected at both events was analysed separately. Observations, photographs and transcribed interviewees shed light on the participants' involvement with trail running and their sociability. Thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews was conducted to identify themes that address the role of sports brands in the niche sport subculture.

Participants in the first event were very individual runners who can be classified as road runners rather than dedicated trail runners. In regards to brands, participants either display high brand loyalty or high trust in retailers. Brands do not play a role in building group identity. Participants in the second event are dedicated trail runners. They consider a variety of factors when purchasing gear. Function and perceived quality of gear are more important than brand name. Brands play an indirect role in building group identity as they are often a starting point of conversation between participants.

Participants in the first event are serious leisure participants whereas participants of the second event represent an emerging subculture of consumption. Therefore, marketing managers should target these two groups of runners differently as they differ in terms of involvement with the sport and the buying decision process.

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides an introduction to the research which investigates the role of sport brands in niche sport subcultures. Firstly, a background to the study is presented. Subsequently, the research aim is stated followed by a justification for the research. Fourthly, the methodology is briefly described. This chapter closes with an outline of the chapters of the dissertation.

1.1 Background to the research

This section briefly outlines the background to the research. Two developments in western industrialised societies are of interest for this research. Firstly, in western highly industrialised societies people have more freedom and possibilities to create self-identity, as a person's identity is less predetermined by occupation or social environment than it was the case in the past (Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009). One way to build and express identity is through brand choice, consumption practice, leisure activities and the overall choice of lifestyle (Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009; Shankar, Elliott, & Fitchett, 2009). Secondly, western industrialised societies are characterised by a high level of individualisation which leads to fragmentation of the society. At the same time, this fragmentation motivates consumers to join groups with the same interests, values, norms or consumption practices (Cleo & Brian, 2011; Cova & Cova, 2002).

The synergy of these two developments can be observed in subcultures of consumption. Subcultures of consumption link people through a consumption practice and the related shared norms, values and beliefs (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). They can be formed around a brand (Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) or a value system or leisure activity (Arthur, 2006; Wheaton, 2000).

However, in the marketing literature, authors generally use a lens of commercial consumption when analysing subcultures of consumption (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). Consequently, they tend to ignore the differences between commercial and non-commercial consumption (Belk & Costa, 1998; Christensen & Olson, 2002; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and only a few authors acknowledge the differences between the two related types of subculture of consumption (Cova & Pace, 2006; de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). The main difference is that

commercial subcultures of consumption form around one brand; the brand is a central component of the subculture (Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). On the other hand, non-commercial subcultures of consumption, such as sport subcultures, on the other hand, emerge independently from commercial consumption, i.e. consumption of a brand (Christensen & Olson, 2002; de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Wheaton, 2000). Thus, the role of brands in non-commercial subcultures of consumption differs from the role of brands in branded subcultures of consumption. In addition to this, there is no clear usage of the term 'subculture of consumption' in the marketing literature as it is often confounded with 'brand communities' or equated with leisure activities (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Kozinets, 2001; Muñiz & Schau, 2005).

The following section presents the research aim which concerns the role of sports brands in niche sport subcultures.

1.2 Research aim

The present study acknowledges the differences between commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption. In non-commercial subcultures of consumption brands are not a central component of the phenomenon (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). Therefore, the question arises what role brands play in non-commercial subcultures of consumption. In order to address this question, the aim of this research is to investigate the role of brands in non-commercial subcultures of consumption, in particular the role of sport brands in niche sport subcultures. The subculture members' perceptions of brands and role of sport brands in building group identity are the main focus of the study.

In the next section justification for the research is provided.

1.3 Justification for the research

The role of brands in non-commercial subcultures of consumption, in sport subcultures in particular, is an under researched area. The main focus of past research has been the surfing, snowboarding and skateboarding subcultures in Australia (Beverland, Farrelly, & Quester, 2010; Quester, Beverland, & Farrelly, 2006). The findings of that research suggest that members of a subculture attach different meaning to the brands depending on the motives to join the subculture and overall involvement with the sport (Quester et

al., 2006). Depending on the meaning members attach to brands, brands are perceived as more or less authentic which is transferred to the person wearing or using the brand (Beverland et al., 2010).

Given the limited amount of research on the role of brands in non-commercial subcultures of consumption, the present study investigates the role of sport brands in niche sport subcultures, the perception of brands and the role of brands in building group identity in particular. Niche sports are sports that only attract a low percentage of a country's population, are not well-known and have hardly any media coverage except in specialised media (Zhang, Bennett, & Henson, 2003). As a consequence, niche sports exist relatively isolated from mainstream society which decreases the probability that niche sport specific brands blend into mainstream society. The niche sport chosen for this research is trail running, a small but growing sport in New Zealand (Jacques, 2010). Section 3.1 provides a comprehensive description of the sport as well as justification why trail running was chosen as the subject of research.

The methodology of the research is briefly outlined in the next section.

1.4 Methodology

The present study uses an ethnographic approach to investigate the research problem. The researcher participated in two contrasting trail running events in New Zealand. The first was the XTerra Trail Festival Rotorua in April 2011 and the second was the t42 Central Plateau event in National Park in May 2011.

Three data collection methods were applied: observation, taking photographs and semi-structured interviews with participants. Firstly, observations contributed to the understanding of the subculture's norms, rules and values. Furthermore, participants' brand use was observed. Secondly, photographs were taken in order to visualise participants' brand use and the overall presence of brands at the events. Thirdly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of trail runners at both events.

Data collected at both events was analysed separately to enable comparison between the two cases. Analysis proceeded in two steps. Firstly, preliminary analysis was conducted to gain understanding of the participants' involvement with trail running as well as the

level of social interaction in training sessions and events. Secondly, thematic analysis of the transcribed semi-structured interviews was conducted.

The combination of three data collection methods – observation, photographs and semi-structured interviews – lead to triangulation of the data and allowed a cross-check of findings.

In Chapter Three a detailed description of the research methodology is provided.

1.5 Outline of the dissertation

After this first chapter which outlined the background to the study, the research aim, the justification of the research and the methodology, Chapter Two provides a theoretical framework for the study based on a comprehensive literature review. In Chapter Three the research methodology employed is described in full. Subsequently, the findings of the research are presented in Chapter Four. The dissertation concludes with Chapter Five, the discussion of the findings and limitations of the present research.

Chapter Two: Literature review

Western highly industrialised societies are characterised by the freedom to create self-identity, a high level of individualisation and at the same time the emergence of communities based on same interests, values, norms or consumption practices (Newholm & Hopkinson, 2009; Shankar et al., 2009). The synergy of these characteristics can be observed in subcultures of consumption which link people through a consumption practice and its shared norms, values and beliefs (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). Generally speaking, consumption can be either commercial, i.e. consumption of a brand, or non-commercial, i.e. consumption of a value system or an activity. The subcultures that emerge out of these two types of consumption differ in terms of origin and subculture practice (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007).

However, in the marketing literature about subcultures of consumption, the important distinction between commercial and non-commercial consumption is widely neglected. Instead, authors use a lens of commercial consumption, i.e. they tend to analyse social groups only based on their consumption of commercial goods. Yet it is important to understand the differences between commercial and non-commercial consumption and the related subcultures, as the role the brands play in each greatly differs (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007).

Additional issues in the literature about subcultures of consumption are the lack of distinction between subcultures of consumption and brand communities (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Muñiz & Schau, 2005) as well as the assumed correspondence of subcultures of consumption with leisure activities (Kozinets, 2001). These two issues are aggravated through a lack of distinction between commercial and non-commercial subculture of consumption.

In the following literature review, these three problems are elaborated on in more detail, before a model displaying the three key terms ‘subculture of consumption’, ‘brand community’ and ‘leisure activity’ is introduced. The chapter closes with an outline of past research and identification of gaps in the literature.

2.1 Commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption

The aim of this section is to establish a clear understanding of commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption. The section starts with an outline of the issue. Secondly, common characteristics of commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption are acknowledged. Next, the peculiarities of both commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption are outlined. Lastly, the role of brands in each phenomenon is explained.

2.1.1 Problem: lack of distinction between commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption

Schouten and McAlexander (1995), who coined the term ‘subculture of consumption’, define this phenomenon 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 (1995, p. 43).

Hence, they do not differentiate between commercial and non-commercial consumption. Other authors have adopted this definition without questioning it (Arthur, 2006; Goulding & Saren, 2009) such that the differentiation of commercial and non-commercial consumption is not often found in the marketing literature (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Kozinets, 2001). Goulding and Saren (2009), for instance, define Goth as a subculture of consumption without making any distinction between commercial and non-commercial consumption although Goth is a non-commercial subculture of consumption as it is not formed around commercial consumption, i.e. a brand, but a value system.

Commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption have certain similarities in common which are outlined in the next section.

2.1.2 Common characteristics of commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption

The common features of commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption are subculture ethos, the emergence of subgroups as well as soft core and hard core members, the question of authentic membership and insider and outsider status. Each of these common characteristics is now outlined.

Despite the correspondence between the members on shared values, norms and beliefs, subcultures of consumption are not a homogenous social group but rather divided into several subgroups. These subgroups can evolve due to different emphasis and interpretation of the subculture belief system, different motivations to join the subculture, as well as the level and term of involvement with the subculture (Belk & Costa, 1998; Beverland et al., 2010; Kozinets, 2001; Sisjord, 2009).

Besides subgroups, the distinction between hard core and soft core members plays an important part in the social dynamic of subcultures. Hard core members embrace subculture norms, values and beliefs whereby the ethos becomes a way of living. Soft core members, on the other hand, are attracted by the subculture and its lifestyle. They pretend to be a member by displaying subculture symbols but are not embracing and incorporating the subculture ethos in their lifestyle (Chalmers & Arthur, 2008). Members of the surfing subculture, for instance, report that an increasing number of individuals dress like surfers although they have never surfed or do not even live close to the sea. However, these soft core members are attracted by the lifestyle and image of the sport (Quester et al., 2006). Although hard core members look down upon soft core members they use soft core members to prove their status in the subculture and to reassure their authenticity (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Being authentic is a central concern in subcultures and depends on the involvement, the sincerity of the motives to join a subculture, the member's experience, knowledge, skills and authority within the subculture (Beverland et al., 2010; Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006; Wheaton, 2000). Soft core members are at the periphery of subcultures of consumption (Beverland et al., 2010; Sisjord, 2009). The importance of authenticity can be observed in the modern mountain man subcultures of consumption. Modern mountain men re-enact rendezvous that were held by trappers in the first half of 19th century. They meet in the US American Rocky mountains and celebrate the life and

culture of trappers. Part of the rendezvous is a costume competition which stresses the authenticity of the clothing (Belk & Costa, 1998). One participant stated

They [referring to Native Americans in the 19th century] didn't have fluorescent pinks and greens and stuff like that you know. And if they're going to have these Indians come in and that, they should be *authentic* . . . because that's the name of the game, to me, is to be authentic. If you can't be authentic, don't participate (Belk & Costa, 1998, p. 227).

New members can gain authenticity through a process of socialisation. Through this process of socialisation novices gain knowledge about the subculture and its norms, values and rules of social interaction. They also learn needed skills and gain experience which in turn increases their authenticity (Celsi, Rose, & Leigh, 1993; Wheaton, 2000). However, it should be noted that members of subcultures of consumption define authenticity differently depending on their motives to join the subcultures as well as their emphasis on the subculture ethos (Beverland et al., 2010; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995)

Closely knit to authenticity is the subculture hierarchy. Every subculture is organised by a social hierarchy that depends on the member's knowledge about the subculture, related skills, as well as commitment and involvement with the subculture (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Sisjord, 2009). Hard core members usually have a high level of involvement, knowledge, skills and experience. Therefore they obtain authority and are positioned at the high end of the subculture's hierarchy. Novices start at the bottom of the social hierarchy and they can increase their status through the process of socialisation (Celsi et al., 1993; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Wheaton, 2000). Subgroups of the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption, for instance, are organised by a strict social hierarchy. Because of their low status within the group, novices have to ride at the end of the group whereas the member with the highest social status leads the group (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Hierarchy can also be observed between different subgroups and is defined similarly as on individual level. Hence, members of some subgroups perceive their subgroup to be of higher status as they perceive their commitment and involvement as well as authenticity to be higher as compared to other subgroups (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

The last characteristic of subcultures of consumption is the classification of insider and outsider status (Celsi et al., 1993; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Insiders are familiar with

the ethos, subgroups, social hierarchy and members' authenticity whereas outsiders who are not involved with the subculture of consumption usually lack this specific knowledge (Arthur, 2006; Wheaton, 2000). Insider and outsider status can act as an entry barrier for novices and can be reduced by the process of socialisation (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). For instance, in the Star Trek subculture there are two main subgroups within the subculture, of which outsiders are not usually aware of: Trekkers and Trekkies. Being a Trekker is the widely accepted form of Star Trek fandom within the subculture whereas Trekkies are perceived to be lost in the utopian fantasy of the show. However, outsiders think of Trekkies as stereotypical Star Trek devotees. This stereotype can be described as

... the geek, the nerd, the dweeb, the guy with glasses and a hypertrophic vocabulary (Kozinets, 2001, p. 72).

This negative image is an entry barrier for novices as they do not want to be perceived as nerds or geeks. Nevertheless, through the process of socialisation they learn the differences between Trekkers and Trekkies (Kozinets, 2001).

Despite these common features, commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption are two distinct social phenomena.

2.1.3 Commercial subcultures of consumption

This section outlines characteristics of commercial subcultures of consumption which distinguishes them from non-commercial subcultures of consumption. Commercial subcultures of consumption are formed around a brand. As a consequence, the subculture ethos, i.e. shared values, norms and beliefs, originate from the brand's image, philosophy, storytelling and myth (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). In other words, the brand's image, philosophy and storytelling inform and organise the members' lifestyle. This is particularly the case in regards to hard core members (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). One example is the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption. The brand stands for personal freedom, patriotism, American heritage and machismo. These four values were adapted by Harley Davidson enthusiasts and are now the ethos of this subculture of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The core value 'personal freedom', for example, comprises of liberation and license. Liberation stands for escaping from daily lives, mainstream norms, hierarchies and daily obligations. The

eagle symbolises liberation and is not only incorporated in the brand logo but can also frequently be seen in tattoos or custom paints of motorbikes. License is the freedom to behave in a way that is not in conformity with mainstream norms and values and would not be accepted outside the subculture (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Secondly, brands not only play a crucial role in the emergence of the subculture but are also a central part in subculture practice. Brands or their consumption often become a sacred good and are worshiped as such (Kozinets, 1997, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Even if the brand is intangible as it is the case of Star Trek or X-Files, religiosity of the brand can be observed. In the Star Trek subculture of consumption, for instance, not only watching the show is considered being a sacred time slot (Kozinets, 2001) but the ideas promoted by the TV show provide the basis for a civil religion that is informed by "... faith in science, humanity and a positive future" (Jindra, 1994, p. 49).

As a consequence of brands being the origin and central part in the subculture practice, the existence of commercial subcultures of consumption inherently depends on the existence of the brand. If a brand is discontinued the existence of the related subculture of consumption is threatened in the long-term (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Leigh et al., 2006). The MG vintage car subculture of consumption is one example of a subculture of consumption that is formed around a brand, in particular a branded product that is not manufactured and supported by marketers anymore. Therefore, its existence is threatened (Leigh et al., 2006).

2.1.4 Non-commercial subcultures of consumption

In contrast to commercial subcultures of consumption, non-commercial subcultures of consumption evolve independently from commercial consumption or brands. Hence, they are not formed around a brand but a value system or an activity (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). Consequently, their shared values, norms and beliefs are directly connected to the belief system or activity the subculture is based on (Arthur, 2006; Dilley & Scraton, 2010). According to their origins, non-commercial subcultures of consumption can be divided into two subgroups: value and activity based subcultures of consumption.

One example of value based subcultures of consumption is Goth (Goulding & Saren, 2009). Members of the Goth subculture are linked by their fascination with death,

mortality and vampires. Moreover, most of the members share an interest in alternative spirituality and use the subculture to resist mainstream norms and values. As typical of subcultures, the Goth subculture of consumption includes subgroups that differ in terms of style, musical preferences and emphasis on the vampire myth (Goulding & Saren, 2009).

