Are you a Lover or a Hater?:
The Impact of the Brand Polarization Marketing Strategy on the Miracle Whip Facebook Brand Community

by

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ABSTRACT

ARE YOU A LOVER OR A HATER?: THE IMPACT OF THE BRAND POLARIZATION MARKETING STRATEGY ON THE MIRACLE WHIP FACEBOOK BRAND COMMUNITY

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This thesis explores the phenomenon of brand polarization, defined as the creation of brand dislike through offensive marketing tactics directed at one group of consumers in order to have a positive impact on another consumer segment. Currently, no academic study and evidence of this phenomenon exists. A netnographic investigation on the Miracle Whip Facebook brand page is used to uncover brand polarization strategies, the impact of these strategies on brand community, and the resulting construction of symbolic boundaries. This study finds that brand polarization is not about one specific strategy used over one specific period of time, but about multiple strategies used gradually. Particularly, consciousness of a kind in a brand community is affected and many different boundaries are formed. The findings extend previous brand community literature by broadening the brand community definition and taking into account the impact from beyond. Managerial implications are also offered.
DEDICATION

To Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior, “for I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Romans 1:16). For everything I do, I do it for your glory (1 Corinthians 10:31). It is in my weakness that I have found my strength and your grace and mercy sustains me everyday (2 Corinthians 12:9-11). You are my portion dear Lord, you are my everything (Psalm 16:5). My first and only love, and I have known no greater love than yours (John 15:13; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8). You are my provider, my banner, my savior, my peace and rest, my dwelling place, my father, and I am honored that you call me “friend” (John 15:15). I am not your lawyer Lord, but a witness to testify that you are good to those who seek you with all their heart (Deuteronomy 4:29). I will praise your name for there is none greater than you. Through the change, the hard times, the trials, and troubles, you are constant. Jesus, you are the same yesterday, today, and tomorrow (Hebrews 13:8). You are faithful even when we are faithless (2 Timothy 2:13). You desire mercy not sacrifice (Hosea 6:6). The glory of man withers like the flowers of the field, but the word of the Lord endures forever (1 Peter 1: 24-25). Those that come to you will find everlasting joy, peace, and happiness. You are the only one that satisfies (Matthew 11:28). The gospel can be summed up in two commandments: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ and ‘Love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22: 37-39). This is because you, oh Lord, are love (1 John 4:8). I have resolved that you are my God, for I understand that just as we bring nothing to this world when we are born, we take nothing out of it (1 Timothy 6:7). I’ve counted up the cost and you are worth it (Matthew 5:10). I love you.
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**CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Industry statistics show that consumers are constantly confronted with marketing messages. On average, an adult is exposed to a range of 600 to 625 ads in a day (Our Rising Ad Dosage: It's Not as Oppressive as Some Think, 2007), with a large portion of these messages going unnoticed (Britt and Adams, 2007). As a result of this recent media landscape, marketers are turning to social and experiential forms of marketing. Traditional channels such as radio, print, and television are regarded as aged, dull and authoritative and consumers have come to expect authentic, unique messages (Holt, 2002). Overall, it has become increasingly difficult for brands to distinctively speak through this marketing clutter.

In this environment, marketers are struggling to contend for the attention, affect, and loyalty of consumers. A quick look at the current marketing industry demonstrates that more organizations are willing to take bolder, aggressive approaches. Take for example, Chick-fil-A’s same-sex marriage controversy in 2011. The American fast-food restaurant chain explicitly publicized their beliefs against the subject and sponsored marriage foundations that directly attacked the same-sex marriage movement (Severson, 2011). The company’s decision to overtly announce their strict conservative values brought about much criticism, with many university students and other organizations lobbying for a boycott of the restaurant. Yet, something interesting happened. Chick-fil-A’s sales increased. Although, it had angered a certain demographic, specifically those that supported same-sex marriage, those that shared similar conservative beliefs were found to love the brand even more for their daring actions (Napoletano, 2012).
There are other examples of companies that have tried to use this method in the past. Abercrombie and Fitch Chief Operating Officer, Mike Jeffries, was caught saying in a 2008 interview for Salon that the teen clothing retailer was not for “fat, unattractive” consumers (Lutz, 2013). The teen clothing retailer defended its position stating that the goal was not to be a brand for everyone. Jeffries specifically stated “…companies that are in trouble are trying to target everybody: young, old, fat, skinny. But then you become totally vanilla. You don’t alienate anybody, but you don’t excite anybody, either” (Lutz, 2013). Again, industry professionals questioned the CEO’s actions and labeled the event as rash and thoughtless, but years later the comments from the interview still generate buzz and keep the brand forefront in consumers’ minds (Krashinsky, 2013). Another example, is Nike and their controversial Tiger Woods ad “Winning Takes Care of Everything”. The company’s values were questioned immediately after the release of the ad given the athlete’s adulterous marriage scandal. Certain consumer groups took to social media to attack the company by stating that Nike was being disrespectful to his former wife and corrupting societal values (Wismer, 2013). Nike’s ad increases the list of the numerous cases that demonstrate the powerful effect that polarized ads can have at arousing passionate consumer responses.

Traditionally, marketers attempt to achieve brand loyalty by persuading consumers to like, even love the brand (McAlexander, Schouten and Koenig, 2002). However, industry experts claim that brand dislike by a group of consumers can potentially have a positive impact on another consumer group. These individuals argue that a moderate, middle of the market approach is no longer effective. A successful brand should aim at creating a strong, clear brand position (Napoletano, 2012). This idea of clear brand positioning is not new, but there are certain unique
elements of a polarized marketing strategy that have not been explicitly studied previously. The marketer is recommended to engage in an open conversation with all types of consumers, including the non-target market by being offensive, controversial, or provocative. Torok (n.d.) has tried to coin this as offensive marketing, and outlines three specific steps towards implementing this strategy: take a polarized position, make enemies, and create tension. All this is counterintuitive to making consumers like your brand.

The success of this type of marketing strategy is thought to be based on the fact that realistically not every consumer will like your brand and by trying to be a brand that everyone likes, you risk losing sight of what your brand is all about (Carrion, 2009). By offending the non-target market, Barone (2013) argues that the marketer may actually empower consumers, strengthen and solidify the bond of the previously loyal customer, and make it easier for potential customers to identify with the brand in the future. In the Abercrombie and Fitch example, Barone (2013) states that the target market from this particular scenario may feel like they belong even more to the brand as they are publically called out as the in-group while making the out-group more clear, personal and real. Other industry experts claim that by creating tension you can generate viral public relations while keeping the consumer engaged and excited about the brand (Torok, n.d.). Luo, Wiles, and Raithel (2013) explain that similar to political negative polling, where knowing the number of voters that will never be persuaded is instrumental to strategically targeting undecided voters, a brand polarization strategy manages haters and may even sway potential supporters towards liking the brand. This type of marketing strategy can also reduce the amount of noise in the environment. The “yellers”, consumers that continually make a conscious effort to
publically hate your brand, are no longer a bother because the brand is not being targeted to them (Napoletano, 2012).

To date, no academic research has examined this phenomenon in-depth. Similar concepts to brand polarization exist such as brand avoidance, reasons as to why consumers intentionally choose not to purchase a brand (Lee, Motion and Conroy, 2009; Lee, Fernandez and Hyman, 2009); dissociative reference groups that explores why consumers avoid being associated with a certain group (White and Dahl, 2006); oppositional brand loyalty which presumes individuals build their brand loyalty through the references they make about products they do not purchase (Muniz and Hamer, 2001); and anti-brand communities that looks at groups of consumers that come together to oppose a brand (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2010). These theories may be helpful at explaining why a hater lashes out or why consumers group together to hate a brand, but they only reflect a single-sided examination of the brand polarization phenomenon. What really needs to be investigated is why lovers of a brand behave and respond positively in the face of negative outsider interactions. It is clear that there is a need to understand this phenomenon given that more marketers are using this type of strategy. From the academic side, knowledge in this area can be quite valuable as it can provide a fresh perspective on existing brand community theories and add a new discourse to the marketing literature.
1.1 Literature Background

Of foundational importance and relevance to this study are brand community and symbolic boundary literature. Brand communities are defined as non-geographically bound communities, organized under a set of social relationships between the individual and the brand (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Brand community relationships in the eyes of Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) consist of three main actors: the customer, other customers, and the brand. Under this triad relationship model, three core elements (i.e. brand community makers) facilitate the existence of the group: consciousness of a kind, shared rituals, and sense of duty. These three elements describe how the initial communal relationship is formed and how social identity is established and maintained.

For this study, Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) definition of community consciousness, also known as consciousness of a kind, is particularly insightful. This deep-rooted connection that members feel towards one another is established by perceived shared similarities in the group. Beyond the understanding of similarities, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) posit that brand community members also share a collective sense of difference from other groups. This initiates a demarcation process that has been described by O’Sullivan, Richardson and Collins (2011) as “sacralisation maintenance”, where members in a brand community enact and preserve their similarities through the signaling of differences from dissociative out-groups. This major conceptual point has sprouted topics in brand community literature specifically in the domains of brand rivalry and community conflict (e.g. Eagar, 2007), intra-group conflict, inter-group stereotyping, trash talking, and schadenfreude (e.g. Hickman and Ward, 2007), and anti-brand communities (e.g. Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006), but has not been heavily explored in-depth.
Shared rituals and traditions, the second element, are the activities and practices that are enacted by members in the community that help to multiply, transmit, and maintain the culture (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Fournier, Sele and Schögel, 2005). Normally, these shared rituals and traditions develop as narratives that are often repeated and rehearsed between members (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Sense of duty, the last element, is the social responsibility that members hold for one another and the community as a whole (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). It helps maintain the bond between members by forming brand loyalty and commitment to the brand and helps to continue the growth and survival of the group by helping to integrate and maintain members.