Another example is the straightedge subculture which emerged out of the punk subculture in the 1980's (J. P. Williams, 2006). Straightedge is a subculture of renunciation. The subculture norms and values are not to consume any recreational drugs such as tobacco, marihuana or alcohol and not engage in promiscuous sex. Additionally, many members are vegetarian or even vegan and are often engaged in political activism (Torkelson, 2010; J. P. Williams, 2006). The motivation to live straightedge is to delineate oneself from mainstream society that is more and more hedonistically orientated. Instead of indulging, 'straightedgers' want to focus on the things in life they perceive to be essential and important (Torkelson, 2010; J. P. Williams, 2006).

Many activity based subcultures of consumption are formed around sports (Christensen & Olson, 2002; Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Wheaton, 2000). One example is the triathlon subculture of consumption. The bonding link of triathletes is "civilised suffering" (Atkinson, 2008, p. 169) in training sessions and especially during races. Additionally, they are linked by shared ideas about health, fitness, nutrition and leisure activities, thus the overall lifestyle they choose (Atkinson, 2008).

However, activity based subcultures of consumption do not necessarily have to be formed around sport. One example is the modern mountain men subculture of consumption already mentioned. This subculture is based on the re-enactment of trappers' lives in the 19th century (Belk & Costa, 1998).

To conclude, non-commercial subcultures of consumption emerge without the influence of a brand. Their values, norms and beliefs derive from the value system or activity the subculture is based on (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). As is the case with regards to commercial subcultures of consumption, the ethos of non-commercial subcultures of consumption can become the members' lifestyle, as in the straightedge or triathlon subcultures of consumption (Atkinson, 2008; J. P. Williams, 2006).

2.1.5 The role of brands

Based on the distinction between commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption, it can be seen that the role of brands in each phenomena is fundamentally different.

Commercial subcultures of consumption are based on the consumption of a brand. Brands are the central component of commercial subcultures of consumption (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). Furthermore, brands inform the subculture ethos and have a great influence on the members' lifestyle (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). As a consequence of the centrality of the brand existence of the commercial subculture of consumption depends on existence of the brand. If the brand disappeared, the related subculture would be threatened in the long-term (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Leigh et al., 2006; Muñiz & Schau, 2005).

Moreover, brands not only play an important part in the emergence and persistence of this phenomenon, but often gain religious status among members and are worshiped as such (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). An example stated before is the civil religion based on the TV show Star Trek (Jindra, 1994).

In contrast, in non-commercial subcultures of consumption, brands do not play a central role. However, members of these subcultures use brands, firstly to express their affinity with the subculture, and secondly to underline their authentic membership (Arthur, 2006; Beverland et al., 2010).

Firstly, brands are used to display affinity and membership with a non-commercial subculture of consumption. In value based subcultures of consumption there are, generally speaking, no items or brands needed to adapt the value system. However, brands can be compatible with a subculture and offer products that symbolise the membership (Arthur, 2006; Blair, 1993). The fashion brand Ecko, for example, is known in the US for its affinity with Hip Hop. Thus, members of the Hip Hop subculture can underline their membership by wearing this brand (Blair, 1993).

In activity based subcultures of consumption, gear is often needed to participate in the activity, for example gear for surfing or snowboarding. Members of activity based subcultures can wear or depict brand names related to the activity even when not practising the activity. Brands related to surfing or snowboarding, for instance, offer

clothing such as t-shirts, caps or jumpers, which are not essential for the activity but can be used to underline subculture membership (Beverland et al., 2010; Quester et al., 2006).

Secondly, members attach meaning to different brands and express authentic membership through brand use. If the brand is not related to the non-commercial subculture of consumption, members create meaning which they attach to brands. For instance, certain models of shoe from Adidas indicate membership in the Hip Hop subculture although Adidas is not a specific Hip Hop brand. Even high end fashion brands such as Gucci, Versace and Ralph Lauren are adapted by the Hip Hop subculture to display authentic membership (Arthur, 2006).

If the brand is related to the non-commercial subculture of consumption, the attached meaning often revolves around authenticity (Arthur, 2006; Beverland et al., 2010). However, authenticity of brands can be perceived differently by subculture members especially in the case of brands with high market share. In the surfing and snowboarding subcultures some members appreciate market leaders, such as Quiksilver or Burton, for their long standing involvement and dedication to surfing or snowboarding, respectively. They perceive the market leaders as providing high quality products based on the knowledge the companies have gained over the years. Such leading brands are used to depict authentic subculture membership. Other members, on the other hand, perceive the brands of these market leaders to be inauthentic. The reason for this is that the market leaders have grown to multi-million dollar businesses and are therefore perceived to have shifted their focus from sport to profit (Beverland et al., 2010; Moutinho, Dionísio, & Leal, 2007; Quester et al., 2006).

2.1.6 Conclusion

In conclusion it can be stated that all subcultures of consumption, be they commercial or non-commercial, have certain characteristics in common. These are, a subculture ethos, the emergence of subgroups, soft core versus hard core members, the question of authentic membership, and insider and outsider status (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Despite these common characteristics commercial and non-commercial subculture of consumption describe two distinct social groups. The main difference is the role that brands play within these two phenomena. In commercial subcultures of consumption, brands are the origin, centre and crucial

component of the subcultures whereas non-commercial subcultures of consumption develop independently from brands (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). The existence of non-commercial subcultures of consumption does not depend on the existence of any brand; however, brands are used by members of non-commercial subcultures of consumption to display their affinity with the subculture and to express authentic membership (Arthur, 2006; Beverland et al., 2010; Quester et al., 2006).

The next section addresses the issue of interchangeable use of the terms ‘subculture of consumption’ and ‘brand community’.

2.2 Subculture of consumption and brand communities

This section outlines the second issue which is interchangeable use of the terms ‘subculture of consumption’ and ‘brand community’. The section commences by term ‘brand community’. Then, commercial subcultures of consumption and brand communities are delineated from one another. The focus is then shifted to possible similarities between subcultures of consumption and brand communities.

2.2.1 Problem: interchangeable use of the terms ‘subculture of consumption’ and ‘brand community’

According to Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001)

A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand. It is specialized because at its center is a branded good or service. Like other communities, it is marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility. (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001, p. 412)

Schouten and McAlexander (1995) coined the term ‘subculture of consumption’, yet in a later article, these authors use the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption as an example of a brand community (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). These authors are not alone in confounding the differences between commercial subcultures of consumption and brand communities (see Table 1).

Table 1: Examples of articles which use the terms ‘subculture of consumption’ and ‘brand community’ interchangeably

Study	Critique
McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, (2002): Building brand community	The authors use the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption as an example of how to build brand communities
Muñiz & Schau (2005): Religiosity in the abandoned Apple Newton brand community	The authors use Star Trek and X-Files as examples for brand communities although they are subcultures of consumption
Arthur (2006): Authenticity and consumption in the Australian Hip Hop culture	The author cites the Muñiz and O’Guinn (2001) article on brand communities but uses it to back up his statement about brands and their role in subcultures of consumption
Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould (2009): How brand community practices create value	They use the Star Trek subculture of consumption as example of a brand community

2.2.2 Differences between commercial subcultures of consumption and brand communities

This section sheds light on the differences between commercial subcultures of consumption and brand communities. Table 2 provides an overview of the main differences.

Table 2: Differences of commercial subcultures of consumption and brand communities

Commercial subcultures of consumption	Brand communities
Rare social phenomenon	Common social phenomena
Members embrace the subculture ethos and adapt their lifestyle according to this ethos	Less impact on consumer lives, brand is not the most important part of the consumers’ lives
Characterised by insider and outsider status, novices have to run through a process of socialisation	New members are welcomed
Demarcation from mainstream society	Embedded in mainstream society, demarcation from users of other brands

Firstly, commercial subcultures of consumption are rare social phenomena and only few examples can be found in the literature. The most prominent examples are the Harley Davidson (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and the Star Trek subculture of consumption (Kozinets, 2001). Brand communities on the other hand, are more common and can be formed around a great variety of brands. Examples are the Apple

Newton (Muñiz & Schau, 2005), Jeep (McAlexander et al., 2002), Saab (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001), Garmin (GPS devices), TPATH (rock band) or Lomo and Holga (cameras) (Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009).

Secondly, the impact on consumers' lives of commercial subcultures of consumption versus brand communities differs. Members of commercial subcultures of consumption adapt their lifestyle to the ideas promoted by the brand. Members of the Harley Davidson subculture of consumption have adapted the four core values of the brand, which are personal freedom, patriotism, American heritage and machismo, in their overall lifestyle. Thus, the brand's image and philosophy informs the subculture members' daily lives (see 2.1.3) (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

The impact of brand communities on the consumers' lives, on the other hand, is less profound. As Muñiz and O'Guinn state

members know it [the brand] isn't the most important thing in their lives—not even close—but neither is it trivial (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 418).

Members of the Saab brand community, for instance, appreciate the safety of the car and at the same time the fun related to driving. However, the brand's image and philosophy do not determine the overall lifestyle of Saab enthusiasts. The love for the brand is only one part of a brand community member's life.

Thirdly, commercial subcultures of consumption and brand communities differ in their social dynamics. Subcultures of consumption are characterised by insider and outsider status and novices have to proceed through a process of socialisation before being accepted as a fully valued member of the group (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). In contrast, new members are actively included in brand communities (McAlexander et al., 2002; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). Even if new members do not own the brand, they can join the brand community (Leigh et al., 2006; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Lastly, different relationships with mainstream society can be observed in each phenomenon. Members of commercial subcultures of consumption demarcate themselves from the mainstream society. For instance, in the X-Files subculture of consumption, the notion that subculture members feel superior to the mainstream society can be observed. They are one step ahead everybody: they discern government conspiracy, recognise that aliens exist and do not deny the supernatural (Kozinets,

1997). Brand communities are embedded in mainstream society (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). Members of brand communities do not demarcate themselves from the mainstream; they demarcate themselves from users of other brands, for example Saab enthusiasts stress being different to Volvo drivers (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001).

2.2.3 Interrelations between subcultures of consumption and brand communities

There are two possible links between subcultures of consumption and brand communities.

Firstly, as the line between commercial subcultures of consumption and brand communities is very fine, both phenomena can blend into each other (Leigh et al., 2006; Muñiz & Schau, 2005). In other words, groups devoted to one brand can display characteristics of both social phenomena. One example is the Apple Newton brand community which is formed around a discontinued PDA (personal digital assistant) device. On one hand, the structure of this community and the group dynamics mainly reflects characteristics of brand communities such as low entry barriers or introduction of novices to the product. On the other hand, insiders of the Apple Newton brand community delineate themselves from the mainstream society (Muñiz & Schau, 2005).

Secondly, brand communities can origin in non-commercial subcultures of consumption. As outlined before, members of non-commercial subcultures of consumption use brands to express their membership with the subculture of consumption (see 2.1.5). Therefore it is possible that members get particularly devoted to one brand which can lead to the emergence of a brand community formed around a brand that depicts membership with a non-commercial subculture of consumption (Beverland et al., 2010). One example is the snowboard brand Burton. Some snowboarders are highly devoted to this brand although there are a great variety of brands snowboarders can choose from. The marketing department of Burton is facilitating and nurturing this devotion to the brand and encouraging an online community based on their homepage (see www.burton.com). It should be noted that not all members of the snowboard subculture of consumption are necessarily members of the Burton brand community (Beverland et al., 2010).

In the next section, the third issue, the overextension of the term 'subculture of consumption', is addressed.

2.3 Subcultures of consumption and leisure activities

This section focuses on the third issue which is the overextension of the term ‘subculture of consumption’. In this section the two forms of leisure activities – casual leisure and serious leisure – are outlined. Subsequently, interrelations between subcultures of consumption and leisure activities are discussed.

2.3.1 Problem: overextension of the term ‘subculture of consumption’

In some studies the term ‘subculture of consumption’ is overextended and subculture status is attributed to leisure activities (Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Schouten & McAlexander (1995), for instance conclude that

Everyday activities such as gardening, woodworking, or fly-fishing may sufficiently guide people's consumption and social activities to form the bases of subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995, p. 59)

However, the examples used are rather leisure activities and cannot be equated with non-commercial subcultures of consumption such as rock climbing or Goth. Commercial subcultures of consumption such as the Harley Davidson subcultures of consumption can be even less compared to activities such as gardening.

Furthermore, when referring to leisure activities it is necessary to distinguish between casual and serious leisure as the two terms describe different types of activities (Stebbins, 1997, 2001).

In order to establish a thorough understanding of the two forms, causal and serious leisure, they are described in more detail in the next section.

2.3.2 Casual leisure activities

Casual leisure activities encompass activities such as taking a nap, going for a walk, social conversations or playing golf or tennis occasionally. Hence, casual leisure activities unify activities that do not require an extensive set of skills or knowledge and are aimed at seeking pleasure and relaxation (Stebbins, 1997). In other words, casual leisure is “fun, enjoyable and hedonistic” (Dilley & Scraton, 2010, p. 125). The reward for the activity is intrinsic and relatively short-lived (Puddephatt, 2007; Stebbins, 1997). Although casual leisure does not require a lot of training and the reward is usually short-

lived, it plays an important role in relaxation, health and well-being of individuals (Shen & Yarnal, 2010).

2.3.3 Serious leisure activities

The second group of leisure activities is serious leisure activities and is less common than casual leisure (Stebbins, 2001). Serious leisure can be all kinds of sports, such as surfing, mountain biking or rock climbing, as well as playing an instrument, or amateur astronomy (Christensen & Olson, 2002; Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Puddephatt, 2007; Quester et al., 2006; Stebbins, 1997).

Serious leisure requires significant effort as it is goal-oriented, specific skills and knowledge are necessary to fully participate, and it is usually long-term oriented (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Stebbins, 1997). Through involvement with the activity and the enhancement of skills, individuals gain deep satisfaction and personal fulfilment (Shen & Yarnal, 2010; Stebbins, 1997). Furthermore, serious leisure becomes an important part of the individual's life and is a way of self-definition and self-expression. In addition, participants form long-lasting relationships with others participating in the activity (Shen & Yarnal, 2010). As a consequence, a social world is formed around the activity with specific norms, values and rules for social interaction (Dilley & Scraton, 2010).

All in all, casual leisure is hedonistically orientated whereas serious leisure transcends seeking pleasure and becomes an important part of the individual's life with its own social world. However, it should be stated that the same activity, e.g. sport fishing, can be casual as well as serious leisure for different participants depending on their involvement. Hence, activities are not per se casual or serious (Shen & Yarnal, 2010).

Next, the possible link between subcultures of consumption and leisure activities is outlined.

2.3.4 Interrelations between subcultures of consumption and leisure activities

Generally speaking the author of this dissertation believes that leisure activities cannot be equated with subcultures of consumption. However, she acknowledges the possible interrelation between activity based subcultures of consumption and serious leisure activities.

It is certainly not appropriate to equate casual leisure with non-commercial subcultures of consumption. The reason for that is that casual leisure aims at relaxation and pleasure and does not generate a specific social world with rules, norms and values which could possibly nurture an activity based subculture of consumption (Shen & Yarnal, 2010; Stebbins, 1997).

However, activity based subcultures of consumption can grow out of serious leisure as a specific social world often forms around serious leisure (Dilley & Scraton, 2010). One example is the climbing subculture of consumption which emerged out of serious leisure and now displays a variety of characteristics of subcultures of consumption that were outlined in 2.1.2. For example, subgroups within this non-commercial subculture of consumption are formed around the different forms of climbing, such as bouldering, big wall climbing or solo climbing of shore lines (Ness, 2011; T. Williams & Donnelly, 1985). Furthermore, a hierarchy of the different disciplines of climbing is established depending on the risk with the discipline. Thus, expedition climbers are ranked highest and climbers participating in bouldering ranked lowest in the subculture hierarchy (T. Williams & Donnelly, 1985). Moreover, novices have to run through a process of socialisation through which they learn specific terms related to rock climbing, the name and function of gear as well as acquire climbing skills (Ness, 2011). Lastly, the climbing subculture of consumption is characterised by demarcation from mainstream society. For instance, female climbers stress the different perception of femininity in this subculture as opposed to femininity in mainstream society (Dilley & Scraton, 2010).

Hence, the example of the climbing subculture illustrates the link between non-commercial subcultures of consumption, an activity based subculture of consumption in particular, and leisure activities. However, it should be stated that not every serious leisure activity necessarily originates an activity based subculture of consumption.

2.4 Introduction of the model

A model displaying the three terms ‘subculture of consumption’, ‘brand community’ and ‘leisure activity’ as well as the role of brand and possible links between these phenomena is introduced in the next section (see Figure 1).

2.4.1 Overview of the main components

The model consists of three main components: subcultures of consumption, brand communities and leisure activities. These components are further divided into commercial and non-commercial components in order to underscore the differences between commercial and non-commercial consumption.

Commercial components of the model are commercial subcultures of consumption (**A1**) and brand communities (**B**) because both social groups emerge out of commercial consumption, i.e. the consumption of a brand. Thus, brands are the origin centre and crucial component of both social groups. In commercial subcultures of consumption the shared norms, values and beliefs originate from the philosophy and ideology of the brand in question (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). In brand communities, members are linked by the passion and devotion to the brand in question (McAlexander et al., 2002; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). As brands influence both phenomena on a grassroots level, brands are located at the base of the model (**A1B and BB**) (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Kozinets, 1997, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Non-commercial components of the model are non-commercial subcultures of consumption (**A2**) and leisure activities (**C**). The reason for this is that both phenomena evolved without the influence of commercial consumption or brands. Non-commercial subcultures of consumption are formed around either a manifestation of a worldview (**A2.1**) (Arthur, 2006; Blair, 1993; Goulding & Saren, 2009) or an activity (**A2.2**) (Celsi et al., 1993; Wheaton, 2000). Hence, brands are not directly involved in the emergence of a non-commercial subculture of consumption (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007). However, subculture members attach meaning to certain brands which are then used to express a member's affinity with the subculture (Arthur, 2006; Quester et al., 2006). Therefore, brands are positioned above non-commercial subcultures of consumption in the model (**A2B**) to illustrate their influence on non-commercial subcultures of consumption after they come into existence.

The second non-commercial component of the model is leisure activities and they can be divided into casual (**C1**) and serious leisure activities (**C2**) (Puddephatt, 2007; Stebbins, 1997) depending on the individuals' involvement with the leisure activity.

The next section describes the links depicted in the model.

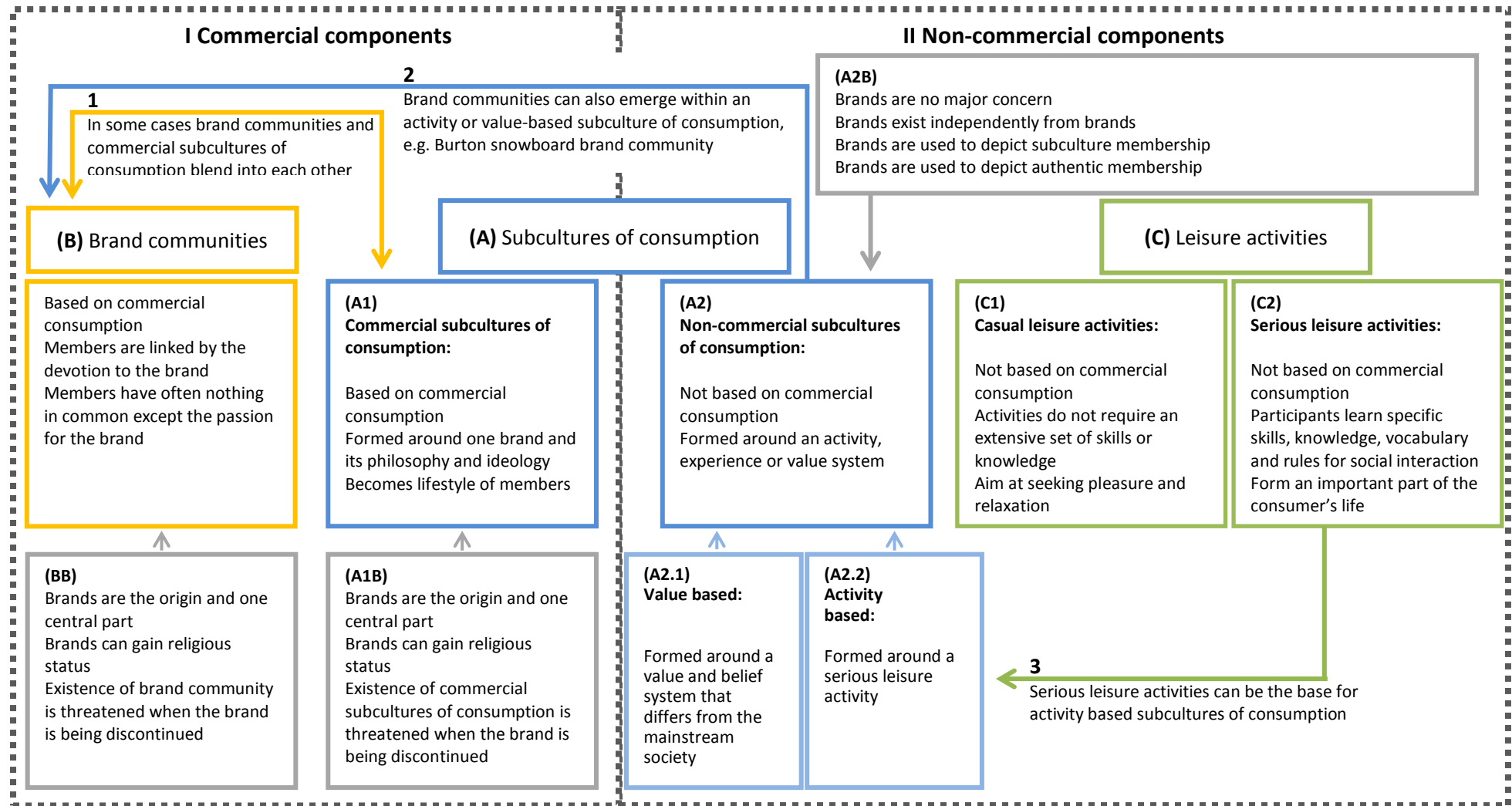


Figure 1: Model of subcultures, subcultures of consumption and leisure activities

2.4.2 Explanation of links

The links depicted in the model refer to the interrelations between subcultures of consumption and brand communities as well as leisure activities which were outlined before.

The first link is between commercial subcultures of consumption and brand communities as they can blend into each other (see 2.3.3 for detail) (Leigh et al., 2006; Muñiz & Schau, 2005). This phenomenon is depicted by the arrow going from brand communities to commercial subcultures of consumption and vice versa **(1)**.

The second link is indicated by the arrow leading from non-commercial subcultures of consumption to brand communities and symbolises brand communities emerging out of non-commercial subcultures of consumption **(2)**. Although brands are not the origin of non-commercial subcultures of consumption, members can become especially devoted to one brand that signifies subculture membership. The example mentioned earlier is the Burton brand community (see 2.3.3).

The third link is positioned between serious leisure activities and activity based subcultures of consumption **(3)**. The reason for this is that serious leisure activities can be the breeding ground for activity based subcultures of consumption (Wheaton, 2000). This occurs if consumers are highly involved in the serious leisure activity and if consumers embrace activity related norms and values and incorporate them in their daily lives (Dilley & Scraton, 2010).

2.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature review and the model are based on the issue of how the term ‘subculture of consumption’ is used in the marketing literature. The main point identified is the lack of distinction between commercial and non-commercial subcultures of consumption (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Kozinets, 2001). Furthermore, the term ‘subculture of consumption’ is used imprecisely and often confounded with brand communities or equated with leisure activities (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; Schau et al., 2009; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The literature review has identified the different role of brands in commercial subcultures of consumption and non-commercial subcultures of consumption as well as brand communities were pointed out.

2.6 Past research

The title of the present research is ‘The role of brands in niche sport subcultures’. The aim is to investigate the perception of sports brands by members of a niche sport subculture as well as the role that sports brands play in building group identity. As explained in the literature review, brands are used by members of non-commercial subcultures of consumption to express subculture membership and to position oneself within the subculture, for example to underline one’s authenticity (Arthur, 2006; Beverland et al., 2010; Quester et al., 2006). However, research on the role of brands in sport subcultures is limited.

Only one relevant study was located. The study by Beverland, Farrelly and Quester (2010; 2006) investigates the role of brands in the surfing, snowboarding and skateboarding subcultures in Australia. It sheds light on the influence of personal values on brand choice and brand loyalty (Quester et al., 2006) as well as the use of brands in expressing authentic subculture membership (Beverland et al., 2010). Figure 2 provides an overview of the main findings.

Belongingness	– Low involvement	}	Positive perception of leading brands	}	Leading brands used to display authentic membership
Excellence	– High involvement				
Freedom	– High involvement	}	Negative perception of leading brands	}	Leading brands perceived as inauthentic
Connection	– High involvement				

Figure 2: Findings of past research

The findings of the study indicate that the motivation to join one of the three subcultures and the different benefits of practising the related sport have a great impact on brand choice, brand loyalty and expression of authentic membership (Beverland et al., 2010; Quester et al., 2006). The main motivations and benefits identified are belongingness to a group, the feeling of freedom, enhancing excellence and connection to place and nature. Belongingness was mainly named by novices and veterans who could no longer practise the sport but still identified with the subculture. The other three core values were named by highly involved members (Quester et al., 2006).

In terms of perceptions of authentic membership, study participants were classed in two groups. The first group is formed by members driven by belongingness and excellence who display a positive perception of the market leader brands such as Quicksilver, Burton or Vans. Belongingness driven members use high brand awareness to demonstrate their involvement and membership of the subculture (Quester et al., 2006). Members motivated by excellence appreciate leading brands for their long term involvement with the sport and the resulting level of expertise in manufacturing high quality equipment (Quester et al., 2006). Consequently, this first group perceives the brands of market leading companies to be authentic and use them therefore to display authentic membership.

The second group is formed by members motivated by freedom and connection who have a negative perception of market leading brands. Members motivated by the feeling of freedom perceive leading brands to be too commercialised and in line with mainstream values (Quester et al., 2006). Subculture members driven by connection with place and nature perceived leading brands to lack connection and understanding of the sport (Quester et al., 2006). As a consequence of the negative connotations with leading brands, the second group perceives them to inauthentic (Beverland et al., 2010).

The study (Beverland et al., 2010; Quester et al., 2006) is a good attempt to shed light in the under researched area of the role of sport brands in sport subcultures. However, the research revolves around individuals and brands and does not investigate the role of brands on a group level. Moreover, the study investigates sport subcultures that are related to each other with some participants practising more than one of the three sports. Additionally, the study is geographically limited as it was conducted in Australia. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalised to other sports. Additionally, the leading brands of the three subcultures blend into mainstream society.

Despite the contribution of the study (Beverland et al., 2010; Quester et al., 2006), there is still a gap in knowledge. Research investigating other sport subcultures is needed, to better understand the role of brands within sports subcultures.

In order to address the gap in the literature the present study investigates the role of sports brands in niche sport subcultures, focussing on the sportsperson's perception of brands and the role of brands in building group identity. Niche sports are sports that

only attract a low percentage of a country's population, are not well-known and have hardly any media coverage except in specialised media (Bennett, Hanson & Zhang, 2003). Thus, niche sports exist relatively isolated from mainstream society. Therefore, niche sport specific brands are not expected to blend into mainstream society which is a limitation of the study of surfing, snowboarding and skateboarding (Beverland et al., 2010; Quester et al., 2006). The niche sport chosen for this research is trail running, a small but growing sport in New Zealand (Jacques, 2010).

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter provides a comprehensive and detailed description of the methodology used in the current study. It starts with a definition of the niche sport investigated – trail running – and a justification why this sport has been chosen. Next, the two trail running events that were observed for data collection are described in detail in order to provide a clear understanding of the events. Subsequently, the research design and data collection methods are presented followed by a description of the sampling method for selecting participants for the study. The chapter closes with an outline of the methods of data analysis used.

3.1 Niche sport: Trail running

The niche sport investigated in the present research is trail running. Niche sports are sports that only attract a low percentage of a country's population, are not well-known and have hardly any media coverage except in specialised media (Zhang et al., 2003). There is no universally agreed definition for trail running and the sport is often equated with running off road. However, it is questionable whether all types of running off road, such as running, in a park can be considered trail running. The author of this study understands trail running as a form of running that takes place on trails leading through forests, native bush or tussock and up hills or mountains. The terrain is usually uneven due to rocks or tree roots. Furthermore, trails can be muddy and therefore slippery and sometimes lead through streams or rivers. In addition to that, in contrast to road running, the step sequence is not steady throughout the run and speed has to be adjusted to the terrain. Part of the motivation to run on trails is the variety of terrain and scenery trails run through.

Trail running was chosen as the object of research for several reasons. Firstly, trail running is a niche sport in New Zealand. However, it has become increasingly popular over the last few years. Secondly, due to the increasing popularity of the sport, a variety of trail running events with different levels of difficulty take place in both islands of the country year around (Jacques, 2010). Thirdly, the researcher's long-term involvement with running and the outdoors in general was considered an additional advantage, as the researcher had a preliminary understanding of running and of enthusiasm for the outdoors. Lastly, the equipment needed for trail running is relatively little compared to

other niche sports and the researcher already owned this gear. Equipment needed to participate in other niche sports such as kite surfing or fixed-gear biking is costly, and would have gone beyond the scope of the project's funding.

The researcher participated in two trail running events which are described in detail in the next section.

3.2 Cases

This section provides a detailed description of the two events that were visited for data collection. The first event was the XTerra Trail Festival in Rotorua in April 2011 and the second event the t42 Central Plateau at National Park In May 2011. The two events were chosen because of their contrast. The events differed in size, difficulty of the trails as well as the geographical location. Rotorua is easy to access and there are several cities and towns nearby, whereas National Park is rather isolated and not embedded in an area of dense population. Furthermore, the XTerra Trail Festival is a well-established event whereas the t42 Central Plateau is an emerging event. The researcher participated in the 11km run at both events, in order to gain thorough understanding of the events, the interaction of runners, as well as the overall atmosphere.

3.2.1 Case One: XTerra Trail Festival, Rotorua

The first event, the XTerra Trail Festival, took place at the Blue Lake near Rotorua in April 2011 for the ninth time. It offered different event options: Mountain biking, triathlon (swimming, mountain biking and trail running), trail running and walking. The overall number of participants was 1830, of which 714 trail runners participated (see www.xterra.co.nz/).

Trail runners and walkers could choose from two distances, 11km and 21km. Although it was a trail running event, both distances included running on road. However, most of the trails were on forest/gravelled roads, tramping tracks and single trails, i.e. trails only wide enough for one person. Overall, the trails were not of a high technical difficulty and relatively even without many tree roots or loose rocks. The ascent and descent of the trails was steady and not too steep. Additionally, the trails were not muddy as it did not rain, either the days before or the day of the event. Many participants were wearing

road running shoes rather than specific trail running shoes.¹ However, given the condition of the trail and the technical level, participants with road running shoes did not have any disadvantage. Most of the participants did not appear dedicated to trail running but rather involved in running in general.

The area where the event was set up was a relatively large area alongside the Blue Lake. The centre of the area was the finish line surrounded by stands of sponsors, commercial food stands and the transmission zone for triathletes. Throughout the day, music played and a race commentator commented on participants finishing their race. Sponsor brands were hardly mentioned. Figure 3 shows the finish line of the event, displaying the main event sponsors.



Figure 3: Finish line of the XTerra Trail Festival in Rotorua

¹ Trail running shoes differ from road running shoes. Trail running shoes have less cushioning as the terrain is generally softer than asphalt. Because of less cushioning, the foot is also closer to the ground, which enables greater feel for the surface and therefore less chance of ankle injuries resulting from uneven surfaces. Furthermore, trail running shoes have a sole which offers better traction which is especially necessary on muddy or slippery trails. As trail running shoes gather water and mud during the run they are also lighter than road running shoes and provide free draining to allow water to escape.

Before the start of the run brief instructions were given explaining the course of the trails and the position of aid stations. During the race there was only minimal interaction between race participants, limited to passing or letting others pass. Runners did not support each other or talk to other runners on the trail.