Similar to the idea of sacralisation maintenance or the demarcation process is the theoretical concept of symbolic boundary construction. Founded in the social sciences, Cohen (1985) proposed that communities could not exist without members constantly defining and negotiating their differences from other communities and groups. This process is known as contrast evaluation and in order for it to occur, interactions with outsiders must take place. Outsiders provide individuals in the group with symbolic meaning for contrast evaluation and individual and collective identity building purposes (Morris, 1999; Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin, 2010). In brand community literature, community similarities are mostly studied. From a social interactionist approach, through the study of symbolic boundaries, more emphasis is given to community differences rather than similarities. In short, creating these boundaries is the social process of categorizing social groupings and creating exclusion criteria. Symbolic boundaries can be formed, activated, transformed, or hidden and they have many characteristics such as they can be flexible, weak, permeable (Wray, 2006). Ultimately, a community will always strive
towards creating greater differences to keep the sense of community in place and so that the community can survive and continue to exist (Cohen, 1985).

Both the concepts of brand community and symbolic boundaries are crucial for the conceptual guidelines of this study. First, the phenomenon was found in the Miracle Whip Facebook brand page and was naturally set up as a brand community. Second, the brand community literature provides a high-level perspective of what might be occurring between consumers when a brand polarizing strategy is implemented. Finally, since the concept of brand polarization currently has no theoretical structure due to the lack of investigation in this area, brand community literature provides the foundation necessary for this study. For example, the three brand community elements can be used to clearly track the changes that could be happening before and after the marketing strategy.

Equally, the symbolic boundaries literature provides the theoretical framework to gage the outcome and consequences of the brand polarization strategy. The theory has been used to gage the consequences that outsiders have on communities. Again, because the brand polarization phenomenon deals with two types of groups, lovers and haters with the lovers being the members of the community while the haters as the outsiders, the interaction between both of these groups is optimally captured through this lens. The role of outsiders in the brand community literature has been largely ignored and as a result the symbolic boundaries literature is used to bridge this gap.
1.2 Research Objectives and Research Questions

The main research goal of this study is to investigate the brand polarization phenomenon within the context of an online brand community (that is, a Facebook fan page). Research objectives include exploring and documenting (i) brand polarization strategies, (ii) the impact of these strategies on the brand community, and (iii) the resulting construction of symbolic boundaries.

The research questions and the respective sub-research questions were used to guide this investigation. The first set of research questions relates to the current understanding of brand polarization strategies (tactics) such as: placating the haters, poking the haters, and amplifying a polarizing attribute (Luo et al., 2013) and contribute to the brand strategy literature. The second set of questions are built upon the current understanding of brand communities such as the three makers: consciousness of a kind, rituals and traditions, and sense of duty of brand community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001) and extend this understanding by encompassing the context of the brand polarization phenomena. New insights contribute to the brand community literature. Finally, the third set of research questions focuses more on the symbolic construction of boundaries in a community. The role of brand lovers and haters is also examined.

Within the context of chosen brand community, the following will be explored.

1. What are the strategies (tactics) of brand polarization applied by the marketer in this brand community?
2. In what way do the three brand community makers manifest themselves in this type of community and in what way does brand polarization strategies/tactics have an impact on these makers? In other words, how are the three brand community makers changed before and after the implementation of the brand polarization marketing strategy (strategies/tactics)?
   
   i. In what way does the overall meaning (i.e. consciousness of a kind) change?
   
   ii. In what way do prominent rituals and traditions change?
   
   iii. In what way does sense of duty manifest and change in this community?

3. Do brand community members use symbolic boundaries in this brand community to define themselves in relation to outsiders?

   a) How is boundary work expressed in the three brand community makers?
   
   b) How is boundary work used to exclude outsiders?
   
   c) In what way does this boundary work change before and after brand polarization?
   
   d) Why does the brand polarization phenomenon activate boundary work?
   
   e) What is the overall influence of boundary work on the brand community structure?

The research site chosen for this study was in the context of an online brand community: the Facebook Miracle Whip brand page. This research site was an attractive option due to the availability of archived data embedded in this social media group. Data could be retrieved quickly, efficiently and in a non-obtrusive way. Facebook, Linkedin, YouTube, and Twitter have become frequently used outlets for companies to develop online brand communities and execute
digital marketing strategies. Facebook, in particular, is very popular and interactive, with readily available information on companies and contains many examples of brand communities (Zaglia, 2013). The study of online brand communities has been supported by the literature as a successful setting for analysis. Recent researchers such as Zaglia (2013) have been able to merge brand community and social media theories together to create the concept of embedded virtual brand communities. Zaglia’s (2013) study of Facebook groups found the existence of both fan pages and brand communities. The former were discovered to be weaker forms of brand communities that typically were used by consumers to express concerns and suggestions to the company and to receive social enhancement, whereas the latter groups are categorized into different sub-groups based on disparities and maintain clear elements of community.

Typically, scholars use online consumer conversations to uncover insights about marketing strategies (e.g. Jayanti, 2010). These conversations contain in-depth meanings about consumption experiences and describe personal thoughts and feelings about brands (Fournier, 1998; Kozinets, 2002). Virtual brand communities have allowed these consumer conversations to materialize more easily by providing a platform that individuals can use to connect, share, and engage in genuine discussions. Kozinets (2006) states that these conversations can be used as a metric that measures the vitality of the brand. Undoubtedly, this type of information has been deemed valuable to marketers to supplement research studies. These conversations can be used to track brand sentiment, better understand competition, and provide insights for product development (Kozinets, 2006). Accordingly, online consumer conversations naturally occurring on the Facebook Miracle Whip Brand page were observed and analyzed.
1.3 Research Methodology

Since the Miracle Whip brand polarization strategy is a phenomenon situated in a virtual brand community, a more exploratory and descriptive investigation is required, one that is able to tap into the social intricacies of this phenomenon. Netnography, a derivative of ethnography, is a methodology that uses public information available in online forums “to identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant online consumer groups” (Kozinets, 2002:3). It allows for participant-observation in an online community (otherwise known as a computer-mediated communication environments) that takes into consideration the unique characteristics of the Internet, which are the alteration and accessibility of content, anonymity, and archiving of data (Kozinets, 2010). Netnography, just like ethnography, can be used or combined with a variety of methods such as online interviews and focus groups, archival data, descriptive statistics, videography, extended historical case analysis, and/or projective techniques (e.g. collages, semiotic analysis). Compared to traditional ethnography, netnography is less-time consuming and elaborate, less costly, and can be implemented in a completely unobtrusive manner (Kozinets, 2002). Since the main use of netnography is to understand both online communities and their cultures, and because the research site in this study is a virtual brand community, this methodology became the most appropriate to use. Therefore, a qualitative method was used in this study.
1.4 Kraft Food Group, Inc. and Miracle Whip Online Platforms

Kraft Foods Group, Inc. is one of the largest North American consumer packaged food and beverage companies, with a 99% household penetration in Canada and 98% in the United States. The company currently makes 18 billion in annual sales (About Us: Company Fact Sheet, n.d.). The company manages 32 brands that span across five main product portfolio: Grocery 25%, Cheese, 21%, International and Food Service 21%, Refrigerated Meals 18%, and Beverages 15% (About Us, n.d.). The company is known as a major player and powerhouse in the North American Market, with 80% of their brands holding either a number-one or number-two market position (About Us: Company Fact Sheet, n.d.). Miracle Whip is classified under the company’s sauces, condiments and dressings product line with other brands such as A.1. Claussen, Grey Poupon, Kraft Barbecue Sauce, Kraft Mayo, Kraft Dressings, and Taco Bell Home Originals (Kraft Products, n.d.). The brand was acquired in 1933 and is one of the company’s largest brands (About Us: Company Fact Sheet, n.d). The product is described by Kraft as a “sorta-kinda-not-really-like-mayo, but multiplied by awesomeness” (Miracle Whip, n.d.). It comes in three forms: Miracle Whip Original, Miracle Whip Light, and Miracle Whip Fat Free. Consumers have stated that it is distinctively recognizable due to its tangy, sweet unique flavor.

The company uses various platforms online to promote its product. Their first component is their actual brand website: http://www.kraftbrands.com/miraclewhip/recipes.aspx. The website is relatively plain and simple, and serves more as a platform to connect to other promotional website outlets. However, one of the large components of this brand website is to provide consumers added value by giving them usage examples through recipes that company makes with the product. The Miracle Whip homepage brand website provides the consumer with links
to their three other major online spaces that the company promotes its products: Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter.

1.5 The Miracle Whip Brand Polarization Marketing Strategy

One of the few companies that have employed a brand polarization strategy for a longitudinal time span has been Kraft Foods Group, Inc. with their Miracle Whip brand. The company launched its “We’re Not for Everyone” (i.e. “Love or Hate”) campaign in the early start of 2011 (Vidani, 2011). The product targets calorie conscious consumers and has been branded as a “sandwich spread” rather than mayo. One of the main differences between Miracle Whip and other mayonnaise products is its unique flavor. The taste of the product is so distinguishable that through consumer insight Kraft was able to find that consumers had quite polarizing reactions; consumers either loved or hated the flavor (Vidani, 2011). Conversely, Kraft’s main competitor, Hellmann’s, has taken advantage of this and refers itself as the real mayonnaise brand, providing consumers with an alternative traditional choice (Wong, 2011).