After finishing their run, many participants relaxed at the lake or watched triathletes. Overall, there were many families with young children at the event who enjoyed spending a Saturday at the lake. Given the high number of participants and the great variety of event options, everyone seemed to be concentrated on themselves and no especial group atmosphere developed during the course of the day.

3.2.2 Case Two: t42 Central Plateau

The second event, t42 Central Plateau, took place in the Tongariro Forest Park between National Park and Owango in May 2011. It was the second time the event had taken place. In 2010 the event won the “Best Emerging Event” at the annual NZ Association of Event Professionals National Event Awards (www.t42.co.nz). 510 competitors participated of whom 300 participated in trail running or walking. About two thirds of the 300 trail runners participated in either the 24km or 42km race (see <http://www.t42.co.nz>).

Participants could register either for mountain biking or trail running. Running distances were 42km, 21km, 11km and 6.5km. The trails were more technically advanced compared to the XTerra Trail Festival in Rotorua: they did not include any sections on roads; only the last 2km were on gravelled road; the rest was on walking/tramping tracks and single trails. Furthermore, the trails were steeper and the ascent and descent of the trails was greater. Additionally, due to heavy rain in the week of the event the trails were muddy and in some parts, especially downhill, relatively slippery. In the event briefing, the middle section (about 8km) of the 24km run was introduced as “muddy trail” because of the condition of the trail with hip deep puddles which runners could not avoid but had to run through. Many of the participants were wearing specific trail running shoes which was a great advantage given the conditions.

The start/finish line was set up in the Owango scenic reserve on a grassy area. Stands of sponsors were loosely spread around the start/finish line. Instead of commercial food stands, Owango community members sold food and drinks. Music was played and a race commentator kept participants informed. The commentator also gave thanks to

sponsoring brands relatively often as well as to the Owhango community that had helped organising the event. Every 15 minutes one participant crossing the finish line was given a spot price sponsored by 2XU, one of the event's sponsors. Figure 4 shows two photographs of the start/finish line with the main event sponsors.



Figure 4: Start/finish line of the t42 Central Plateau event

Before the runs started, the race coordinator provided a briefing for each distance giving information about the condition of the trails, how the trails were marked along the way, as well as where help stations were positioned. He also invoked the runners' help in the case of an accident as some parts, especially of the 24km run, were relatively remote and therefore hard to access in the case of emergency. Furthermore, he appealed to the participants "to take care of other members of the trail running family", and rallied trail runners by saying enthusiastically, "We are trail runners, we are hard core!".

During the race, runners interacted more compared to the XTerra Trail Festival. They cheered each other and jokes were made about sore muscles participants were expecting to have the next day. Generally speaking during the whole event a sense of community and mutual support were experienced. Other participants were not considered as competitors but rather allies going through the same physical challenge.

After the race, participants sat on chairs or on the grass and relaxed. There was also some interaction between participants as many had to wait for family members or

friends to finish. On contrast to the XTerra Trail Festival, there were few families and it appeared that people came to the event for the challenge and to enjoy themselves rather than having a great weekend away with the family.

In the evening an after-event was organised by those responsible for the event. The after-event consisted of a BBQ dinner and was followed by a party with a DJ and dancing. The after-event was promoted during the event and participants were encouraged to come to the after-event to share their “war stories”.

To sum it up, the two events differed in the overall number of participants, involvement with trail running as well as groups of participants present (i.e. family versus no family). The XTerra Trail Festival provided a great opportunity for athletes of different abilities to enjoy a weekend away, often with their family and children. The t42 Central Plateau was rather a get together of trail runners and outdoor enthusiasts who came to the event because of the trails and the good reputation of the event.

Before and after each race, data was collected. The next section outlines the research design and data collection methods used.

3.3 Research design and data collection methods

This section outlines the research design and data collection methods. It explains why the research design and data collection methods are chosen and how they were appropriate to answer the research question.

The researcher undertook an ethnographic study for different reasons. Firstly, through participation in two trail running events, access was gained to the niche sport subculture (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Participation in the events also helped to understand trail runners and their motivation to participate in the niche sport. Secondly, participation aimed at learning about the norms, values, rules, shared beliefs and common social interactions of trail runners. Understanding of the sport and its participants was necessary to understand the role of brands in the niche sport subculture. Thirdly, an ethnographic approach was chosen to signal to potential interviewees that the researcher is “one of them” so that members of the subculture were more likely to share insider information with her (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Quite often interviewees asked the researcher whether she had participated in the race and what distance she had run.

Three different data collection methods were used: observation, photographs of the interviewees' gear and of brands present at the events, as well as semi-structured interviews.

Observation, on one hand, helped understanding of social interactions between participants, and on the other hand revealed brand use by event participants. All observations were recorded according to an observation protocol (see Appendix B). The observation protocol was divided into two parts. The first part consisted of a table which the researcher filled with brand names which were often used by event participants, in and the corresponding branded items of gear. The second part consisted of short questions about the way participants dressed, the dominance of brands, interactions between event participants and the influence of brands in these interactions as well as the overall presence of brands at the event.

Taking photographs helped visualise the presence of brands at the events. Additionally, photographs were taken of the interviewees' gear to visualise brand use by trail runners.

Semi-structured interviews shed light on the subculture members' perception of sports brands and their role in building group identity. Semi-structured interviews were tape-recorded after the interviewees agreed. The interviewees were provided with an information sheet (see Appendix C) and signed a consent form before the interview proceeded (see Appendix D). The semi-structured interviews followed an interview guide which was divided into four sections (see Appendix E). The first section covered basic demographic questions. The second section investigated the interviewees' involvement with trail running and training behaviour. The third part focussed on the motivation to participate in trail running events. The last set of questions consisted of questions about gear and the buying decision process.

The implementation of different data collection methods led to triangulation of data sources and methods, which enabled the researcher to cross-check findings and, thereby enhance the validity and reliability of the research findings (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Table 3 provides an overview of the data collection methods and their contribution to answering the research question.

Table 3: Data collection methods and contribution to answer the research question

Data collection method	Contribution to answer research question
Observation	Understanding the subculture's norms, rules and values Record of brand use
Photographs	Record of brand use and presence of brands
Interviews	Perception of brands by subculture members Investigation of the role of sports brand in niche sport subcultures

The research was approved by AUTECH – the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 30 March 2011, AUTECH reference number 11/45 (see Appendix A).

3.4 Interviewees

In this section the method of sampling of interviewees is described. In both events purposive sampling was applied.

At the XTerra Trail Festival the researcher sought to interview trail runners of varying genders and ages to ensure diversity of the sample. At this event, nine trail runners, five female and four male, between 37 and 57 years were interviewed. The interviews each lasted approximately 5 minutes, the shortest three and the longest ten minutes. Most of the participants provided similar information. For that reason, after nine interviews no additional information that would have contributed to answering the research question was gained. Hence, theoretical saturation had been reached. Theoretical saturation eventuates when further data collection does not add to the information needed to answer a research question (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table 4 provides an overview of all interviewees in Case One, their age, occupation and city of residence.

Table 4: Interviewees – Case One: X-Terra Trail Festival

Person	Gender	Age	Occupation	Location
1	Female	43	Tax manager	Manukau
2	Female	40	Business signer	Hamilton
3	Male	38	Doctor	Auckland
4	Male	39	Manager	Auckland
5	Female	44	Lecturer	Auckland
6	Female	57	Fitness instructor	Tauranga
7	Male	45	Race car engineer	Auckland
8	Female	37	Teacher	Waiheke Island
9	Male	38	Marketing manager	Auckland

At the t42 Central Plateau the researcher was more selective when approaching interviewees. Besides different ages and genders, only trail runners who had run the 21km or 42km event were interviewed, as these runners may represent individuals with a higher level of commitment to the sport. Additionally, attention was paid to the brands worn by runners. Therefore, trail runners wearing high end brands such as 2XU or trail running specific brands such as Salomon or inov-8 were especially approached. At the t42 Central Plateau seven trail runners were interviewed, three female and four male, between the ages of 30 and 60. The interviews lasted on average 8 minutes, the shortest 5 minutes and the longest 16 minutes. After interviewing seven trail runners, theoretical saturation was reached (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Table 5 provides an overview of all interviewees in Case Two, their age, occupation and city of residence.

Table 5: Interviewees – Case Two: t42 Central Plateau

Person	Gender	Age	Occupation	Location
10	Male	47	Police officer	Muriwai
11	Male	33	Physiotherapist	Auckland
12	Female	35	Teacher	Auckland
13	Female	46	Charge nurse in intensive care	Hamilton
14	Female	40	Registered nurse	Tauranga
15	Male	37	Nurse	Auckland
16	Male	57	Paediatrician	Gisborne

The researcher interviewed 16 trail runners in total, 8 female and 8 male, ranging from 33 to 57 years. Trail runners were very friendly. 16 out of 17 trail runners approached by the researcher agreed to participate in the study. All collected data was analysed as described in the next section.

3.5 Data analysis methods

This section outlines the data analysis methods used in the research. Data collected at the two events were each analysed separately, in order to enable comparison between the two cases. Additionally, analysis of the cases followed the same procedure to facilitate comparison of findings. First, preliminary analysis was conducted using the observation protocol, photographs of interviewees' gear and statements from the interviews. Second, thematic analysis of the semi-structured interviews was conducted.

Before data analysis, all tape-recorded interviews were transcribed (see Appendix F). All interviews collected at the first event were transcribed by the researcher and the interviews collected at the second event were transcribed by an independent transcriber. The transcriber signed a confidentiality agreement (see Appendix G) using the form provided by AUTECH.

The outline of the data analysis method described below is applicable to both cases.

3.5.1 Preliminary analysis

The preliminary analysis for each case aimed at understanding participants' overall involvement with trail running as well as the sociability of event participants. Background information on each participant was examined.

The observation protocol, photographs of interviewees' gear and statements from interviews were used for the preliminary analysis. Conclusions about the participants' involvement with trail running and their sociability were drawn based on the observation protocol. On one hand, photographs of interviewees' gear were used to confirm observations about event participants' brand use. Statements from interviews, on the other hand, were used to support impressions about the event participants' involvement with trail running as well as their sociability.

After the preliminary analysis thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted.

3.5.2 Justification for using thematic analysis

The purpose of thematic analysis is to identify themes in the data which help to explain the research phenomenon and answer the research question. The process of thematic analysis is to firstly code collected data according to their content and meaning and subsequently cluster codes into themes or categories which represent a higher level of abstraction (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Thematic analysis in combination with an inductive process is chosen as the method of analysis because of the investigatory nature of the present research. The aim of the research is to investigate the role of sport brands in niche sport subcultures, in particular subculture members' perception of brands and the role of sports brands in building group identity. As thematic analysis enables the researcher to explore and understand interviewees' perceptions, experiences and opinions about brands, it is considered an appropriate method of analysis. Furthermore, an inductive process facilitates thorough data exploration and investigation, as analysis is led and informed by the data and not by existing ideas or frameworks as in the case in a deductive process (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.5.3 Data analysis procedure

The researcher followed the guide for thematic analysis suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). These authors developed a guide of six steps: Familiarising with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and lastly producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although the process seems to be very linear, the authors stress the importance of

... constant moving back and forward between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analysing, and the analysis of the data that you are producing. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86)

Based on this guide (Braun & Clarke, 2006), the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was conducted in eight phases. Two NVivo files were created and thematic analysis of each case was conducted separately. Table 6 provides an overview of each phase.

Table 6: Phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Procedure
Phase 1	Reading all interview transcripts of both cases Manual coding of all interview transcripts of both cases
Phase 2	Coding with NVivo; Only half of the interview transcripts of each event were coded Comparison of codes of both cases
Phase 3	Inter-coder reliability check
Phase 4	Coding with NVivo of the second half of the interview transcripts of each case Reconsideration of coding and re-coding when necessary Comparison of codes of both cases Up-dating the NVivo files
Phase 5	Identification of emergent themes Up-Dating NVivo files
Phase 6	Reconsideration of codes and themes Re-coding when necessary Brief analysis of codes and themes
Phase 7	Identification of themes relevant to answer the research question Development of a model for each case depicting relevant themes and codes
Phase 8	Writing of report

The first phase involved reading all interview transcripts of both events repeatedly in order to familiarise with the data. Furthermore, data was coded manually to enhance the understanding of the data and to facilitate coding with the NVivo software.

Coding the interview transcripts with the NVivo software was the second phase of the thematic analysis. However, only half of the interview transcripts of both cases were coded. Codes used in both cases were compared manually in order to ensure that similar data found in interview transcripts were given the same codes. Both NVivo files were up-dated.

Codes identified in Phase 2 were then checked and approved by a second coder, the student's supervisor, in order to enhance the reliability of coding (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Phase 4 started with coding the second half of the interview transcripts of each case with Nvivo. Subsequently, codes for each case were reconsidered and re-coded when necessary. Next, codes for both cases were compared manually again so that codes describing the same idea were named identically in order to enhance comparability of the two cases. Lastly, both NVivo files were up-dated.

The next phase was to identify emergent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Bryman & Bell, 2007). The process of identifying themes was conducted manually. Each name was written at a card and the cards compared and organised on a flat surface. During the whole process, code names were changed and statements re-coded whenever necessary and the NVivo files up-dated again.

In Phase 6, the up-dated NVivo files were printed including the interviewees' statements. Subsequently, codes and themes were reconsidered and re-coded when necessary. Additionally, brief analysis of codes and themes was conducted and notes were written down.

Based on Phase 6, themes relevant to answer the research question were identified for both cases and interrelations between relevant themes were established. A model for each case was then developed, depicting relevant themes, codes and interrelations (see 4.1.2 for Case One and 4.2.2 for Case Two).

The last step was writing the report of the analysis which constitutes the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the research. The main focus of the analysis is the role of sports brands in the trail running subculture, in particular the trail runners' perception of sports brands and the role of sports brands in building group identity.

For each case a separate analysis was conducted. Each case analysis is divided into three parts. The first part starts with the results of the observation protocol focussing on the participants' brand use and the overall interaction of trail runners on the race day. Conclusions about the participants' involvement with trail running are drawn and subsequently cross-checked with statements from the interviews conducted. This first part provides background knowledge which facilitates and enhances the understanding of the second part. The second part outlines the findings of the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts. Only themes that contribute to answering the research question are taken into account. The third part provides answers to the research question.

4.1 Case One: XTerra Trail Festival Rotorua

In this section, Case One (XTerra Trail Festival) is analysed. First, observations on gear and the interaction of participants on race day are outlined. Subsequently, impressions of participants' level of involvement with trail running, gained through observation, are cross-checked with statements from all nine interviews. Next, an overview of the identified themes is given and then discussed in detail. Based on deliberations on the themes the research question is answered for Case One.

4.1.1 Findings of preliminary analysis

This section provides a summary of data from the observation protocol and draws conclusions about the participants' involvement with trail running and the existence of a community of runners. These conclusions are then cross-checked with statements from interviews conducted at the XTerra Trail Festival.

4.1.1.1 Observations

This section covers the common way to dress at the event, the most prominent brands and the overall interaction of event participants. The section closes with conclusions drawn about the event participants' involvement with trail running and their sociability.

The common way to dress at the XTerra Trail Festival in Rotorua is fitness clothing, i.e. sports pants or shorts and sports t-shirts, and some participants are also wearing caps or sunglasses and track suit tops. Most of the participants run in road running shoes rather than specific trail running shoes. Other items of gear, which are mainly used by 21km runners, are hydration backpacks or a belt with small drinking bottles attached.

The most prominent brands for shoes are Asics, Adidas and Nike which are established mainstream sports brands. Other popular brands for shoes are Mizuno and New Balance which are also mainstream road running shoes. The most common brands of clothing are Adidas, Nike and Asics. Some runners are also wearing Puma. Another brand logo seen on caps, shirts and pants is 2XU which is a high end endurance sport equipment brand. Figure 5 shows four different items of gear used by interviewees.



Figure 5: Photographs of interviewees' gear at the XTerra Trail Festival

Top left: Nike pants, top right: Asics trail running shoes, bottom left: Adidas road running shoes, bottom right: Mizuno road running shoes

Groups of runners are not wearing the same brands and people wearing the same brands are not more likely to interact with each other. As already mentioned (see 3.2.1), event participants do not interact much. Many participants come to the event with their partner

and young children, and spend time with them after the race either at the lake or watching triathletes in the transition zone (the transition zone is where triathletes change gear, for example, from swimming to cycling).