The campaign aims at publically instigating the non-target market and asks consumers to judge or bash the brand. Key marketing managers at Kraft stated in interviews that the main reason they launched such a risky marketing strategy was because prior ones were not effectively working. In the past, the company had tried many different marketing campaigns using traditional marketing practices. For example, one campaign had a punk rock theme that tried to reach younger consumers by making the brand a rebellious choice. Kraft finally decided that by embracing the fact that not every consumer liked the brand, rather than fight the misperceptions and make consumers like them, this would be a more authentic strategy to reach non-users and their current consumers (Wong, 2011).
The marketing strategy began with provocative television commercial spots airing during American Idol. The commercials used controversial celebrities, such as Pauly D, a much liked or hated reality television star, telling consumers that he hated Miracle Whip. The commercial ended with Twitter hash tags, inviting consumers to talk about what they had just watched on the social media platform. The commercial became a top trending topic on Twitter during its airing. Consumers felt it was a daring move by the company and admired Kraft for their efforts (Vidandi, 2011). Many marketing experts observed that the strategy was extremely risky and predicted that it would backfire on the company in the future. However, the conversation continued online, consumers couldn’t stop commenting on the provocative marketing campaign and buzz kept increasing. Most of the feedback was coming from individuals in couples or relationships taking sides on the debate. Kraft immediately recognized and responded to the opportunity and launched a “Not for Everyone Relationship Contest” which asked couples to post YouTube videos stating their love or hate for the brand. The incentive was a $25,000 cash prize that the company stated could be used for either getting married or divorced. Again, much controversy was generated with some consumers stating that Miracle Whip was making light of divorce (Vidandi, 2011). More marketing experts criticized Kraft’s strategy, and some stated that publically asking consumers to reaffirm negative aspects of the brand could easily lead to an uncontrollable situation that could substantially hurt the overall brand reputation (Wong, 2011). Nevertheless, remarkable results were seen. Vidandi (2011) reports that the marketing campaign increased buying rate for growth consumers, increased social media posting volume by 631%, and that the company was able to gain much online media attention that aggregated a total of 98 million impressions.
The company continues the brand polarizing strategy on various social media platforms, more notably on Facebook, and though many online experts claim to know the reasons for the strategy’s success, academic knowledge can help uncover a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

1.6 Research Site: Miracle Whip Facebook Page

The online research site chosen, Kraft’s Miracle Whip Facebook page. One of the most important criteria for this particular study was finding a research site that related well with the focus and research question at hand, especially given that the topic in question is relatively new and using the wrong or inappropriate context would be extremely detrimental and invalidate the entire study. In the initial stages of research question formulation, it was found that companies that have tried to implement this marketing strategy have mainly used single campaigns or ads (e.g. the previous examples in the general introduction). It was reasoned that analyzing various campaigns would be more susceptible to unorganized sporadic data collection and it would make the foundations of this study unstable.

Given that this research site fit perfectly with the research question the Miracle Whip Facebook brand page was used. Facebook is a social context aggregator (Kozinets, 2010) which helps members communally discover, share, comment, and appreciate content through functions such as the “like” button. It is very dynamic and has been refined over the years to allow more user control, flexibility, and customizability. For example, the prevailing current layout called the Facebook “Timeline” which was introduced in the late fall of 2011, allows users to organize
content in a more visual and orderly manner, making navigation easier and fun (Facebook Timeline, n.d.). The beginning of the webpage starts with a large cover photo, which acts as the main focal point of the page. The company states that this cover photo is suppose to be the first thing that appears on the page when someone visits another person’s timeline (Introducing Timeline, n.d.). For the Miracle Whip Facebook page, the cover photo is a screen shot of their most recent commercial ad campaign that is still part of their “We’re Not for Everyone” marketing strategy, or in this case their brand polarization marketing strategy which began on Facebook on February 26, 2012, but the original strategy was initiated in February 2011 (Facebook Miracle Whip, n.d; Vidani, 2011).

Figure 1: Sample Screen Shot of Cover Photo

Source: (Miracle Whip, 2013a)

A small “profile picture”, which is used to represent what the user looks like, then follows the cover photo; this is very similar to the concept of an online avatar. It is also the picture used and shown when you comment on another page and it becomes the visual that identifies the user from others. The Miracle Whip page uses a photo of their most recent product, in the original packaging flavour:
The website is then divided into two columns, with a line in the middle demonstrating the various dates of the content posted. In other words, it becomes a horizontal timeline. Major life events such as birthdays, are represented by larger pictures on the timeline. For example, on the Miracle Whip Page, “The Cause Begins” part of the brand polarization marketing strategy is demonstrated as being a major event and takes up quite a large portion of the page on the date it began.
It is important to note that a Facebook page started for commercial purposes is quite similar to an individual user profile, with very minor subtle differences. For example, one difference between both types of pages is that a company page may be left open with an option to like the page, or it may have a restriction and ask to “Like” the entire page in order to gain membership and view the content. The page also has a “suggest a change” button below the profile picture, and has a recommendation box at the top right corner of the page below the cover photo to allow users to invite friends on their social network to join the page. Finally, right below the recommendation box, there is also a box that shows all the recent posts made about the brand by members of the group. An individual user page in contrast can be left open or closed; with the latter having users send “Friend Requests” in order to view the profile. Apart from these small options, company or brand pages are quite similar to those of individual users, and makes the experience of joining the page a much more intimate practice.
On the “About” section of the page, it shows that the company joined Facebook on April 23, 2009. There is also a brief description of the product, the same one given on their corporate brand website. However, on this page the company follows their polarized strategy by stating that their overall mission is to fight the prejudice attitudes towards them and that they don’t care if others judge them.
The administrator/communication moderator of the web page is a Kraft employee who regularly makes posts on a daily basis, sometimes more than once per day making the community an active site as well. The website is visually attractive with the marketer always sharing photos with the brand members. A typical post from the marketer is either a quirky, humorous, fun comment or question accompanied by a visual picture usually representative of the brand colours and theme.
Figure 6: Example of the Marketers Post

Source: (Miracle Whip, 2013f)

Many of these posts will generate numerous likes with a thread of comments from the brand community members professing the loyalty or love for the brand. Other brand community members will be more creative and make a positive pun or tell a funny narrative that creates more discussion in the group.
Taking all these characteristics into consideration, the Miracle Whip Facebook brand page made a fertile research site for investigation.

1.7 Thesis Overview

This paper will begin with a review of the relevant theoretical literature that offered foundations to the conceptual framework proposed for this study. Next, the methodology is presented. Details are given regarding the process of how the data was extracted and analyzed. Following this, findings from this study are described. A discussion is then offered about how these findings provide new theoretical and managerial insights including a revised theoretical model. Finally, limitations and future research avenues are discussed.
CHAPTER 2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Although current marketing academic literature does not explicitly address the brand polarization phenomenon, related research in the areas of brand community and symbolic boundaries are used to form the theoretical foundation for this study. This literature review will present and examine key related conceptualizations and theories. Finally, gaps in existing literature and the proposed conceptual context for this study are presented.

2.1 Relationship Marketing: New Discourses in the Marketing Field

Early branding literature considered a brand mainly for its functional characteristics (Aaker, 1991; Gardner and Levy, 1955). An experiential view of consumption started to replace this understanding of marketing in the mid-80s (Holbrook, 1984; Arnould and Price, 1993; Celsi, Rose and Leigh, 1993; Schouten and McAlexander, 1995). This marked a pinnacle turning point in the branding literature as more researchers began to embrace a socio-cultural outlook. Brands were no longer considered solely an aggregation of functional features, but they could be infused with cultural symbolic meaning (Patterson, 1999).

Relationship theory developments were also occurring during this time and an interest was beginning to form around complex types of relationships concerning the consumer and the brand (see Figure 8). Furthermore, Fournier (1998) noted that the consumer-object relationship, the most extensively used relationship model, could extend beyond brand loyalty into feeling such as brand love. When consumers become passionately involved with a brand and experience it through consumer activities and actions, meaning is constructed adding more depth to the consumer-object relationship. It is through this process that consumers gain an understanding of
what a brand means; however, the danger of this is that consumers have the ability to change the meaning of a brand from what the marketer originally intended it to be (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 2002).

![Figure 8: Traditional Relationship Model](image)

**Figure 8: Traditional Relationship Model**

**Source:** Source: (McAlexander et al., 2002)

Fournier’s (1998) seminal study created an opportunity to move research beyond a two-dimensional relationship frame of reference. One type of relationship that has been gaining much importance is that of the collective agency, particularly, brand communities. Brand community has been defined as a non-geographically bound group organized under a set of social relationships between the individual and the brand (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Thus, in this context, the relational model consists of three or more participants to form a community entity (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). In addition, three elements - consciousness of a kind, rituals and traditions, and sense of duty - also help form a brand community.

**2.2 Expansions of the Brand Community Relationship Foundation**

The most widely accepted definition of brand community in the marketing literature is the one proposed and coined by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001). Grounded in sociological-based definitions and conceptualization of community, the authors began by providing an extensive literature
review on the subject which was supplemented by their own ethnographic qualitative study on three niche brands with strong group followings: Ford Bronco, Macintosh, and Saab. Using interviews and informal online data collection of offline and online communities, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) mapped out some components for the creation and maintenance of brand communities.

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001:412) defined this phenomenon specifically as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structure set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” and presumed these groups as having fairly open, democratic, and inclusive environments. Consumers in brand communities transcend social categories such as gender and age. Individuals connect on an abstract level through the shared feelings of admiration for the product or the brand. In other words, brand communities are more imagined communities that create the flexibility and opportunity for distant individuals to unite through well-developed ideologies (Anderson, 2006). Thus, these types of groups are more likely to form around brands with strong images, rich history, and threatening competition. The relational ties in these communities are established between both the brand and other consumers. This could include multiple of consumer-to-consumer ties, where commitment is fairly strong but not extremely deep-rooted.

The theoretical contributions of the authors were significant as the study displayed evidence of a triad relationship model. This expanded the status quo of a two-agent relationship model typically used in marketing (i.e. consumer-object relationship). Through this study, the “other” consumer became an important actor in these new social structures (see Figure 9).
A noteworthy expansion to the brand community definition is the one developed by McAlexander et al. (2002) who argued that the relationship triad model was narrow and ignored various relational and structural realities found in brand communities. They argue that it neglects other entities that can change a community’s dynamics. In their own brand community definition, the authors put more emphasis on these groups being more subjective and constantly changing rather than a static multi-relational group. Using a mixed method, McAlexander et al. (2002) studied the Jeep and Harley Davidson brand communities through the use of ethnography and surveys at brand fests and were able to identify two other constant members adding to Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) previous study. Brand communities from their point of view included members, the brand, marketing agents and the product (see Figure 10). As a result, the authors broadened the perspective of brand community by presenting a more customer-centric relationship model, which focuses on the consumption experience rather than the brand surrounded by the experience. The customer experience dictates which relationships are formed and with who.
Other important findings concern the nature and structure of brand communities. The authors found several other dimensions relating to geographic concentration, social context, and temporality. Brand communities behave differently depending on whether members meet offline and online. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) look at both social contexts, but no clear distinction was made between the effects of these two contexts on community dynamics. McAlexander et al. (2002) found that meeting physically provided members a rich social context to communicate more clearly. It reduces the risks of personal misrepresentations that can occur through electronic communication (Arnould and Price 1993; McAlexander and Schouten, 1998). Sense of community longevity is also strengthened by the qualities of the relationships that are formed by these consumption experiences, building strong long-term lasting relationships. Finally, different temporal conditions exist with some brand communities being enduring and stable, while others nonpermanent and unstable.
Presently, the brand community definition has been impacted by the changes in technology. The Internet has facilitated the move from a brand community to a virtual brand community definition. Consumers produce and exchange information and knowledge more commonly online (Johnson, 2001). It is typical to see individuals “meet” in virtual spaces. This has helped form numerous types of virtual communities (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002; Fernbank, 1999; Dholakia, Bagozzi and Pearo, 2004).

Just like brand communities, individuals explicitly create virtual brand communities in order to share admiration and consumption activities pertaining to the brand (Kim and Jin, 2006; Kozinets, 1999). The method of communication is said to be the distinctive difference between a traditional brand community and a virtual brand community definition (Fernback, 1999; Andersen, 2005). Commonly viewed as a small difference, the two terms have been used interchangeably in the literature. It is only recently that there has been a re-emerging interest to question this assumption. Clean-cut definitions for virtual brand communities at this point in time are still limited but there is one exception that has been done quite well. In a study conducted on a Coca-Cola Spanish virtual community, Sicilia and Palazón (2008) adapted Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) brand community definition to include the recent technological changes. The study focused on analyzing the activities and practices of the community that were found to be generating three types of value for the consumer: functional, social, and entertainment. This resulted in a more formalized virtual brand community definition. Brand communities from a face-to-face context are defined as a “group of people that possess a common interest in a specific brand” whereas virtual brand communities are more of “a group of individuals with common interests in a brand who communicate [with] each other electronically in a platform
provided by the company” (Sicilia and Palazón, 2008:258). This assumes that virtual brand communities are susceptible to further geographically dispersed members producing a dynamic network of relationships that prominently have the absence of physical contact. The three brand community makers are also assumed to be present in both contexts but are used and expressed quite differently.

Next, the conceptual underpinnings that expand our understanding of brand community are presented.

2.3 The Three Basic Makers of Brand Community

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) hypothesized that brand communities have three basic mechanisms: consciousness of a kind, rituals and traditions, and sense of duty. These are known as brand community makers, which help facilitate the consumer consumption community experience.

2.3.1. Consciousness of a Kind

Although the brand community makers are interrelated, consciousness of a kind is argued to be the most important (O’Guinn and Muniz, 2005; Fournier et al, 2005; Day, 2006). Consciousness of a kind is outlined as a two-part process. First, group members must unite on common similarities. This creates a sense of belonging in the group (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). The second component is a shared sense of difference from other groups, recognized as the demarcation process. O’Guinn and Muniz (2005) argued that this process is imperative for community creation and maintenance. Paradoxically, consumers find it difficult to identify and
verbalize these differences in comparison to shared similarities, but there is an awareness that differences do exist.

The key mechanisms that help form consciousness of a kind in Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) studies were found to be legitimacy and oppositional brand loyalty. Legitimacy is the process whereby members try to shift through true and false members. Members want to know who in the group is genuinely devoted, ridding the group of opportunistic members (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Fournier et al., 2005). Lower share brands with small extremely loyal groups generally are the ones that desire to keep “infidel” outs. A similar effect is seen in Phillips (1996) study of a Usenet online community under threat. When an unknown user came and attacked the community, members labeled this attack as an “invasion” and the user as a “barbarian” trying to “kill” their community. They did everything possible to defend their community from illegitimate users. This shifting procedure also allows brand communities to develop social status hierarchies (Kozinets, 2010; Fournier and Lee, 2009).

Oppositional brand loyalty provides members with consumer experiences and important information about the meaning of their own brand. It is created through the information consumers have about competing brands. Communities typically with an underdog and niche brand have been demonstrated to have high oppositional brand loyalty and function similarly to threatened communities expressing clear reactions such as cohesion, trepidation, and anger towards the competition (Muniz and Schau, 2005). Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) concluded that niche brands have a greater need to protect themselves as they may face extinction and this reaction essentially acts as a survival mechanism. Higher market share brands observe lower
oppositional brand competition, making it harder for consumers to delineate a clear enemy or opposed force. Communities will unite to oppose threats real or perceived. The tightest connections are usually pulled together during a time of threat (Ganor and Ben-Lavy, 2003; Sonn and Fisher, 1998).

It has been argued that consciousness of a kind establishes the shared ethos and values of the group. When individuals join groups, they find that there is a benefit of increased social power. In order to maintain this, the community establishes rules and obligations by negotiating them through the actions and conversations that take place in the group (O’Guinn and Muniz, 2005). Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) also state that consciousness of a kind can transcend geographical boundaries. Some particularly interesting findings are provided by McAlexander et al.’s (2002) study. They found that consciousness of a kind could be hindered by fear of not belonging. Consumers can have predisposed stereotypes regarding the consumption context and brand members prior to belonging to the community (McAlexander et al., 2002).

In an online context, the success of establishing a consciousness of kind and building a brand community is supported by the platform’s ability to make communication continual and easy (Sicilia and Palazón, 2008). This fosters a space where consumers feel empowered to create and share content, and it is in these open and expressive environments that individuals are free to engage in discussions for an extended period of time (McWilliam, 2012). This in turn provides a rich environment for relationship building (Mathwick, 2006).

2.3.2. Rituals and Traditions

Shared rituals and traditions is the second element found by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001). Signs
and symbols are created through this process that signify group membership and can be considered the glue to which the culture is cemented (Fourier et al., 2005). The meaning of the brand is multiplied, transmitted, and maintained through rituals and traditions. Some of these activities are widespread while others are more localized, and centered on consumption experiences. Two types of common rituals found in brand communities are celebrating the history of the brand and sharing brand stories (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Celebrating the history of the brand helps with the demarcation process as members of the group feel that an appreciation of the history of the brand often differentiates the true believers. Sharing stories are often based on common experiences with the brand. They serve to invest brand meaning and it is a crucial link between community members. It reinforces consciousness of a kind and helps to increase security about the understanding of the ethos as individuals feel they have had like-minded thoughts and experiences (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001).

The stories often observed in brand communities frequently originate from commercial texts (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). Texts and symbols are powerful means of representing the deeply held means and desires of individuals (Belk, Ger and Askegaard, 2003). Unique images to brand communities are derived from logos or advertisements. Marketers are often seen as directly assisting in publishing and distributing these types of socialization material to the rest of the community (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). By establishing these practices marketers foster the type of environment consumers interact in and create meanings for consciousness of a kind. These activities can aid in community sustainability as new members become quickly more integrated with the group, especially if the consumption experiences are positive (McAlexander et al., 2002).
2.3.3. Sense of Duty

Being a participant of a brand community means sharing an ethos and a set of values. Eventually, membership in the group will graduate to a sense of moral responsibility and duty to the group (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). This sense of duty develops on two relational levels. A member will first feel a duty to the whole collective identity and then a sense a duty to individual members in the community. This bond is believed to be elastic, operating quite similarly to daily social obligations and social commitments. The creation of the group’s social moral consciousness, which gives members the bounds for right and wrong, is also established through this brand community maker. In virtual communication, reasons for staying in the community are easily publicly reinforced (Seraj, 2012). The main function this last brand community maker is to continue loyalty and commitment to the members and the brand, but it can also serve to integrate and retain members and assist with the proper use of the brand (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). By assisting in use of the brand, product or service, members demonstrate that they have the best interest for the group and they add value to the consumption experience (Schau, Muniz and Arnould, 2009). Sense of duty can also aid in with integration and retention of new members. It is a responsibility that is shared by both community members and marketers as both may have mutual motivations, beliefs, and thoughts about the brand that they want to maintain (McAlexander et al., 2002).

Next, relevant literature background is presented under two major thematic research goals and motivations that have directed the research agenda: 1) exploring the nature of brand communities and 2) measuring outcomes of brand community participation as offered by Woisetschläger, Hartleb and Blut (2008). More emphasis is given to the first stream of research as this study aims to contribute to this area of knowledge.
2.4 Exploring the Nature of Brand Communities

Research in this area primarily focuses on describing, understanding, and identifying brand community processes using qualitative methodologies (Woisetschläger et al. (2008). This research has uncovered some important insights regarding motivations for joining and participating in these communities. At a very abstract level, Holt (2002), in his critique of the marketplace argued that the increasing desire for authenticity in marketing initiatives has driven consumers towards wanting more community settings. Expanding on this notion, Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006) link this postmodern culture reaction to the growth of anti-brand communities, where members come together for anti-consumption and activist goals. More commonly, it has been identified that consumers join these communities for information, relationship building, social identity expression, altruism, enjoyment, belongingness, and status needs (Porter, Donthu, McElroy, and Wydra, 2011).