The overall impression of the participants is that they are road runners who also enjoy running off road. However, they appear to have relatively low involvement with trail running as defined in 3.1. Furthermore, the way participants dress does not seem to be specifically adapted to trail running. As mentioned, the most prominent brands are Asics, Adidas and Nike which are mainstream brands. Additionally, there is no sense of community at the event. Participants seem to be focussed on themselves and enjoying time with people they come to the event with. Interactions with other runners during and after the race are minimal.

4.1.1.2 Cross-checking with statements

These impressions gained through observation are cross-checked with statements of interviewees before starting the thematic analysis. The aim of this procedure is to fully understand the participants' involvement with trail running. Cross-checking confirms the relatively low involvement with trail running and absence of community. Table 7 provides information about the interviewees' training habits and event participation.

The first impression from the observation is participants' low involvement with trail running. When analysing the participants' statements about their training sessions this conclusion is confirmed. Seven out of nine answer the question about the term of their training sessions providing information in kilometres. The remaining two interviewees do not provide any information about their training sessions. Even participants who have started trail running years ago provided information in kilometres. However, in trail running, kilometres are not a reliable indicator as the level of difficulty and intensity of the trail depends on the terrain, the conditions of the trail, i.e. mud, puddles and streams, as well as the overall elevation (see www.runningwildnz.com). For that reason, the fact that participants prescribe kilometres as the indicator for their training sessions suggests an involvement with road running rather than trail running.

Table 7: Training habits and event participation , XTerra Trail Festival interviewees

Interviewee	Term of involvement	Training session	Motivation to trail run	Running partner	Event companion
1	> 4 years	Kilometres	Less stress on body	Friends Individual	Family
2	> 4 years	No information	Less stress on body	Individual	Family
3	> 4 years	Kilometres	Fitness	Individual	Family
4	Years	Kilometres	Nicer than road running	Partner	Partner
5	Years	Kilometres	Nicer than road running	Friends Partner	Partner
6	Years	No information	Less stress on body	Individual	Family
7	Years	Kilometres	No information	Individual	Partner and friends
8	Novice	Kilometres	Prefers road running	Individual	Partner
9	> 4 years	Kilometres	Fitness	Individual	Partner

Asked why they undertake trail running common answers are either “it’s less stress on the body” (Interviewees #1, #2, #6), “it’s nicer than road running” (Interviewees #4 and #5) or “fitness” (Interviewees #3 and #9). This is surprising as the natural environment is one important characteristic of trail running not mentioned. Interviewee #1 is a good example of how little the participants distinguish between road running, running off road and trail running. At the beginning of the interview she mentions that she “just love(s) trail and running” but she then names a road half marathon as an event she is going to participate in August 2011. Looking at her gear she is wearing only Adidas which is a mainstream brand and her shoes are road running shoes. Hence, she perceives the XTerra Trail Festival as a proper trail running event although the technical level of the trails was rather low.

The second impression is the absence of community. Most of the study participants state they train by themselves. Only two participants state they train with either their partner or friends (Interviewees #4 and #5). Hence, for the majority of the interviewees running is a very individual sport. This observation can be also made when analysing statements about event companions. Only one participant comes to the event with

friends (Interviewee #7), the other eight interviewees come either with their partner or family. One participant explains that she and her husband “...just do this as a family thing and spend the day with the kids” (Interviewee #1).

To sum up, participants of the XTerra Trail Festival like running off road but are not particularly involved in trail running. The difference between off road running and trail running has already been discussed in 3.1. Hence, they are in a grey zone between road and trail running. The gear they are mainly using are mainstream brands. Moreover, there is also a lack of community and camaraderie as the participants are very individual runners.

4.1.2 Description of themes

The next step of the analysis is conducting thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews. Only emerging themes that relate directly to the role of sports brands in niche sport subcultures are considered (see Appendix H). Figure 6 provides an overview of the three key themes which are *Individuality*, *Lack of interaction* and *Buying decision*. *Individuality* describes the focus of the study's participants on themselves and causes the *Lack of interaction* between runners. *Lack of interaction* on the other hand enhances the runners' trust in brands and retailers as they are the main factors influencing the *Buying decision*.

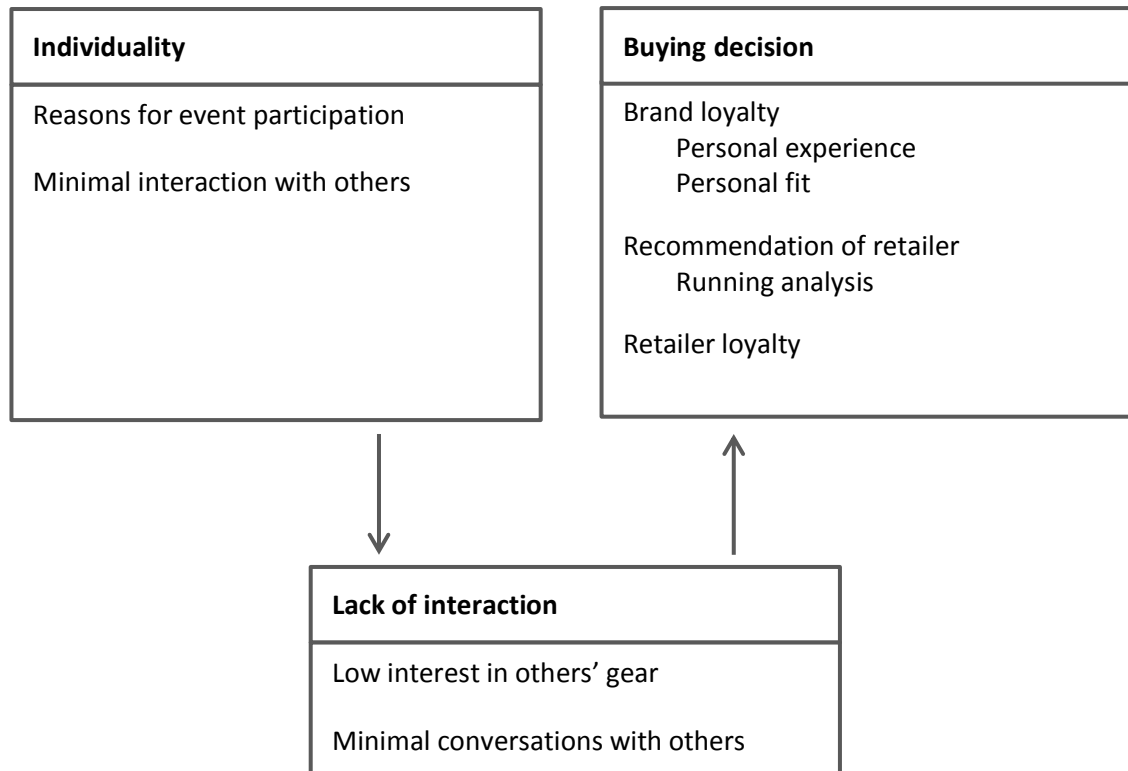


Figure 6: Overview of themes and their interrelation – Case One

In the following, the three themes *Individuality*, *Lack of interaction* and *Buying decision* are explained in more detail and illustrated by quotations from the interviews.

4.1.2.1 Individuality

Individuality can be observed in two codes: *Reasons for event participation* and *Minimal interaction with others*.

Three *Reasons for event participation* are stated: challenge, competition and having a goal to train for. All three reasons underline the participants' focus on themselves. For instance, one participant states she participates in events to “just have my own challenge and go run” (Interviewee #2). Another participant explains that he comes to events because he

wanna see how far I can push myself [and because of] the sense that you wanna do better than last time. (Interviewee #9)

In terms of competition, interviewees explain that events stimulate their competitive side which is perceived positively (Interviewees #1 and #8). The third reason to participate in events is to have a goal to train for, as the following statement illustrates:

“I do them because I think for me having a goal means that I run regularly” (Interviewee #8).

The second code reflecting **Individuality** is *Minimal interaction with others*. When asking participants whether they use events to socialise with other runners, most of them answer in the negative (Interviewees #1, #2, #4, #5, #6, #8, #9).

None of them states that they come to events because they enjoy running with others. In fact, the overall consensus is that running is nothing to do with socialising (Interviewees #2, #4, #6, #8, #9). Statements such as “that’s nothing I do socially, I just like to run by myself” (Interviewee #8) illustrate the low interest in interaction with other runners.

To sum it up, participants’ of the XTerra Trail Festival are individual runners who come to events to challenge themselves, to have a goal to train for and to spend a weekend away with their family or partner.

4.1.2.2 Lack of interaction

The second theme is **Lack of interaction** and is caused by **Individuality**, as participants are focussed on themselves. Codes describing **Lack of interaction** are *Low interest in others’ gear* and *Minimal conversation with others*.

Overall, interviewees show relatively low interest in other participants’ gear. Two interviewees state that they do not pay attention to gear or brands of other runners at all (Interviewees #1 and #8). The rest of the interviewees notice gear of other runners either out of pure interest or because they perceive it to hinder the performance of other runners as the following statement underlines:

Probably a couple of times in the past I have looked and seen people with all this really flash gear and, it doesn’t normally do them any good... I think that it hinders their, could hinder their performance... otherwise it [what others are wearing] doesn’t bother me. (Interviewee #6).

Interviewees talk exclusively about shoes but do not talk about other items of gear such as compression clothing, hydration backpacks or gaiters. Furthermore, they show low interest in other people’s gear:

A little bit but not a huge amount [referring to checking out gear] cause I know that the shoes that I've got suit me really well. (Interviewee #7)

The second code reflecting ***Lack of interaction*** is *Minimal conversation with others*. Just two interviewees state that they talk to others at events either just having “a chat along the way” (Interviewee #3) or talking to them after the race (Interviewee #7). One participant explains that he would potentially talk to another runner if they wore five finger shoes as he is interested in these shoes² (Interviewee #4). The other six interviewees do not talk to others.

In summary it can be stated that the focus on oneself causes the lack of interaction which is reflected in the low interest in others' gear and the very limited conversations among participants.

4.1.2.3 Buying decision

The third theme is ***Buying decision*** and its codes - *Brand loyalty*, *Recommendation of retailer* and *Retailer loyalty* - are enhanced by the ***Lack of interaction***. There are two groups identified within the XTerra Trail Festival interviewees. The first group is characterised by high brand loyalty whereas the second group trusts the recommendation of retailers. *Retailer loyalty* can influence the buying decision of both groups. Here again, the participants' main concern is shoes.

Interviewees displaying high brand loyalty have one or two favourite brands that they use. The reason for high brand loyalty is high satisfaction with the brand and its products. One participant explains that

Asics to me are the best shoes I've ever had and I would not change for them... just shoes that improve my running style. And how well I was running and the level of pain I was getting sometimes. (Interviewee #7)

Another participant justifies her high brand loyalty with Nike as follows:

We tend to, both of us [she and her husband] to like Nike stuff ... and that really is because, I think we keep going there

² Five finger shoes are shoes that aim at imitating barefoot running. The shoe basically consists of a sole which protects the feet from elements on the path or trail (see vibramfivefingers.com).

because we know the things will last... like having trainers that will last for four years with constant use whereas other brands just fall apart or smell after six month. (Interviewee #5)

Besides these rather rational reasons one participant also explains her brand loyalty with "...those brands [Adidas and Brooks] have me made really proud" (Interviewee #1). Hence, the satisfaction and the resulting brand loyalty derive from both rational and emotional sources.

The second group trusts the *Recommendation of retailers* rather than brands. This group of interviewees goes to sports shoe shops and gets a running analysis. Based on this analysis retailers recommend certain shoes that are best suited for the running style and ground the customer is usually running on. One participant explains

... these shoes are Mizunos. I would have never chosen them myself but the guy [salesperson] recommended them for me. (Interviewee #3)

The salesperson's opinion can even outweigh the runner's preference:

I go to shoe clinic and then essentially they'll, you know, make me wear different brands for my type of running and I'll basically go with the one which they say is best but usually I want a different one... So, you know, if they say I'm pronating in one shoe then, you know, even if I might have felt comfortable while I was trying it on and it looks good, I'll go for a different shoe. (Interviewee #9)

Independently from brand loyalty and trusting retailers, the interviewees depict a high level of *Retailer loyalty*. When describing how they choose gear they state that they tend to go to the same store. Interviewees with high brand loyalty favour certain retailers because they know that the retailer stocks the brand they are looking for as the following statement illustrates "I go to Rebel Sports because they just supply Asics trainers" (Interviewee #2). The group trusting retailers seems to go back to the same retailers because they know they can trust the recommendation:

I'm shoe science... I take that quite seriously and make sure it's all done properly with the video and everything. (Interviewee #1)

The combination of both buying decision processes is also possible. One participant states that she usually goes to Shoe Clinic and

They tell me what to wear and because of my narrow feet I know that I'm gonna be suited to certain brands... I always end up in either of those two [Adidas or Brooks]. (Interviewee #1)

To conclude, the main factors influencing the buying decision are brand loyalty, recommendations of retailers and retailer loyalty. Hence, the buying decision is not influenced by other trail runners, their experience or recommendations. Participants in the study rely either on their positive brand experience or the recommendation of a qualified salesperson. For that reason it can be stated that the importance of *Brand loyalty* and *Recommendation of retailer* is enhanced by the ***Lack of interaction*** as there is hardly any communication with other trail runners. Thus, not only the sport itself is an individual occasion but also the buying of gear.

4.1.3 Answering the research question

Based on the described themes the research question can be answered as follows.

The role of sports brands in this group of runners is limited to a very individual level. As already explained one group of these runners exhibit high brand loyalty, and brands are seen as a partner that supports their running. Hence, there is a close relationship between these runners and their favourite brand. However, for other participants, the brand name is not relevant as long as the shoe fits, is comfortable and recommended by a salesperson. They tend to go to the same sports shoe chain due to their positive experience with the chain in question.

The question of how brands are perceived is also based on the two groups described – brand loyalty and trusting retailers' recommendation. For the high brand loyalty group brands are very important and signal high personal fit and contribution to improve running style. For the second group brands are "... all pretty much of a muchness" (Interviewee #3) and it depends on what is recommended by salesperson. Hence, for them brands are not perceived to be of great importance.

The role of sports brands in building groups identity could not be identified within this group as they are highly individual runners and there is no sense of community or subculture. Therefore, they do not care about others or their gear.

4.2 Case Two: t42 Central Plateau

In this section, data collected at the second event will be analysed, following the same procedure as in Case One. Hence, observations made at the event are summarised and conclusions are cross-checked with statements from the interview transcripts. Subsequently, themes which help to investigate the role of sports brands in niche sport subcultures are outlined before explaining each theme in detail. The section closes by answering the research question.

4.2.1 Findings of preliminary analysis

In this section observations of the t42 Central Plateau participants' use of sports gear and interactions with each other are summarised. These observations are then cross-checked with statements from all seven interviews.

4.2.1.1 Observations

As in Case One, this section summarises the common way to dress at the event, the most prominent brands and the overall interaction of event participants. At the end of this section conclusions about event participants' involvement with trail running and their sociability are drawn.

Participants at the t42 Central Plateau event wear either tights or shorts, and t-shirts or long sleeved shirts. Participants running 24 or 42 km have a backpack containing obligatory gear because of safety reasons. Contents of the backpack include a beanie, a spare long-sleeve thermal top, full-fingered gloves, full length tights, a waterproof jacket, a basic first aid kit including a whistle and safety blanket, as well as food and at least one litre of fluid (www.t42.co.nz). The reason for the obligatory gear is that parts of both trails, 24 and 42km, are relatively remote and hard to access in the case of an injury. Some trail runners participating in the 11km run also carry a hydration backpack.

Participants wear either road running or trail running shoes. However, road running shoes are a great disadvantage on the trail due to the conditions of the trails, as described in 3.2.2. Some wear short gaiters around their shoes to prevent mud and pebbles coming into their shoes or long, tight gaiters around their legs to protect their legs from being scratched or cut by toetoe (cutty grass). The overall impression is that participants are not dressed as if to go to the gym, but rather specifically equipped for trail running and being outdoors.