Other authors have described the many different type of members and their corresponding behaviors. For example, research on community social structure found bloggers in brand communities assumed and performed different social roles that shaped their narrative style accordingly to evaluation, explanation, embracing, or endorsement (Kozinets, de Vlack, Wojnicki, and Wilner, 2010). The types of product or service can also recruit distinctive consumers (Luedicke, 2006). For instance, both Sicilia and Palazón (2008) and Cova and Pace (2006) use mass-marketed convenience products, Coca-cola and Nutella respectively. Interestingly, both brand communities had completely different social environments. The Coca-cola community was much larger with dispersed members closely interacting for entertainment purposes, while the Nutella brand community was composed of a much smaller group of
hardcore cult-like consumers with moderate interaction, motivated more by self-expression. Studies that focus on religious and cult-like members have concentrated on niche brands (Muniz and Schau, 2005; O'Sullivan et al., 2011). A member’s identity can also shape the community culture and its activities (Schau and Muniz, 2002; Hardey, 2011; Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder, 2008). Hardey (2011) uncovered that Generation C consumers, those that heavily participate in creating online content and participate heavily in the internet culture, value content co-creation and are likely to participate on consumer review sites. Finally, there is a surge in popularity of the study of cross-cultural members especially in innovation and meaning creation issues (Jayanti, 2010; Füller, Jawecki, and Mühlbacher, 2007; Jawecki, Füller, and Gebauer, 2011; Cova, Pace, and Park, 2007; Cova and Pace, 2006).

Additionally, the exploration of brand communities has advanced the understanding of specific processes that differentiate offline and online brand communities. Popular themes in this area are typically related to the various computer-mediated communication channels and type of communication. For instance, chatrooms (Shoham, 2004), social media sites like Facebook (Zaglia, 2013), and websites (Sicilia and Palazón, 2008; Brown, Broderick, and Lee, 2007) can all differently affect the way consumers connect and interact with one another. This research has challenged some of Muniz and O’Guinn’s (2001) notion that all brand communities are “open”. For instance, some online brand communities have been found to have registration processes or paid membership demonstrating that “closed” brand communities can exist and are not as open and democratic as they are often assumed to be (Seraj, 2012; Andersen, 2005). With the rise of online brand communities, the type of communication occurring in different brand community cultures is also at the forefront of research agendas. Word-of-mouth theories have consequently
been largely applied and are creating sub-research topics like trash talking and defense communication tactics (Kozinets et al., 2010; Colliander and Wien, 2013; Hickman and Ward, 2007; Hung and Li, 2007; Chang, Hsieh, and Tseng, 2013) and the role of rumors in brand communities (Muniz, O’Guinn, Fine, and Hantula, 2006). Currently, the discourse has moved to embrace darker topics such as brand rivalry (Ewing, Wagstaff, and Powell, 2013; Muniz and Hamer, 2001) and inter-group stereotyping (Hickman and Ward, 2007).

2.5 Measuring the Outcomes of Brand Communities

The second stream of research pertains to measuring the consequences of brand community participation (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Woisetschläger et al., 2008). General research topics in this area look at how benefits, incentives and brand community practices create value and strengthen brand community loyalty (Shang, Chen and Liao, 2006; Dwyer, 2007; Schau et al., 2009; Garnefeld, Iseke and Kerbs, 2012). Brand loyalty in particular has been a focal point for many of these studies. Other outcomes that have been identified with brand community participation are degree of satisfaction (Casaló, Flavián and Guinalíu, 2007), consumer experiences (Schouten, McAlexander and Koenig, 2007), quality and nature of relationships, (Algesheimer, Dholakia, and Herrmann, 2005), and degree of consumer identification to the group (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Hickman and Ward, 2007).

2.6 Expanding the Brand Community Definition: Symbolic Boundaries

This study proposes a novel way to look at brand communities that take into consideration the impact from beyond. In other words, this study will take into consideration the impact that outsiders have on the brand community. This has been a relatively ignored concept in the
literature. By looking at these communities from a social interactionist perspective, a new pathway can be created that can help understand what sort of influence the larger marketplace society has on community members and community structure.

The idea of community is not a relatively new topic in disciplines outside of marketing (Day, 2006). Various definitions of community exist (for examples see Fernback, 2007), but one that is highly relevant to the brand polarization strategy is the notion brought forth by Cohen (1985). In this perspective, a community is not viewed as a structure situated in a specific space, but as a symbolic process-oriented experience (Fernback, 2007; Cohen, 1985). Communities, just like symbols, do not contain meaning on their own (Skogen and Krange, 2003). They are actively and socially constructed to serve different functions to different groups (Liepins, 2000; Fernback, 2007). Central to this theory is that communities are defined equally by both their similarities and their differences. This process is otherwise known as symbolic demarcation of category division (Cohen, 1985) which is similar to the demarcation process that Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) explain is necessary to create differences. This natural duality is grounded on the idea that the whole is founded on the co-existence of juxtaposed parts (Dumont, 1980). The community derives its sense of self from contrasting its collective identity to “others”, which is similar to the in-group/out-group comparison process in social identity theory (Tajfel, 2010). This practice can be found inside and between communities and assumes that categorization of social relationships is symbolic in nature resulting in fluid not fixed meaning where contrasting evaluation is a necessary part of the collective identity formation process (Cohen, 1985).
Distinguishing between members and non-members in a community brings attention to another important concept in this theory, which is the construction of symbolic boundaries. The distinctions individuals make to categorize objects, people, and practices in their community become the symbolic markings of social borders that encompass around the community (Cohen, 1985; Epstein, 1992). Individuals will negotiate these boundaries to come upon an agreed definition of reality (Epstein, 1992). In other words, members create categories with inclusion and exclusion criteria. Shared characteristics that members in the group agree upon about other social groupings are strongly tied inferences made about identities (Wray, 2006). The actual strategies and practices used by the members in the community to create, manage, maintain and transform collective identities and cultural categories creates boundaries which is also referred to as oppositional consciousness (Morris, 1999; Owens et al., 2010). Boundary terms are words that are used among members to create these social differences (Wray, 2006). For example in Wray’s (2006) study, the author compares the different instances where the word “white trash” appeared in different cultural and social research settings in order to identify the boundaries of “whiteness” (i.e. fair-skinned American Caucasians). Theoretically, it is important to note is that symbolic boundaries are not social boundaries or borders. Symbolic boundaries are about the process of how people in groups separate or generate feelings of similarities, whereas social boundaries are social separations created from either imbalanced allocation of resources or social opportunities (Epstein, 1992). Symbolic boundaries serve as the prerequisites for the creation of social boundaries (Lamont, 1992). In this case the main difference between symbolic boundaries and social boundaries is the permanence and how widely spread boundaries are. Symbolic boundaries can be viewed as the meanings that individuals hold in their mind that separates them from others. Once these meanings become more fixed, identifiable social patterns and social
boundaries are created. For example, in a study about art professionals, Pachucki (2012) found that artists made symbolic distinctions in their daily artwork; this would be considered symbolic boundary work. These symbolic distinctions were then found to shape the status hierarchies in museums, social boundaries. It is not surprising then to see that much of the research conducted in social boundaries relates to racism, sexism, and social class, whereas with symbolic boundaries various meanings of potential differences are explored (Lamont and Molnar, 2002).

The third type of theoretical nuance are borders which deals with actual geographical and physical borders, political or citizen boundaries, and cultural boundaries of state communities (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). These type of boundaries heavily investigates the formal and informal social experiences and ties between dimensions of national identity.

Boundaries can be “rigid or flexible, static or fluid, stable or unstable, permeable or impermeable, weak or strong” (Wray, 2006: 14). Furthermore, the historical time period may also show different characteristics of boundaries over time (Wray, 2006). With respect to changes in boundaries, Tilly (2004) describes some mechanisms that can cause this to happen. These can be implemented through social encounters with outsiders of the community, impositions by authorities, borrowing of distinctions from other organizations, incentives such as rewards or punishments for within or cross boundary relations, or simply from conversation among members. One consequence of a change in boundary is increased conflict in the group through attack-defense series, which can lead to the exploitation or salience of one category or boundary. It can also create social mobilizations such as movements or popular rebellions (Tilly 2004).
Boundary or components of boundaries are not always apparent. Most of the time, they are created and held only in the mindset of the community members. Ideas regarding these boundaries may or may not be shared perceptions with other entities or rival communities (Cohen, 1985). Boundaries are also subjective and not absolute. A community may develop various boundaries at various degrees depending on the “outsider” they are referencing themselves to. This means that community members may behave quite differently from threat to threat; it all depends on the “outsider” making the threat. In a study on the differences between upper and middle class individuals in France and the United States, Lamont (1992) identified three types of boundaries evident in all social structures - moral, socioeconomic, and cultural.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of understanding communities from this frame of reference is with respect to the role-played by the “other” individuals. Inherently, in order for oppositional consciousness to form, there must be some form of interaction with “outsiders” to create meaning (Skogen and Krange, 2003). Community or boundary do not simply exist, but it is demarcated symbolically. As a result, communities constantly seek to continue this sense of difference (Cohen, 1985). External interaction is not only a tool used for collective identity building but vital for communities to survive. Sometimes interactions with outsiders aren’t always friendly, but they can serve as strong bonding experiences, ending up being beneficial for community survival and resilience. Identity-based conflict can actually strengthen the collective group, mobilize collective action, or create a cultural renewal in the group (Olzak 1994; Nagel, 1995; Owens et al., 2010).
Several reasons exist for the aforementioned occurrences regarding conflict and external interaction. First, the collective identity is flexible enough to maintain both the group identity and the individual identity so that when there is a threat to the community those individuals who have their independent identity more invested in the community, are more likely to react and defend the community (Cohen, 1985). Secondly, members that defend a community under threat may be driven not only by the needs to protect the self or a sense of duty to the group, but to also gain more understanding and knowledge to construct the self by taking the opportunity to discriminate against another entity. Finally, maintaining and achieving superiority over an outside community to some degree though insider and outsider comparison can lead some groups to instigate this comparison process (Tajfel, 2010).

Communities ultimately must achieve two main things to exist. They must be able to differentiate themselves from others by some criteria and these differences must be recognizable by the outsiders for the collective identity to emerge (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). This is especially evident for communities that may share very similar structural boundaries, where differentiating on a social categories may be an easier alternative and approach. Stereotyping can become a very important heuristic for this contrasting process as they allow for vocabularies of values that individuals use to maintain the integrity of the community’s self-image, and its sense of distinctive self (Cohen, 1985).

Recent literature on how the external environment and outsiders impact boundary work can help shed light on brand polarization strategies. For example, Skogen and Krange (2003) investigate the construction of symbolic boundaries in a face-to-face community. They observed the impact
of conservatory animal-life efforts on rural communities and found that different members in the community perceived boundaries from their own individual perspective. However, common to all the members was the metaphor of the “wolf”. The conservatory interest group was seen as representing the actual danger, the “wolf” itself, which signified their fight between the imposition of urban lifestyles and values that threatened their way of life.

Honeycutt (2005) examined hazing rituals (initiation rites) in both offline and online communities, and how elite social groups use this strategy to transmit culture capital and control access of their community. Hazing rituals helped maintain inequality, power, and symbolic boundaries in the groups. Williams and Copes (2005) looked at the construction of boundaries in a straightedge (a term used by youth to describe an individual that abstains from drugs) subculture Internet forum. The boundary constructing process began by identifying which rituals were authentic. For example, some individuals argued that in order to be truly straightedge, members needed to be part of the same type of music scene. Members disputed these issues until they reached a broader definition of what constituted being straightedge. This later led to conversations pertaining to authentic articulation of the subcultural lifestyle. The role of the outsider was very important to the maintenance of the collective identity in this group. Outsiders prompted dialogues, provided themes, and continued discussions. It also helped to enforce exclusion criteria for the group. By using negative stereotypes in posts, members also solidified their straightedge identity. The authors also point out some technological elements in boundary creation. Particularly, the anonymous nature of the Internet gave individuals more freedom to unreservedly and frequently communicate with others. It also helped individuals find others similar to them more quickly. Interestingly, other authors have also found that boundaries in
online communities can also be distinguished quite differently from face-to-face communities. For instance, Smith (1999) suggests that online communities are characterized by open boundaries. Due to the large diversity that this context can hold, online communities are prone to inevitable conflicts leading to actions such as flaming (insulting) (Reid, 1999). Conflicts, however, are not always detrimental to the community. Some users have mentioned these online battles as exciting, unpredictable, and worth living for. Victory in these communities tests users skills. The open nature of online communities increases the chances of threat, but also the chances of solidifying the collective identity (Reid, 1999).

2.7 Identification of Research Gap and Proposed Conceptual Framework

Much of the brand community discourse has focused on studying group interactions, relationships and processes between community members or between competing communities. A symbolic construction approach to community, the branch of literature where symbolic boundaries lies, allows both within and outside interactions to be analyzed (Liepins, 2000). Interactions between members are not the only influences that construct meaning in a brand community, but it can be argued that all types of interactions that occur inside the community, whether between members or between members and outsiders, can potentially impact the brand community profoundly. In other words, it is suggested that outsiders that simply visit and participate once in the group can have just a large impact as a member. If brand communities are investigated from the proposed symbolic interactionist perspective, it creates a broad definition of community that can investigate these outsiders meaningfully. Such a definition has yet to be proposed in the brand community literature. This theoretical expansion can be seen in Figure 11.
Additionally, it is important to study the impact of outsiders in a more structured manner as it can produce insight on how threatening these outsiders and interactions can be to the survival and existence of the community. For example, Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) expressed that threatening competition and publically consumed goods have a higher chance of producing brand communities, and they explained how threatened communities can react in the form of oppositional brand loyalty. Lacking from their study was the understanding of how this threat occurs and by whom. A few others have tried to indirectly tackle the impact of outsiders (e.g. Holt, 2002; Luedicke, 2006; Hickman and Ward, 2007). What these studies show is that leaving out the impact of the external environment in brand community studies ignores a large
component of the brand community theoretical framework. One cannot ignore the influence outside interactions have on the community. Inevitably, members will in one way or another interact with outsiders, forcing an evaluation regarding the collective identity through comparison (Cohen, 1985). In other words, as individuals interact with others, they will acquire knowledge about those groups that can be used in the discrimination process. By using symbolic boundaries as one of the overarching theories in this study, it assist in understanding the community’s survival and resilience, how it is growing, the community’s shared consciousness, the culture, and even the individual’s sense of self. Boundaries are found in all the social interactions, the social discourse, that is occurring in the community. People gain identity information, which eventually are expressed, maintained, and reinforced through the community. Eventually, these identities becomes the reality that is lived out in the community and to an outsider this becomes the culture and identity of the community, which serves as a referent point to other communities in the completeness of the social system.

The proposed model (i.e. Figure 11) is based on McAlexander’s et al. (2002) assumptions of a dynamic changing environment and the concept of an open brand community. This model provides the opportunity to explore the role of many different types of members that could impact the community structure. The three brand community makers, ‘consciousness of a kind’, ‘rituals and traditions’ and ‘a sense of duty’ are assumed to exist as most of the brand community literature agrees that these are foundational elements that continue the groups existence. These elements are assumed to change depending on the structure of the community, which is influenced by the interactions that take place within the group. These interactions do not only occur between members, but it is anticipated that occasionally outsiders from the larger
marketplace reality will also participate in the community. For this study, the larger marketplace is Facebook, as the social media website hosts many brand communities and fan pages, not only the Miracle Whip brand page. The outsiders are not considered members of the group and therefore are presented outside the symbolic boundary lines. However, these social agents do have an impact on the type of boundaries members create (i.e. the community’s overall structure). The boundary line is presented as dashed because the construction of symbolic boundaries is ever changing. Members in the brand community remain the same as those stated by McAlexander’s et al. (2002): Marketers, community members, the brand and the product. A quick theoretical point to note is the difference between the product and the brand. The focal consumer can have a relationship with the overall brand, which may be compromised of different products. The consumer can also have a relationship with a specific product. For example, a consumer may love the Miracle Whip brand, but this love may be tied to a specific product, Miracle Whip original or Miracle Whip Low-Fat. As interactions occur between members and with outsiders, this will affect the brand community makers and the overall meaning of the community, how the community defines itself, and how it differentiates itself in this environment.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the outline for the foundation, design, steps and plan used to conduct this study will be discussed.

3.1 Introductory Thoughts Regarding Research Study

The brand polarization phenomenon was discovered through serendipity. A discussion with an academic colleague regarding some of the controversies that were being published on the news and major social media websites regarding Chick-fil-a was initially what sparked an interest in the phenomenon. The situation and how consumers were responding so counter-intuitively to common sense and seemed to contradict current best marketing practices. This interest slowly grew into a more serious intention to pursue the topic from an academic standpoint. The search began with a very rough exploratory study focused on obtaining concrete industry and academic evidence. The findings from this stage provided key words needed for further research. News outlets and influential bloggers were labeling this phenomenon as a polarizing effect. Specific, key words that were found from industry publications included brand, group, polarization, negative, controversial, and offensive marketing. These were used as key words to help search for academic evidence on Google Scholar. However, none of the results from this database directly matched what was happening in the market.

The decision was made to find more evidence in the industry for this phenomenon to see if enough data existed to adequately move forward to a formal investigation. Four months were spent generally browsing online on Google for companies who were practicing this form of
marketing strategy. The various number of companies who were practicing this type of marketing strategy or who were purposefully using offensive marketing to anger certain consumers was tracked on an excel spreadsheet. An excel sheet was used to organize these real world examples by company name and information, the values that were being polarized, description of the type of polarizing marketing campaigns being used and outcomes or consequences of these strategies. Many company names were collected and interestingly most seemed to be fashion industry brands such as American Apparel, United Colours of Benetton, Marc Jacob, Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana, Calvin Klein, Diesel, Sisley, and Tom Ford. There were also many other brands outside of this industry such as Bud Light, O2M Breathable polish, Death Cigarettes, TD Canada Trust, and Oreos.

The tracking of these real-world example led the researcher to stumble upon a video on the London School of Business website where Professor Nader Tavassoli spoke about this type of phenomenon in a short video and called it brand polarization. Next, the researcher decided to contact Professor Tavassoli directly to ask if perhaps he was working on this type of research. He stated he had a general interest, but that project had been abandoned due to lack of data and literature. He provided some good advice on a starting point by directing the researcher to negative online reviews and some preliminary work he had done during his own interest on the topic. This is where the Miracle Whip example was found. One final Google search was done on Miracle whip and a lot of data existed online through newspaper articles, the company website, and various online and social media groups and communities. This is where the researcher discovered that a lot of data existed on the topic.
Looking at the online data from a qualitative viewpoint presented the perfect opportunity to move ahead and explore the phenomenon. A lot of the data that existed was cultural and symbolic. As a result, it was agreed upon with the advisor and committee that although no current literature existed, it was a realistic and appropriate topic to pursue. A qualitative approach that is primarily data driven would allow the flexibility to explore and try to further understand the phenomenon that was happening. Berg (2009) argues that qualitative studies have the advantage of understanding a phenomenon in greater detail, which can lead to fruitful results. It also better suited for open-ended inquiries, offering the possibility of uncovering new information about the content and complexities of the social context (Keup, 2007) and provides the researcher with results that are have descriptive depth (Dabbs, 1982). Qualitative methods are strongly tied to the symbolic interactionist paradigm that believes in multiple realities being socially constructed, relative and evolving from other parts of social life (Hutchinson and Campus, 1988). It provides the essence and ambience of the phenomenon. It uncovers the what, when, how, and where. It gives insights into the meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphor, symbols, and descriptions of this phenomenon. These types of experiences simply cannot be expressed in numbers (Berg, 2009). Consequently, since this was a new phenomenon with no existing literature, the research focus should appropriately be more about understanding and describing this phenomenon than measuring it. This is the type of research method is precisely needed to introduce it into the marketing discipline discourse.