This impression can also be observed in terms of the brands of clothing and gear as fewer people wear mainstream brands such as Asics, Adidas or Nike. Instead, participants use outdoor related brands such as Salomon, Lafuma or Macpac. Furthermore, inov-8, a brand specific to trail running, is common for shoes, hydration backpacks, shirts and caps. Besides outdoor and trail running specific gear, endurance sports gear is also popular among participants, in particular, compression tights and shirts.³ The leading brands in this segment, 2XU Skins and Orca, are all seen at the event. Figure 7 displays items of gear owned by interviewees.



Figure 7: Photographs of interviewees' gear at the t42 Central Plateau

Top left: inov-8 light weight backpack, top right: 2XU shorts, bottom left: Asics road running shoes, bottom right: Salomon trail running shoes

Observing the brand use of groups of runners it becomes obvious that individuals in a group are not wearing the same brands. Participants wearing the same brands are neither more likely to interact with each other. However, participants interact throughout the

³ Compression gear keeps muscles warm and transports moisture away from the skin, thereby preventing fatigue of the muscles and enhancing the athlete's performance.

day, keeping each other motivated during the race, congratulating others and chatting after the race as well as at the evening function. Hence, there is a sense of community: participants do not appear to be focussed solely on themselves but socialise with other trail runners.

To sum up, participants in the t42 Central Plateau appear more involved with trail running although some participants wear mainstream brands and road running shoes. The overall impression is that gear used is adapted to the specific requirements of trail running and endurance sport. Furthermore, obligatory gear underlines the technical level and conditions of the trails. Hence, participants have to be involved with trail running and/or outdoor sports in general to be motivated to participate in the event. Someone who is not involved with trail running or the outdoors in general would not own most of the obligatory gear and would not be willing to buy gear simply to participate in a single event. The second impression is a sense of community as participants interact throughout the day and socialise with other runners.

4.2.1.2 Cross-checking with statements

The observations about involvement and community are cross-checked with statements from all seven interviewees. This procedure confirms the impressions gained through observation. Table 8 provides information on training habits and event participation of interviewees.

The involvement with trail running is cross-checked by analysing statements about training sessions. Interviewees provide information about training sessions in hours rather than kilometres. Only two participants answer the question with kilometres. However, these two participants (Interviewees #11 and #12) are novices to trail running which explains why they provide information in kilometres. As already explained (see 4.1.1.2) kilometres are not a reliable indicator for trail running and the fact that participants state hours instead of kilometres supports the observation of high involvement with trail running.

The second information used to confirm the participants' involvement with trail running is the motivation to practise the sport. Five out of seven interviewees state that they like trail running because of the natural environment and the variety of trails as the following statement illustrates:

I like the variety of the terrain; yeah, the variety of the terrain and the conditions you run in; the mud and the puddles.
(Interviewee #15)

Other reasons stated are fitness, fun, enjoyment and less stress on the body (Interviewees #12 and #14). One participant also states that she prefers trail running over road running because of less time pressure (Interviewee #14). This statement confirms that time is not that important in trail running.

Table 8: Training habits and event participation, t42 Central Plateau interviewees

Interviewee	Term of involvement	Training session	Motivation to trail run	Running partner	Event companion
10	Years	Hours	Fitness, enjoyment, natural environment, health	Partner	Partner
11	Novice	Kilometres	Natural environment	Partner	Partner
12	Novice	Kilometres	Fitness, less stress on body	Partner	Partner
13	> 2 years	Hours	Natural environment, fun	Individual Friends	Friends
14	> 2 years	Hours	Less stress on body, less time pressure	Friends Partner	Friends
15	> 0.5 years	Hours	Variety of trails, natural environment	Individual Friends	Friends
16	Since 1991	Hours	Enjoyment, natural environment	Individual Friends	Partner

Statements about a training partner and event companion are used to examine the sociability of t42 Central Plateau participants. The analysis shows that none of the interviewees trains exclusively by themselves. Three out of seven interviewees train individually but also with others (Interviewees #13, #15, #16). The remaining interviewees train either with their partner and/or friends. Hence, running is not only a

form of fitness but also an opportunity to socialise with friends and “just to have a catch-up” (Interviewee #14). Another participant explains:

I’d admit it, when I run with friends, we do drills over at the Domain and so...I started off just running on my own, just to keep fit because I’d stopped other sport and then friends were running at the Domain with a group so doing sort of drills and I enjoy sort of the social interaction with it as well. (Interviewee #15)

Besides statements about the training partner, event companions are used as a second indicator for the sociability of t42 Central Plateau event participants. None of the study participants comes to the event with their family but with friends or their partner. One participant coming with a group of female friends emphasises that “we have a great time; a night away” (Interviewee #14). Thus, coming to events without kids but with their partner and/or friends underlines the observation that participants are open to socialise with other participants.

In summary, it can be said that participants in the t42 Central Plateau event are mostly trail runners who enjoy the natural environment they run in. Furthermore, they appear to be social runners who train sometimes by themselves but mostly with others. During the race participants support each other and are not focussed solely on themselves. None of the interviewees comes to the event with their family and therefore they have more time to interact with other trail runners after the run.

4.2.2 Description of themes

Following the same procedure as in Case One, thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews is conducted and themes which are relevant to answering the research question are presented in this section (see Appendix I).

Analysis of the interviews depicts a sense of **Community** as participants describe a high level of camaraderie and overall interaction with others. The two themes **Community** and **Others as reference** are linked by a two way arrow as the analysis shows that gear and brands can be the starting point for interaction between trail runners at the events and thereby contribute to the sense of community. The sense of **Community** on the other hand encourages participants to use **Others as reference**. The themes **Others as reference** as well as **Sources of information** and **Personal factors** influence the **Buying decision** as indicated by arrows. The second set of one way arrows indicate that the

same three themes lead to a ***Restricted brand loyalty***. Figure 8 provides an overview of the identified themes and their interrelations.

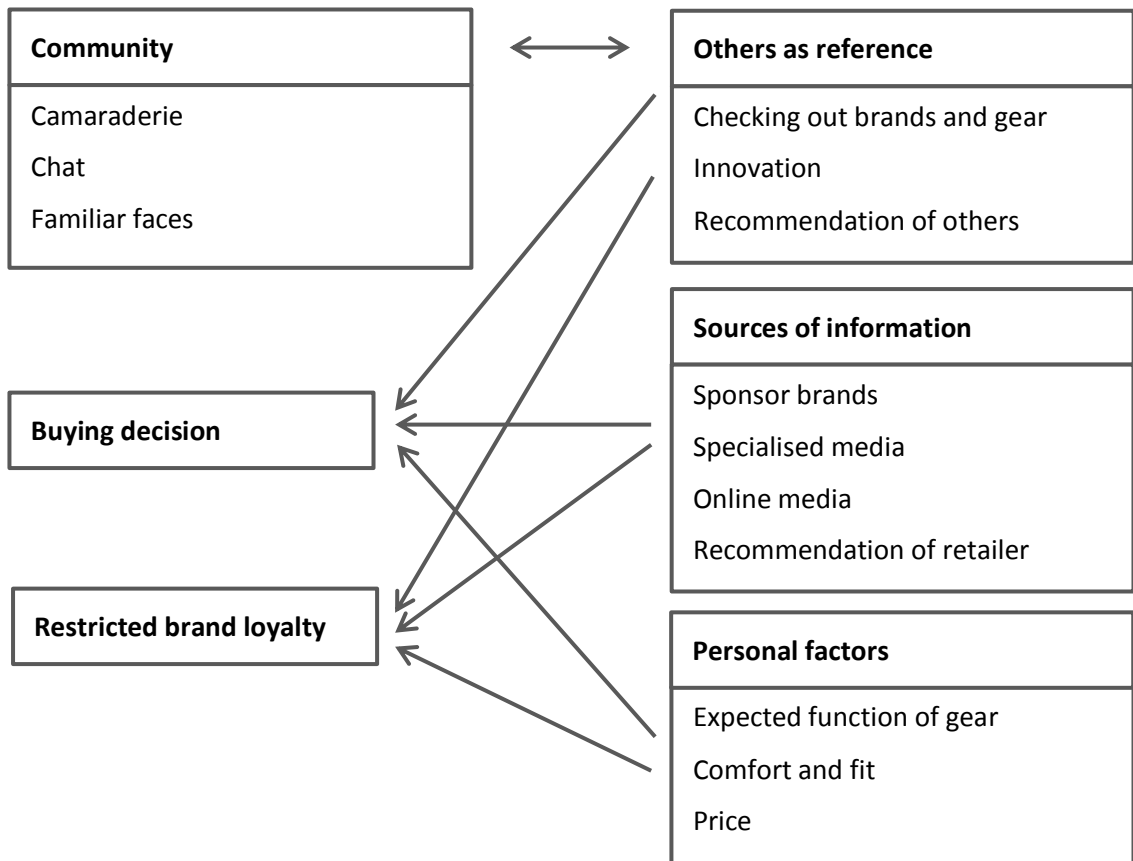


Figure 8: Overview of themes and interrelations – Case Two

In the following sections each theme is explained in more detail and quotations from interviews are given for illustration. Subsequently, interrelations between the identified themes are outlined.

4.2.2.1 Community

Codes reflecting the theme ***Community*** are *Camaraderie*, *Chat* and *Familiar faces*.

One common perception of interviewees was *Camaraderie* during the race. Participants relate how they are supported by others but also how they support others:

... it's really actually supportive out there today, especially in that mud run. People were really... you don't know them but they are really encouraging and if you fall over they check if you're alright and yeah, that kind of thing. (Interviewee #13)

... if you get hurt out there people will stop and help you and if people are falling over you'll stop and help them up. So there's a

sense that it's not all about doing it for yourself. If there's somebody hurt you will stop and you will help them, so yeah. There's that real sense of camaraderie. (Interviewee #10)

But participants not only help each other when they fall over, they also support each other in general and share the race experience:

The hills. (laughter) Generally the next hill and... just generally try and keep each other motivated I think when running... and I think definitely it's a feeling of just doing something with other people. (Interviewee #15)

The second code reflecting **Community** is *Chat*. All seven interviewees state that they talk to others during and/or after the race. One participant explains that "... it's easy to talk to them because you're all out there doing the same thing" (Interviewee #13). Hence, the sport links participants although they do not know each other. Besides encouraging others along the run and to "have a laugh" (Interviewee #10), participants congratulate each other after the race and talk about other events and injuries.

The third code for **Community** is *Familiar faces*. Four interviewees (Interviewees #12, #14, #15, #16) state that they see the same people at events and that it is

... good to see the same faces and I mean, the events you do the more people that you might get to know. (Interviewee #12)

However, seeing and maybe talking to the same people at events was rather perceived as "a nice by-product" (Interviewee #16) than the main purpose of event participation. Nevertheless, the code *Familiar faces* underlines the sense of community and highlights that participants in the t42 Central Plateau event are not focussed on themselves.

4.2.2.2 Others as reference

The theme **Others as reference** describes participants using other people for information about gear and brands. Codes reflecting this theme are *Checking out gear and brands*, the trail runners' perception of *Innovation* and *Recommendation of others*.

Interviewees state that they check out what gear and brands other trail runners are wearing. When doing so, they appear to be rather interested in the function and performance of gear than the brand name of the item. For instance, during one interview

the interviewee spots another trail runner wearing long, tight gaiters and she instantly comments

... that guy's wearing those [pointing to his gaiters]... they would have been good... for the cutty-grass, cause I got scratched up. (Interviewee #14)

However, she does not mention or recognise the brand name but stresses the perceived benefits of the other trail runner's gear.

Analysis of this code, *Checking out gear and brands*, shows that novices are particularly interested in the gear and brands other trail runners are wearing (Interviewee #11 and #12). They check what gear others are using in order to get an idea what gear and brands are used by experienced trail runners:

Just see whether people were wearing Skins [compression gear] or not; yeah, just to get an idea of what they would be running in; so, whether we were going to be wearing too much or not enough. (Interviewee # 11)

If I know that they've done the event well, and then I might look at what gear they're wearing... cause I might think well, that might be a good option because I haven't done much trail running and think oh well, that could be a good option to wear when I run next. ... If you... see what people are wearing and if they look like they're good runners, you know, like the Richard Usher's of New Zealand sport, you look to see what they're wearing. And then obviously, if they're wearing a brand that you don't know, then you go and look at it. (Interviewee #12)

In terms of *Innovation*, that is new gear available for the sport, both novices and experienced runners observe what others are wearing. It appears that events are used to check out new gear. A process of diffusion of innovation is operating (Roger, 1995):

I thought oh, you know, people don't wear compression tights when they're running...or they didn't five years ago so why would we need them now? But things develop and they take time and you start to see people wearing them and there must be something there... there is some science behind them clearly, you know. (Interviewee #15)

The third code reflecting the theme *Others as reference* is *Recommendation of others*. Interviewees talk to others and trust their recommendations because "you kind of trust someone who does it as well" (Interviewee #15). One participant says she listens to

... what people say about what are good shoes and what aren't and what's sort of the trend of good shoes. (Interviewee #12)

But the opinion of others is not only considered in regards to shoes but also other gear:

I've got compression gear... I must admit it was my friend who put me on to that gear... Yeah, I was influenced by her. (Interviewee #13)

It can be concluded that trail runners at the t42 Central Plateau event firstly talk to others about gear and secondly trust recommendations of other trail runners. In some cases this influence can lead to a purchase decision.

4.2.2.3 Sources of information

In addition to *Others as reference*, interviewees use additional *Sources of information* such as *Event sponsors*, *Specialised media*, *Online media* and *Recommendations of retailer* to stay informed about gear and brands.

One brand that sponsors a great variety of trail running events in New Zealand is the British brand inov-8 which is specialised in trail running equipment. As they sponsor different events, interviewees refer to this brand in their statements. Event sponsorship and the related presence of the brand at events appear to be a popular source of information. Five participants state that they talk to the inov-8 representative at the event (Interviewees #10, #12, #14, #15, #16). One participant explains

And yeah, as it happens, I was talking to the guy from Inov-8 last night at the registration and I think I probably will get a pair of those next time round because I think there are some things about that particular brand that it's worth trying out anyway. So I think I'll probably give it a go, just because of what he was saying. (Interviewee #16)

A second participant had talked to the inov-8 representative at the former event and as a consequence bought an inov-8 hydration backpack:

I've got an Inov-8 backpack and I'd got that after the Dual, that Rangitoto Dual. I signed up for that and I wasn't going to carry a pack and I didn't carry a pack there but I spoke to him [brand representative] about hydration packs. (Interviewee #15)

Hence, brand representatives at events seem to have a high credibility and therefore influence event participants.

Another source of information named is *Specialised media* such as running or endurance magazines:

The compression clothing and things like that; we'd probably look at magazines and be swayed by that. (Interviewee #14)

Participants also use *Online media* to get information about gear:

And I was looking for trail running shoes on the internet.... I Googled....just tried "trail running shoes review" and ... then I saw these and clicked on them" (Interviewee #15)

The last source of information used by trail runners is *Recommendation of retailer*. One participant states that he was rather influenced by the recommendation of a salesperson

... because we all have our sort of unique way of running and what suits us. So what suits another runner is not necessarily going to suit me, so yeah, so I guess that's actually less important. (Interviewee #16)

4.2.2.4 Personal factors

Other factors when assessing gear are *Personal factors* with corresponding codes, *Function of gear*, *Comfort and fit* and *Price*.

One important factor when buying new gear is the *Function of gear*. Gear has to meet the personal expectations and requirements:

...if there are particular things about it... because for trail running, I like to have a reasonable amount of protection around my feet, particularly on the toes because I find, well, particularly with mountain running I kick stuff a lot (Interviewee #16).

Other characteristics expected from gear are lightness of the shoe and good tread (Interviewees #12 and # 14).

Besides the *Expected function of gear* interviewees state that *Comfort and fit* of gear is a determining factor in the purchase decision (Interviewees #10, #15, #16). One participant explains how he had chosen his current pair of trail running shoes as follows

I went into one of the camping shops and they had the Solomon brand, you know, and I tried them on and they were nice, comfy. (Interviewee #15)

Furthermore, *Comfort and fit* are used as an indicator for the overall quality of a brand. When asking one interviewee why she thinks that some brands are better than others she answers “The fit, the style I suppose, reputation I suppose” (Interviewee #13).