It is not to say that qualitative research is without it limitations. Like all type of research, even in quantitative, we are restricted in some way. In some cases, researchers may apply the assumption of certainty to quantitative too rigidly, dismissing and underestimating some of the valuable
nuggets of knowledge qualitative can provide (Berg, 2009). Given, that the intentions of this study are not to derive to results that are generalizable and accurate, but to forge a new path that may lead to more fruitful avenues in the marketing discipline and avoid what Zaltman (1983) calls “knowledge disavowel”, a qualitative method seemed more appropriate. In the next section, the rationale for the qualitative method used is described.

3.2 Netnography

Netnography was derived from the concept of ethnography. Ethnography is a methodology used for describing a social environment or culture through the description and interpretation of the social expressions between people and groups (Spardley, 1979; Berg, 2009). New technology radically changed ethnographic practices in marketing qualitative research. One of the major catalysts for this academic movement can be credited to the introduction of netnography (Kozinets, 1999). Similar to ethnography, netnography is used for examining cultural practices to gain abstract ideas, meaning, social practices, relationships, languages, and symbol systems from a social environment (Kozinets, 2010). The main difference is the focus of this social environment. Netnography heavily highlights the cultural component of online gatherings. It is a type participant-observational research method that is conducted through computer-mediated communication (Kozinets, 2010).

This methodology has been primarily used in the study of brand and virtual communities in the marketing field. Netnography is used to understand consumer behavior through public information found on online communities and help uncover insights regarding meanings, symbols, and patterns of consumption (Kozinets, 2010). It has been used to reveal how these
communities change and hybridize online (Kozinets, 2010). Relationships are viewed from the perspective of the individuals in the online community and the boundary of the social network is where the community defined itself (Kozinets, 2010). Given that this study will focus on the Miracle Whip brand community on the social media network Facebook, and will investigate the interactions of the group members, netnography is the appropriate methodology to meet the objectives of this study.

Netnography has various advantages. For example, the inherent elements of computer-mediated fieldwork such as alteration of online participation and interaction, readily accessibility of information, and automatic archiving of data and media (Kozinets, 2010), allow for this context to make netnography a “faster, simpler, timelier and much less expensive than traditional ethnography” (Kozinets 2006:279). This allows a window to naturally occurring behavior where researchers can conduct invisible lurking, and track communal conversations back in time (Kozinets, 2010). Where the true beauty of this methodology lies is in the unique characteristic of its intrinsic unobtrusive nature (Kozinets, 2010). The Internet allows individuals to remain anonymous. In traditional ethnography, the researcher intrudes on the subject’s life, but with netnography unless the researcher discloses their presence, they will remain discrete. This reduces researcher reactivity, which is the change or bias in they way the subject reacts caused by their knowledge of the researcher presence (Berg, 2009).

Although there are many advantages to netnography, like all methods the disadvantages must also be recognized. Jayanti (2010) noted that netnography was good at providing rich descriptions and revealing hidden motives, but like all qualitative methods lacks generalizability.
It is recommended that netnography studies are followed up or extend by quantitative methods or by using multi-method techniques. Rokka (2010), in his brief commentary on netnography, demonstrates that this methodology is still underdeveloped and argues that it does not take into account the translocal and globalizing nature of the Internet. Finally, Xun and Reynolds (2010) identified the ethical ambiguity surrounding this method and the existence of poor quality in terms of textual discourse. There is no way of knowing whether individuals truly pay attention when they engage community.

Various forms of netnography can be conducted. A study can range from pure ethnography study to a pure netnography study (Kozinets, 2010). This study focuses on a “pure netnography” study because it will be conducted entirely online focusing of online cultural interactions and data collection. Netnography may also be partial in terms of capturing a phenomenon. In order for a study to be a complete study, the phenomenon must be related to online communities. In this case, it is believed that the brand polarization phenomenon will be partially captured, as it is not a general social phenomenon. Is it a general phenomenon that has some related Internet aspects.

3.3 Data Collection

Although netnography is a fairly new methodology, it does follow and practices, protocols and standards that have been determined by marketing scholars. There are five steps outlined for a netnographic research project proposed by Kozinets (2010). The first step of defining the research questions, social site, and topics to investigate have been addressed in chapter one and two of this study. This section will discuss the details behind step two, three, and four of this research process. Step two is the identification and selection of a research site, the community. In
step three the researcher can then begin to observe the community by immersing themselves as a participant. Data collection and any ethical procedures are also executed during this step. Step four the data analysis and interpretation of the findings are conducted. Finally, in step five, the report of all these findings is written and theoretical and managerial implications are reflected upon and provided.

3.3.1 Research Site Selection
The second step of the research process is to identify the brand community and select the appropriate one for the site. Using Kozinets (2010) guidelines for site selection, in the Planning and Entrée section, outlines the five criteria that a research site needs to meet. The Miracle Whip Facebook brand community page was evaluated for suitability based on the following criteria:

- **Relevant:** This criterion determines if the community site was related to the research focus and questions. The Miracle Whip Facebook page focused on a polarized campaign with easily accessible archival data and as a result passed this criterion.

- **Active:** This criterion establishes how recent and regular communication in the community is. Facebook provides an indication of this through the “likes” statistics, found just under the profile picture avatar. On January 8, around 444 people were talking about the website. The measure also shows the fluctuation of this activity graphically over the course of the brand community’s life.

- **Interactive:** This criterion determines the flow of communications between participants. In this community, the Miracle Whip web administrator posts daily with consistent likes and comments from various members making comments on their posts. This occasionally breaks out into a discussion but this is dependent on the question or comment the
administrator posts. In generally, these posts always tend to get a response from members. Members will also post pictures of themselves or art that they create inspired by the brand found in their pictures section. They will ask each other questions that other members will answer.

- **Substantial**: This criterion determines if there is a mass of communicators and an energetic feel. During the month January 2014, the Facebook page demonstrated on the cover page that the brand had 266,895 likes which gives an indication of the membership level in the group. This is a large number for the purposes of this study, but it is a rather niche number in comparison to other convenience products. For example, Heinz Ketchup, on their Facebook brand page that same month had 1,121,928 likes. Nevertheless, the number is significant enough given that this community provides clear example of brand polarization.

- **Heterogenous**: This criterion determines if the community has a number of different participants. The Miracle Whip Facebook fan page is an open community that allows other members and the public to see member’s personal Facebook page. Briefly going through some of these demographic statistics, it is evident that there is a good mix of male and females from different areas of the world, ages, and backgrounds.

- **Data-rich**: This criterion determines how detailed or descriptively rich data. Using the Ncapture feature on NVivo, the software downloaded 7,970 posts and 24,714 comments for the month of January 2014. This indicates a large amount of data to work with.
3.3.2 Data Collection Process

In netnographic studies, data collection is a process that is simultaneously conducted with the researcher’s immersion and participation in the culture and data analysis (Kozinets, 2010). Through data collection, a thorough understanding and representation of the communal context and interactions is sought. It is a process of seeking, learning, and reflecting deeply (Kozinets, 2010). From a technique standpoint, two specific types of data were captured in this study: archival and field note data. Archival data is the various forms of communication, text and visual, which are directly copied verbatim from the online community. Field note data is the researcher’s comments, reflections, and other thoughts regarding their own involvement and observations of the community and members. A third type of netnographic study can exist, elicited data, which is the co-created communication between the researcher and community members. However, because of time constraints, the researcher in this study participated more in learning rather than doing in the community. No direct interaction with members took place. In other words, the researcher did not post or make any comments in the brand community. Thus, elicited data was not collected. These three categories closely follow those of Wolcott’s (1992) categories of standard qualitative method.

When actually capturing the data, there are two basic choices to decide on, manual or computer assisted. This study used computer-assisted technology to obtain, organize, and analyze the data. A qualitative software program allows for more flexibility and freedom. It can extend the boundaries being analyzed of the community (Kozinets, 2010). The intent to use of computer software is to increase the effectiveness of data collection, and not to replace the methodology and learning procedure (Bazeley, 2007).
The software package used was QSR-NVivo (Version 10). Typically, qualitative software analysis aids in the recording, sorting, matching and linking of the data collection and analysis process (Bazeley, 2007). Bringer, Johnston, and Brackenridge (2006) explain that this specific software package, QSR-NVivo, has been demonstrated to effectively help researchers move the analysis from thick description to explanatory theoretical models. It also automatically keeps track of every step the researcher takes during the research process. This can enhance transparency that is considered a form of validity in qualitative research. Hutchinson, Johnston, and Breckon (2009) further proved that QSR-NVivo was a powerful tool that facilitated a grounded theory approach. Although, this study does not use a grounded theory approach, it heavily remains data driven where these tools become very handy for this step of the research process. Finally, Kozinets (2010) states that a researcher should choose analysis software that they are already similar with. The researcher had spent four months training with the software with focus group transcripts for a different study. It was also found that with version 10 of this software package, new tools have been added that were specially designed for social media websites, such as the NCapture function.

Data that is captured using software was saved as text, excel, pdf, and video file formats. Various means of screen captured were used for these types of data. When collecting and analyzing data, spam, unsolicited bulk messaging will be ignored and treated as noise in this study (Kozinets, 2010).
This entire process can be summarized in the following steps, and heavily follows Kozinets (2010) guidelines.