Thirdly, *Price* is mentioned to be a factor that is considered when buying new equipment. On one hand interviewees are price conscious

... when you look at the price... I check it very much at the price bracket. (Interviewee #15)

... it might be worth looking at what else is out there, depending on price as well. (Interviewee #12)

Additionally, they weigh the advantage of expensive gear against the price they have to pay:

I’ve looked at those Innova [inov-8] ones but the thing is, at the end of the day, it’s just value for money. And they’re, what? \$250...and they were \$170 [referring to own shoes] and you know, I don’t think it’s going to give me the advantage that I need to start worrying about going for super, super specialised shoes. (Interviewee #10)

On the other hand interviewees use price as an indicator for quality:

...it’s almost that if things are too cheap, probably you’re going to think well, they’re not going to last and generally you’re right” (Interviewee #15)

Another interviewee is of the same opinion: “Yeah, it [a good brand] does tend to be more expensive too” (Interviewee #14). Hence, price can be a determining factor in the buying decision in a negative way but price is also used as an indicator for quality.

To sum it up, ***Personal factors*** - *Function of gear*, *Comfort and fit* as well as *Price* - are a set of factors that are considered when making a purchase decision.

4.2.2.5 Buying decision

Others as reference, ***Sources of information*** and ***Personal factors*** all contribute to the trail runners’ ***Buying decision***. Analysis of the data shows that there is no common way to decide what to buy. Instead, every interviewee makes a decision based on different classes of information. One interviewee states that he trusts someone who is also

involved with the sport (Interviewee # 15). Another participant states that he would rather listen to the advice of a salesperson as compared to another runner (Interviewee #16). A third trail runner explains that he is not willing to spend NZ\$ 250 on shoes because he does not think that more expensive shoes would make a difference (Interviewee #10) whereas other participants use price as an indication for quality (Interviewees #14, #15). The overall consensus is that it is important to buy high quality:

you want something that's...you know, if there's at least some science that's gone into designing the shoe; it's not a piece of rubber with a bit of canvas on top of it. (Interviewee #10)

4.2.2.6 Restricted brand loyalty

The same themes that contribute to the *Buying decision - Others as reference*, *Sources of information* and *Personal factors* - also influence the participants' brand loyalty. As a result interviewees depict a *Restricted brand loyalty*:

... when you're spending \$250 on a pair of running trainers, you can't be...yes, you'd have your preferences on what you want to buy [referring to his favourite brand] but they've got to feel right as well. (Interviewee #15)

Hence, interviewees have their favourite brands but they are open to change brands if the alternative is recommended by other trail runners, the function of the alternative gear is perceived to be superior or the fit and comfort is perceived to be higher.

4.2.3 Answering the research question

Based on the emerging themes the research question can be answered as follows.

The overall role of sports brands in the emerging subculture observed and investigated at the t42 Central Plateau event is complex. It seems to be about gear and the function of gear rather than about brand names. As one participant states, when being asked whether brands organise trail runners in some hierarchy or subgroups, she says "Probably not because you all end up wearing the same sort of gear" (Interviewee #14). Maybe it is rather the type of gear that communicates meaning than the brand name:

You look at some people and you think God, you know. (laughing) When you look at some of the things they're wearing like... and we have a little bit of a laugh about them. Like, I've

got to beat that person cause he looks a bit too serious or something, you know. (laughing) (Interviewee #15)

The perception of brands in general is that brands stand for high quality products. Branded equipment is bought because of the expected function of the items. Participants have favourite brands and are also looking out for “their” brands when buying new equipment, but they are willing to change brand if the function of an alternative is perceived to be higher. The perception of function in turn depends on how many other trail runners are wearing it, how satisfied other trail runners are, what information they can find online, the influence of brand representatives at events and salespeople in shops.

The role of sports brands in building group identity is of an indirect nature. Brands do not seem to communicate any additional information than the brand name. However, trail runners at this event talk to others about gear and ask them especially about innovations and new brands. Hence, brands can contribute to the feeling of community as they can be the starting point for a conversation.

Chapter Five: Discussion

This last chapter covers the discussion of the findings. Firstly, the two cases are compared using the model of subcultures of consumption (see page 22), brand communities and leisure activities which was introduced in the literature review (see section 2.4). Furthermore, a brief outlook on the future of trail running is given. Subsequently, managerial implications are presented. The chapter closes with an outline of limitations of the research and further research is suggested.

5.1 Comparison of the two cases

In this section the two cases – the XTerra Trail Festival and the t42 Central Plateau – are compared. For this purpose the model of subcultures of consumption, brand communities and leisure activities which was introduced in the literature review is used as a base for comparison. The position in the model of each case is deduced from the findings.

5.1.1 Case One: XTerra Trail Festival

Participants of the XTerra Trail Festival are classified as serious leisure participants (see C2 in the model) for two reasons.

Firstly, participants at the XTerra Trail Festival showed most of the characteristics participants in any serious leisure activity do. Most of them had a long-term involvement with the sport (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Stebbins, 1997) as they practised running for several years. They were also goal-oriented and sought to enhance their skills (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Shen & Yarnal, 2010) through improvements in their race times. Furthermore, they gained deep satisfaction from running (Shen & Yarnal, 2010; Stebbins, 1997).

Secondly, a specific social world is often developed around serious leisure activities (Dilley & Scraton, 2010). Participants of the XTerra Trail Festival are members of a specific social world. This world is characterised by focus on oneself and low interest in communication or interaction with other runners. Hence, not interacting with others and being focussed on oneself is the accepted and common behaviour pattern.

A third characteristic of serious leisure is that practitioners in serious leisure activities often form long-lasting relationships with others participating in the activity (Shen & Yarnal, 2010). This characteristic of serious leisure was not found at the XTerra Trail Festival. As mentioned, participants of this event were focussed on themselves and hardly interacted with others so that no long-lasting relationships could be formed. However, the lack of long-lasting relationships is assessed to be an outcome of the individuality of the sport rather than an indicator of a lack of involvement with the sport.

To sum up, running is a serious leisure activity for participants of the XTerra Trail Festival. Furthermore, it is doubted that a subculture will develop around those individual off-road runners. The reason for that is that social interaction is a basis for subcultures of consumption through the development of subgroups, social hierarchy or insider and outsider status (de Burgh-Woodman & Brace-Govan, 2007; Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Therefore, participants of the XTerra Trail Festival are positioned in serious leisure activities.

There is no influence of brands on serious leisure activities depicted in the model. In the case of XTerra Trail Festival participants, it appears that sports gear brands as well as retailer brands are used for self-identification. Other participants are not used as a reference in terms of what gear to use or what brands to wear. Being member of a certain group does not necessarily imply that consumers use other members as a reference group (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2007). As a consequence, brands do not play a role in building group identity nor are they used for identification with the leisure activity.

5.1.2 Case Two: t42 Central Plateau

Participants of the t42 Central Plateau event exhibit an emerging subculture and are therefore positioned between serious leisure activities (see C2) and activity based subcultures of consumption (see A2.2). The reason for this is that trail running is a serious leisure activity for participants of this event. At the same time they display characteristics that indicate the emergence of a subculture.

Characteristics of serious leisure activities observed at the t42 Central Plateau event are long-term involvement with the sport and deep satisfaction from the activity (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Shen & Yarnal, 2010; Stebbins, 1997). Admittedly, not all participants already have long-term involvement with trail running but novices plan to continue with

the sport, buy appropriate gear and participate at more events. Hence, it can be deduced that participants have a serious involvement with the sport and also gain deep satisfaction through trail running. Additionally, participants of serious leisure activities form long-lasting relationships with others participating in the activity (Dilley & Scraton, 2010). One code identified was 'Familiar faces' which indicates that participants form relationships with others or at least starting to build relationships.

Further characteristics of serious leisure such as goal-orientation and enhancement of skills (Dilley & Scraton, 2010; Shen & Yarnal, 2010) did not appear to be of great importance. This fact can be explained in two ways. Firstly, the nature of the sport implies that performance and improvement are hard to measure. The only way to measure performance and improvement is the elevation a trail runner can master, and the duration a trail runner can run for. However, as discussed before, the difficulty level depends on the terrain which makes the measurement of performance even harder (runningwildnz.com). Secondly, the lifestyle related to the sport is more important than improvement of skills. The main reason to participate in trail running is to be in a natural environment and enjoy the scenery. Participants could work out in a gym; instead they choose the natural over an artificial environment which is a choice of lifestyle. When a serious leisure activity becomes the lifestyle of individuals participating in the activity, it is an indicator that the serious leisure activity transcends to an activity based subculture of consumption.

The last feature of serious leisure activities is the formation of a social world (Dilley & Scraton, 2010). The social world of the t42 event is characterised by a high level of camaraderie, openness to talk to others and friendly attitude. Generally speaking, camaraderie and no entry barriers are characteristics of communities rather than subcultures (Leigh et al., 2006; Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001). However, these observations have to be qualified in the case of t42 Central Plateau participants. The high level of camaraderie described by participants can be defined as a shared norm or rule. That is helping others, being helped and supporting each other has become the norm of behaviour. Having no entry barriers but being open to new members, on the other hand, is an indicator that the social group at the t42 Central Plateau event is not a fully developed subculture yet. The reason for that is that entry barriers are a strong characteristic of subcultures of consumption in general (Kozinets, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Furthermore, statements from interviewees also indicate that subgroups are about to develop which is another characteristic of subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Sisjord, 2009). For instance, one participant stated that some trail runners look too serious. Therefore, they laugh about them and try to beat them which underlines the development of subgroups.

To sum up, participants of the t42 Central Plateau event can be positioned between serious leisure activity (C2) and activity based subculture of consumption (A2.2). The reason for this is that they display characteristics of both phenomena: long-term involvement with the activity, building relationships with others and a specific social world are characteristics of serious leisure activities; sport as a lifestyle choice, shared norms and rules, and development of subgroups are characteristics of an activity based subculture. Hence, this group is in the transition phase from a serious leisure activity to an activity based subculture of consumption. The fact that this group lacks entry barriers underlines the early stage of development of the subculture.

The early stage of this activity based subculture of consumption can also be observed in the role of brands. As outlined in the literature review, brands are often used to display membership with a non-commercial subculture of consumption as well as to underline authentic membership (Arthur, 2006; Beverland et al., 2010). However, in the case of t42 Central Plateau event participants, the function of gear is more important than brand name, which is why members have not yet attached meaning to different brands. Furthermore, the limited range of brands available for specialised trail running gear might also contribute to the fact that function outweighs brand.

5.1.3 Conclusion

In conclusion it can be stated that the runners observed at the two events represent two very different groups of consumers. Participants of the XTerra Trail Festival are a group of consumers who participate in a leisure activity and display a high involvement with the sport to the extent that running is a serious leisure activity for them. However, as they are very individual runners it is not to be expected that an activity based subculture of consumption will evolve from this group.

Participants of the t42 Central Plateau event on the other hand represent a group that is in the transition phase from serious leisure to an activity based subculture of consumption. In contrast to participants of the first event, they are linked by their

passion for the sport and agree on shared norms and rules such as helping and supporting others. Overall, they do not perceive trail running was an individual sport but enjoy the sociable side of the sport. Another indicator of the emergence of a subculture is the establishment of subgroups.

In terms of brands the two cases differ as well. Participants in the first event display a high brand and/or retailer loyalty. Furthermore, they choose their equipment without considering other runners' opinions or experiences in their buying decision. Participants in the second event are rather influenced by the function of gear than by the brand name. In addition, they consider a variety of factors in their decision making process.

One aim of this research was to investigate the role of sports brands in building group identity. Interestingly, in both cases brands do not play any substantial role in building group identity. However, in Case Two brands may become important in the future as the sport gains popularity.

Overall, the research is a valuable example for the importance of the precise use of terms. Without making a clear distinction between subcultures of consumption, brand communities and leisure activities as well as their subgroups, it would not be possible to clearly distinguish and analyse the two cases.

The next section will discuss possible developments in trail running based on Case Two.

5.2 Future of trail running

Trail running was chosen as research object as it is a niche sport in New Zealand and the number of people participating in the sport is limited. However, according to one of New Zealand's leading outdoor magazines, trail running is the "fastest growing challenge of choice" (Jacques, 2010, p. 49). For instance, the number of events being run has doubled in the last six years (Jacques, 2010).

Besides the increasing number of events, other interesting developments around the sport can be observed. Firstly, an online trail running magazine called the "trail runner AUS-NZ" was launched this year. This magazine is targeted at trail runners in Australia and New Zealand and offers information not only about trails in these two countries but reports from international events and provides advice on training and reports about gear:

You want to know who's running up what mountain, who's winning which extreme event, what's the best short trail run just outside your town, what supplement will see you through that 100 Kay killer, how to set up a training plan for the 4 Deserts you reckon you'll conquer next year, and what's the best pair of runners to tackle the TNF100 [The North Face 100]? (trailrunnermag.wordpress.com/)

Despite the early stage of development, this magazine makes the distinction between different levels of involvement within trail running participants and targets only high involved trail runners as can be deduced from the following statement:

Bitumen? BORING. Tarmac? TEDIOUS. Asphalt? ARE YOU KIDDING? Go wild, we say. Get dirty! Blaze a new trail with your running. (trailrunnermag.wordpress.com/)

Secondly, the appointment of the New Zealand trail runner Anna Frost as an ambassador for the Salomon brand (see annafrosty.blogspot.com) indicates the increasing commercialisation and sophistication of the sport.

Hence, companies manufacturing trail running specific equipment are starting to position their brands in the trail runners' mind and appoint professional trail runners as their brand ambassador, thereby, underlining the quality of their gear.

These recent developments indicate that trail running is growing, that the sport might eventually become more popular. The role of brands in this subculture is also expected to change. The growth of trail running can be compared to the history of snowboarding as a sport. When snowboarding came into the picture only very few companies offered equipment especially targeted at snowboarders (Sisjord, 2009; van Tilburg, 1996). However, nowadays snowboarding has grown onto a common winter sport all over the world. Snowboarders are no longer limited in their choice of brands (Blair, 1993; Quester et al., 2006). Brands are now even used to position oneself in the subculture of consumption and brand communities have evolved around snowboard related brands such as Burton (see burton.com).

It is not expected that trail running will gain the same level of popularity as snowboarding but recent developments indicate that changes to the sport are likely and a trail running subculture of consumption with associated brands may emerge.

5.3 Managerial implications

Two managerial implications can be deduced from this research. Firstly, not all sports are clearly defined and managers have to be aware of this lack of definition. Secondly, depending on consumers' level of involvement with a sport, differences in targeting and approaching consumers arise.

5.3.1 Lack of definition of sports

The first implication for managers is that they have to be aware that some sports are not defined precisely. Both events in this study were defined by the event organisers as trail running events. However, as observations and thematic analysis have shown there are great differences between the two events, the types of runners participating, and the role of brands within the two groups of runners. The first event was an off road running event with very low technical level and a majority of participants who wore road running shoes. Participants were involved with road running and enjoyed running off road as well. In contrast, the second event was a trail running event and participants were dedicated to trail running rather than road running.

Hence, although niche sports are small sports, marketers have to analyse niche sports very carefully and identify subgroups with different levels of involvement. Not all subgroups might be an appropriate target for products. Furthermore, different approaches to marketing might be resumed for each group.

5.3.2 Different approaches to marketing

Participants at the two events make their buying decisions based on different factors. They also show dissimilar levels of brand loyalty. For this reason, different approaches to marketing are suggested.

Participants at the XTerra Trail Festival can be divided into two groups in regards to their buying decision. The first group buys their favourite brand whereas the second group trusts the recommendation of a retailer. In addition to that, both groups depict high retailer loyalty. Opinions and experiences of other trail runners do not influence either of the two groups and they do not show especial interest in sponsor brands at the event. Because of their high trust in retailers and high retailer loyalty, marketing communication at the point of sale should be emphasised. Furthermore, training sessions for salespersons should be held regularly so that they are informed about

brands and can recommend them. If a new brand, such as inov-8, is recommended by a salesperson it can be expected that runners classified as serious leisure participants consider the brand in their buying decision.

Participants at the t42 Central Plateau event are influenced by a great variety of factors when acquiring new gear. Although some have a favourite brand and stick with it, they are still open to new ideas and brands and actively seek information about them. For instance, they are interested in sponsor brands and talk to brand representatives at events to gain information. Furthermore, participants talk to other trail runners about gear and consider their opinion in the buying decision process. In addition to that, the functionality of gear appears to be of greater importance than does brand name. Therefore, the overall recommendation to target this group of consumers is to make personal contact with them at events and stress the functionality of the products offered.

5.4 Limitations

There are two limitations to the study. Firstly, there might be other trail runners in New Zealand than those interviewed who display a higher involvement with the sport, for instance participants of events such as the Tarawera Ultramarathon. The event options in the Tarawera Ultramarathon are 100 km, 85 km and 60 km trail run. These highly involved trail runners might provide different insights into the trail running subculture and their perception of brands.

Secondly, the present research is not a longitudinal study. It would be interesting to investigate the change in perception of brands over time. For instance, the examination of how the perception of brands changes in the case of the two novices of Case Two might offer new insights. The current research only provides insights at one specific moment in time.

5.5 Further research

Given the current stage of development in trail running, it is recommended to repeat this study in a few years' time, to see how the role of brands in this niche sport may change in the future.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Ethical approval

>>> Charles Grinter 31/03/2011 11:39 AM >>>

Tena koe Ken

I advise that your ethics application is now approved and that you may commence data collection.

The formal correspondence will follow in due course.

--

Please contact me should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter.

Charles Grinter charles.grinter@aut.ac.nz

Ethics Coordinator

Auckland University of Technology

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Comprehensive information about AUTEK's principles and processes is available online in the Ethics Knowledge Base (accessible via <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>)



MEMORANDUM

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

To: Ken Hyde
 From: **Dr Rosemary Godbold and Madeline Banda** Executive Secretary, AUTEC
 Date: 30 May 2011
 Subject: Ethics Application Number 11/45 **The role of sports brands in niche sport subcultures.**

Dear Ken

Thank you for providing written evidence as requested. We are pleased to advise that it satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) at their meeting on 14 March 2011 and that on 31 March 2011, we approved your ethics application. This delegated approval is made in accordance with section 5.3.2.3 of AUTEC's *Applying for Ethics Approval: Guidelines and Procedures* and is subject to endorsement at AUTEC's meeting on 13 June 2011.

Your ethics application is approved for a period of three years until 31 March 2014.

We advise that as part of the ethics approval process, you are required to submit the following to AUTEC:

- A brief annual progress report using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>. When necessary this form may also be used to request an extension of the approval at least one month prior to its expiry on 31 March 2014;
- A brief report on the status of the project using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/research-ethics/ethics>. This report is to be submitted either when the approval expires on 31 March 2014 or on completion of the project, whichever comes sooner;

It is a condition of approval that AUTEC is notified of any adverse events or if the research does not commence. AUTEC approval needs to be sought for any alteration to the research, including any alteration of or addition to any documents that are provided to participants. You are reminded that, as applicant, you are responsible for ensuring that research undertaken under this approval occurs within the parameters outlined in the approved application.

Please note that AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval from an institution or organisation for your research, then you will need to make the arrangements necessary to obtain this.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at ethics@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

On behalf of AUTEC and ourselves, we wish you success with your research and look forward to reading about it in your reports.

Yours sincerely

Dr Rosemary Godbold and Madeline Banda
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Veronika Schwarzenberger hkw0985@aut.ac.nz

>>> Rosemary Godbold 16/05/2011 9:45 AM >>>

Dear Ken

Thank you for informing us of the additional data collection for your research project which is approved. Charles will be in touch shortly with the formal correspondence.

All the best with your research,

- Rosemary

Rosemary Godbold R.N. PhD.

Senior Lecturer, Health Care Ethics & Executive Manager, AUTECH

rosemary.godbold@aut.ac.nz

SUMMARY NOTES:

1. The way participants dress
2. Description of gear participants wear, e.g. trail running shoes, light weight backpacks, camel bags
3. Dominance of brands, i.e. are certain brands more common than others?
4. Are brand names clear to read?
5. Do groups tend to wear/use the same brands?
6. Are people wearing the same brands more likely to interact with each other?
7. How dominant is the presence of sports-related brands?

Appendix C – Information sheet

Participant Information Sheet



Date Information Sheet Produced:

29 March 2011

Project Title

The role of sports brands in niche sports subcultures

An Invitation

Hello. I am Veronika Schwarzenberger, a Master of Business student from AUT University School of Business in Auckland, New Zealand. I am conducting research to understand the role of sport brands in niche sport subcultures. My supervisor is Dr. Ken Hyde. I would be happy if you agreed to participate in my research. This would involve sharing your opinions in one interview and photographs taken of your clothing and sports equipment. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

What is the purpose of this research?

This research forms part of my Master of Business degree. The purpose of this research is to understand sport subculture members' perception of sports brands and to investigate the role of sports brands in building group identity. I have been observing the brands of clothing and equipment present at this event.

What will happen in this research?

I will conduct a semi-structured interview with you for about 20 minutes and/or take photographs of your branded clothing and sports equipment you are using. With your permission I will audiotape the interview. Your participation will occur without any pressure. Should you feel at any point that you do not wish to continue participating you may end the interview or withdraw your permission to have your clothing and sports equipment photographed. If you wish to withdraw all information provided by you including your photographs will be destroyed and consequently not used for the research project.

What are the discomforts and risks?

The design of this research will not cause any discomfort or personal risk. There will be absolutely no pressure to respond to any particular question and should you feel at any point that you do not wish to continue participating – you may end the interview or withdraw your permission to be photographed.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

This request is voluntary in nature. If at any stage you do not feel like answering any questions, you have the right to withdraw.

How will my privacy be protected?

I will not include any names or any other information that will enable the reader to identify individuals who have participated in the research.

Photographs of the branded items you own will be used for academic purposes only and will not be published in any form outside of this project without your written permission.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

Agreeing to participate does not remove your right to withdraw from the research. You may view the interview questions and if you are not comfortable – you can end your participation.

You may withdraw yourself, photographs of your branded items, or any information that you have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way. If you withdraw, all relevant information including tapes, transcripts and photographs, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

You will be asked to sign a Consent Form if you agree to participate in this research.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Summary results of this survey will be made available to you should you wish to see them. Please remember that these results will be based on aggregation of the data recorded from all the participants to ensure the anonymity of each participant. If you would like to see the findings, please send an email to veronika.schwarzenberger@gmail.com in August 2011.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr. Ken Hyde, ken.hyde@aut.ac.nz, +649-921-9999 ext 5605.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTECH, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz, +649-921-9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Veronika Schwarzenberger, veronika.schwarzenberger@gmail.com, phone (09) 921-9999 ext 5605

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr. Ken Hyde, ken.hyde@aut.ac.nz, phone (09) 921-9999 ext 5605
Address: AUT University, 42 Wakefield Street, Auckland Central.

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 31 March 2011,
AUTECH Reference number 11/45.

Appendix D – Consent Form

Consent Form



Project title: ***The role of sports brands in niche sport subcultures***

Project Supervisor: ***Dr Ken Hyde***

Researcher: ***Veronika Schwarzenberger***

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 29 March 2011.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interview and that the interview may also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that, with my permission, photographs of my branded items may be taken.
- ☐ I understand that quotations will be included in the findings but my name will not be mentioned.
- ☐ I understand that the photographs will be used for academic purposes only and will not be published in any form outside of this project without my written permission.
- ☐ I understand that any copyright material created by the photographic sessions is deemed to be owned by the artist and that I do not own copyright of any of the photographs.
- ☐ I understand that I may withdraw myself, photographs of my branded items, or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes, transcripts and photographs, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.
- ☐ I am over twenty years old and I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a copy of the report from the research (please tick one): Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 31 March 2011

AUTEC Reference number 11/45

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

Appendix E – Interview guide

INDICATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The role of sports brands in niche sport subcultures
XTerra New Zealand Trail Festival 8-10th of April 2011, Rotorua

Basic demographic questions

1. Age
2. Occupation
3. City of residence

General questions

1. When and why did you start trail running?
2. How often per week do you go trail running and for how long?
3. Do you go by yourself or with friends?

Motivation to participate in events

1. How often did you participate at events like this in the last 12 month?
2. Why do you participate in events like this?
3. Who did you come to the event with?
4. Do you use trail running events to socialise with other trail runners and to talk about trails in different regions? Do you talk about gear?

Questions on gear

1. If you need new gear where do you get information from? (Ads, blogs, friends, brand homepages, etc)
2. If you choose new gear do you pay attention to the brand name and its reputation?
3. If you see other trail runners do you check what gear/brands they are using?
4. Have you noticed any entrants using unusual gear?
5. Have you noticed any entrants using high end gear?
6. Are some brands better than others? Which ones? Why?

Appendix F – Example of interview transcript

DW D0047 (Interviewee # 14)

May I ask you how old you are?

I'm 40.

And what are you doing?

I'm a Registered Nurse.

And where are you living?

I live in Tauranga.

When and why did you start trail running?

About three years ago and it was better on your body and there were less time pressures.

Ok, so that's the reason why you decided to change from road running to trail running?

Yeah, I do both, I do both.

And how often per week do you go for a run?

Four times a week.

Ok, and how long?

It depends on what I'm training for but usually I wouldn't run less than an hour. And depending on if I'm training for a marathon or for something else...but we do one longer run a week...two hours...something like that; two and a half hours.

Ok, is that mainly on road?

Yeah.

And do you go by yourself?

No, we always run as a group. Oh, I do the shorter ones by myself but other than that we run as a group.

Why do you run as a group?

Just to have a catch-up. We're friends and it makes you turn up. You know, it ensures that you do turn up here.

How often do you participate in events?

At least one every six months; probably more often than that; maybe three a year.

Ok, and why do you participate?

To force yourself to train.

Ok.

Yeah, events make it purposeful.

Yeah, ok. And you've come to the events with your friends?

Yeah.

So you always have quite a good time.

Yeah, we have a great time; a night away.

That's good. And do you use those events also to socialise with other runners?

Not particularly but we...you know, we talk to people along the run but no, not really.

So what do you talk about along the run?

Along the run? We find out where other people are from and things like that and what other events they're going to do. Yeah, but..

Ok, do you talk about gear?

About what?

About shoes and stuff?

No, not really. Not with other people.

Ok, but within the group you do?

Yeah, oh definitely. Yeah, yeah.

So you discuss about shoes, brands or...?

Yeah, yeah, definitely. We'll all like our own brands and we're interested in what feels good for other people, yeah.

And does it influence you when you buy new stuff?

What other people have? Yeah, of course. Like, when we were all buying these Camelbak's, you know, it's good to see what suits others and what's good for, like, a woman compared to a man and things like that and which brands are good.

Yeah, and if you see people at events having the same brands that you do, does it...

Yeah....

You think yeah, you know it (looks good?)

Yeah probably. Yeah, yeah, yeah; like if they're wearing Asics shoes or something you think oh yeah, yeah, they're good shoes. (laughter)

So if you need new shoes, do you just talk with your friends about it or you look in magazines or...?

Yeah, magazines. But you usually...once you've found a brand, you stick with it.

Ok.

So I would tend to stick with...you can't even see what these are. These were new and I'm really upset, but anyway, that's ok...they're Asics trail shoes. And I got them after our last trail run when I threw out my old ones. But they will wash up ok. But you know.... So you wait for the specials and then try and get your own brand.

Ok. So you do pay attention to the brand names in terms of you're happy to pay for a brand and...?

Yeah, but then we're open to...like, different things that come out. The compression clothing and things like that; we'd probably look at magazines and be swayed by that.

Yeah. And if you see people at events wearing that gear, would you talk to them and ask them how it feels?

How it feels and stuff? Yeah. Yeah, definitely. Like, a lot of people are wearing those arm warmers or that guy's wearing those...they would have been good...for the cutty-grass, cause I got scratched up with all the...yeah...so yeah...I'd talk to them about it.

Ok, and do the brand names sort of organise the runners in a certain hierarchy of how good they are or is it...

Probably not because you all end up wearing the same sort of gear, yep.

Ok, and so for you some brands are better than others?

Yeah. Some brands are better than others because I guess they're just more well-known and more people use them.

So for you, a brand is better the more people know them?

Yeah, it does tend to be more expensive too.

So if you had friends like Inov-8, their trail runner shoes, they're not that well-known a brand but would you consider them being not as good?

Yeah, you'd be open to new ideas if they worked; if they had good tread or...

So if you see...if you're at events and the people are wearing a new brand, would you talk to them about it?

Yeah, yeah; we did one event where there was a guy selling shoes. One of my friends won a spot prize and it was a walking trail shoe and that was one we hadn't heard of but, you know, she really thinks that's good.

And at those events do you feel like there's a sense of community?

Yeah, you tend to some of the same sort of people or similar...yeah, you see faces that you've seen before, yeah.

Did that kind of make you feel like 'oh yeah, that's right...' Does it make you feel like coming home?

Yeah, it is, it's good.

And you also support each other running and stuff?

Yep, yep.

Great, thank you.

Appendix G – Confidentiality agreement

Confidentiality Agreement



Project title: *The role of sports brands in niche sport subcultures*

Project Supervisor: **Dr Ken Hyde**

Researcher: **Veronika Schwarzenberger**

- ☐ I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.
- ☐ I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.
- ☐ I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature:

Transcriber's name:

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

Date:

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):

Dr. Ken Hyde.....

AUT University, 42 Wakefield Street.....

Auckland Central.....

(09) 921-9999 5605.....

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 31 March 2011
AUTEC Reference number 11/45

Appendix H – Description of codes Case One

Individuality	
Reasons for event participation	Challenge Improvement of running Goal to train
Minimal interaction with others	7 out of 9 do not interact with other runners at events except the people they come to the event with
Lack of interaction	
Low interest in others' gear	Minimal checking out other runners' gear Focus on what suits individual What they see does not affect them in their buying decision
Minimal conversations with others	Only very few talk to others They only talk in very few instances about gear and if so, they only talk about shoes but no other equipment
Buying decision	
Brand loyalty	6 out of 9 have a favourite brand and stick with it
Personal experience	Brand loyalty because of positive brand experience
Personal fit	Brand loyalty because of brand is perceived to have the best fit
Recommendation of retailer	High trust in recommendation of retailer
Running analysis	Confide in running analysis
Retailer loyalty	They often go to the same shop because of former positive experience or because retailer stocks favourite brand

Appendix I – Description of codes Case Two

Community	
Camaraderie	<p>Sense of camaraderie</p> <p>Helping and being helped during the race</p> <p>Enjoyment of doing something with others</p> <p>It is not just about oneself as it is the case in Case One</p> <p>Even being competitive is different, in Case Two it is about being competitive with others, in Case Two it is beating own time</p>
Chat	<p>Interviewees chat during and after the race with others</p> <p>It is easy to talk to others because they are all doing the same thing</p>
Familiar faces	<p>People go to the same events and recognise others</p>
Others as reference	
Checking out brands and gear	<p>Aim of checking out others is to see what could be good for oneself</p> <p>Especially for novices perceived involvement of others is important when seeing what other are wearing, if the person appears to be competent function of gear and brand is rated good</p>
Innovation	<p>Performance of innovations has to be perceived to be good in order to be considered</p> <p>Perceived quality increases the more trail runners are using the innovation</p>
Recommendation of others	<p>Recommendation of others is taken into consideration when buying new gear</p> <p>Can lead to buying decision</p>

Sources of information

Sponsor brands	<p>Open to new brands</p> <p>Interested in sponsor brands</p> <p>Sponsor brands can influence them in their buying decision</p>
Specialised media	Running and endurance magazines
Online media	<p>Use online reports</p> <p>Google gear and brands</p>
Recommendation of retailer	<p>3 out of 7 are influenced by the recommendation of retailer</p> <p>Recommendation is taken into consideration besides other factors</p>

Personal Factors

Expected function of gear	<p>Function of gear is important</p> <p>Function is more important than brand name</p>
Comfort and fit	<p>Comfort and fit is important</p> <p>Outweighs brand name</p> <p>Aware that not every brands suits everyone</p>
Price	<p>Price conscious</p> <p>Price indicates quality</p>

Buying Decision

Influenced by a variety of factors and as straight forward as in Case One

Restricted brand loyalty

Function and fit are more important than brand