1. Immersion in the online community was undertaken. This meant repeated, consistent visits over the course of six months. During this time participation (i.e. learning about the culture and community) and field notes were taken.

2. Before beginning data analysis, all data from the Facebook Miracle Whip brand page were downloaded, saved and stored in their entirety. This included both text and visual data.

3. Areas with significant data were analyzed first for relevant areas of interest.

4. Data was sorted into preliminary datasets that were initially read and then complied into refined data sets for analysis.

5. Definitions of field site and boundaries were continually revisited, especially during the early stages of the data collection.

3.3.3 Ethics

As in any type of research, ethics are an integral part of the research design. For online research, ethics can sometimes be an unclear topic given the many unique issues that come from computer-mediated communication. Netnography can be a particularly invasive and personal type of methodology, where our own steps and trails in the community can be archived (Kozinets, 2010). Some of the main ethical issues that a netnographer faces are similar to those initially faced by ethnography but that are altered by technological complexities. A selection of some of these main issues include whether data is public or private, whether there is a need for informed
consent from participants, if any harm is going to be done to the participant especially with respect to privacy and confidentiality, should participant names be used or undisclosed, and several legal implications (Kozinets, 2010).

Giving careful consideration to the research questions, research design, and research site of this study the following ethical standards and procedures are believed to be the most important and relevant. When reporting data in the findings section, Bruckman (2006) guidelines were used. The author suggests four degrees of concealing participant information. Concealment varies on a scale of no concealment, minimum, medium, and maximum concealment. The decision was made on a minimum concealment degree where member names and dates posted were blocked in the findings section. However, direct quotes will be used verbatim (Kozinets, 2010). As a result, all posts in the finding are considered personal communication information. The decision was based on the fact that examples given in this paper were not sensitive in nature. Miracle whip members were found to have some form of understanding this brand community was a public space and that the discussions occurring in the group were trivial in nature. The emotional risk and harm that could potentially arise was also gauged, and the researcher felt that both of these were at a minimal. Finally, no vulnerable groups were also identified. Generally, for this type of concealment, the researcher is encouraged to ask participants for consent. However, for most netnographic studies, informed consent of documentation is usually not necessary and it is an uncommon practice as these studies typically publish information that is considered low risk of harm (Kozinets, 2010). It is assumed here that the lack of anonymity is balanced by the lack of harm. The research site was particularly a driving force in most of the ethical decisions made. Facebook is understood to be a public social media website. In their privacy statement, an
individual that join and comment of “Pages” (i.e. brand pages) is automatically classified as public information, meaning that the owner of the page and anyone can see it (Data Use Policy, n.d.). Control of privacy is left to the responsibility of the user. Additionally, the interaction that will take place between the researcher and the online participants and community will be solely learning. In other words, the researcher intends to immerse into the community and participate by learning rather than interacting with members of that community. Finally, taking legal precautions, all content that may breach intellectual propriety rights was cited. Credit to any visuals posted by Kraft or other sites is given appropriate citing.

3.4 Data Analysis

Next, a detailed examination of the data that was collected begins. This is the fourth step of Kozinets (2010) five-step netnographic research process. The following procedure was used for this phase:

1. Datasets from the data collection process were first analyzed using exploratory preliminary data mining techniques provided by NVivo. Great care was taken to avoid obscuring the cultural experience of netnography.

2. From these insights more detailed analysis were conducted on these datasets, where field note data was used to guide the researcher on particular areas of interest.

3. Once these areas had been selected, the coding procedure began in this step using Strauss and Corbin (1998) established framework for qualitative researchers to code data. The following steps were taken to code as rigorously as possible:
a. The authors advise researchers to begin with open coding, which is concerned with generating categories and their properties to determine how categories vary dimensionally.

b. Axial coding follows whereby the researcher takes these categories and systematically develops them and links them to sub-categories.

c. Selective coding was then conducted which is the process of integrating and refining categories.

d. Coding for process was also done allowing the researcher to look into the conditions of the phenomenon.

The overall goal from this coding procedure was to make sure that the researcher developed major categories that later formed a large theoretical scheme.

4. Part of this coding procedure was also making reflections about the process (Kozinets, 2010). This is called noting. In NVivo each category (i.e. node) that is created can be linked to “memos”.

5. The following techniques were used during this coding and noting process to analyze the data suggested by Strauss and Corbin (1998):

   a. Making comparisons is conducted with things such as incident-to-incident, object-to-object, similarities and differences, size, shape and colour.

   b. Theoretical comparisons are done and provide theoretical sampling and are done by comparing categories to similar or different concepts, concept to concept.

   c. The flip-flip technique is applied by looking at opposites and extremes to bring our significant properties.
d. Systematic comparison of two or more phenomenon is when concepts are compared to the researchers prior experience from other literature.

6. Finally, in line with the qualitative spiraling research approach (Berg, 2009), simultaneous literature review took place.

7. Data analysis was deemed completed when the researcher felt that the data approached saturation. Glaser and Strauss (1967) define saturation as data that no longer generates new insights on important theoretical areas.

3.4.1 Specific Example of Data Collection

The Miracle Whip Facebook brand page uses the "timeline" layout which allows for an individual to browse through the website in chronological order of the number of years it has existed. In order to capture brand polarization, all the years on Facebook were analyzed. Miracle Whip established the page in 2008, but all years showed that the marketer was guided by a particular campaign theme. For example, in 2009 the company had posts that all revolved around a campaign called “We are Miracle Whip and We Will Not Tone it Down”. This consisted of posts that demonstrated Miracle Whip as a darker, rebellious, rock brand. Just recently, in 2014, the company changed their campaign to one called “Miracle Whip and Proud of It”. Themes for this campaign include posts that tell consumers how Miracle Whip makes certain recipes better and how they should be proud of product’s unique taste. All content and posts made by the marketer for every year try to align with the marketing campaign and theme. It was noted from learning about the community that evidence for brand polarization began in 2010 and was officially implemented in 2011, with 2012 indicating spill over effects. Between both 2010 and
2011, the before and after intensification is better captured and this was also the area where most of the changes occurred. As a result, the data set focused mainly on these two years.

After the time frame was decided, a decision needed to be made in terms of what part of the webpage to focus on for data collection. A Facebook brand page organizes posts under three large categories: Highlights, Post by Page, or Post by Others. The figure below demonstrates how find each section of the page on the Facebook page.

Figure 12: Front Page of Miracle Whip Brand Community

Source: (Miracle Whip, 2014)
The Highlights page includes a limited selection of posts made by the marketer that were considered milestones or significant by Facebook’s algorithms. Post by Page includes posts that the marketer made each respective year. This included the marketer’s posts and the member comments that followed. Post by Others is the area where members and outsiders comments can be found.

The page that was chosen to gather data was Post by Page because the research questions in this study focus around understanding the marketing strategy behind the brand polarization phenomenon. Consequently, it was important to look at all the marketer’s posts made between 2010 and 2011. Every single post in these two years in the Post by Page was collected using NCapture and reviewed. Once all the posts were read the dataset was further reduced to keep those that only strictly used a brand polarization strategy. At this point, both the researcher and the advisor had defined a brand polarization tactic as posts and narratives that used either a Miracle Whip versus Mayo, Bold versus Bland, or Love versus Hate argument. These were the three main strategies that the marketer used to create the polarized effect (see Chapter 4, 4.1 for a thorough explanation of this). Other posts that were made during these two years that did not classify under this definition were considered irrelevant as they did not add or take away from the brand polarization strategy, and they fit outside the scope of true polarization (see Appendix A for samples of this dataset).
An example of a non-polarization and polarized post are presented below:

Figure 13: Non-Polarizing Post, 2010. Posts Made By The Marketer Asking Consumers To Try Out A New Recipe

Source: (Miracle Whip, 2010a)

Figure 14: Polarizing Post, 2010. Post Made By Marketer That Uses A Miracle Whip Versus Mayo Argument

Source: (Miracle Whip, 2010b)

After all polarizing related posts were collected the dataset was once again further refined to include only posts that had both lover (insider) and hater (outsiders) comments. This study wanted to capture both the lovers and the haters interacting, as some of the research questions were to see how outsiders impact the creation of meaning in the community. Furthermore, Luo et al. (2013) define brand polarization as the dispersion between lovers and haters, and as a result, haters must exist to create this phenomenon.
The final refined dataset included only polarizing related posts between 2010 and 2011 made by the marketer that had both lover and hater comments (see Appendix B for samples of this dataset). This dataset was then coded and analyzed using NVivo and the steps outlined previously in section 3.4.

3.5 Criteria to Evaluate Results

Qualitative research is evaluated using validity, reliability and generalizability. The following criteria: transparency of research procedures, triangulation, and transferability of study to other contexts (Miles and Huberman, 1984). Specific to netnography, Kozinets (2010) gives ten criteria to evaluate netnographic inquiry that this study used: coherence, rigour, literacy, groundedness, innovation, resonance, verisimilitude, reflexivity, praxis, and intermix.

These criteria acted as a tool kit to help guide appropriate representation of the findings. Many of the criteria call for fixed protocols and procedures to be planned, followed, and executed in all steps of the netnographic investigation. The guidelines of this study were constantly reviewed during data collection and data analysis achieving the criterion of rigour, which is making sure that all texts follow the standards set in place for netnographic inquiry. Additionally, the entire research process followed the spiraling research approach outlined by Berg (2009). The researcher constantly reviewed and went back to the literature during every step. Using this approach allowed for coherence, literacy, and groundedness to be achieved, all which focus on making sure that the interpretations being made from the data are free of bias, is relevant to the literature, and makes convincing theoretical links. Using this back and forth approach identified
missing theoretical and conceptual links that needed to be improved throughout the research process. Constant reflection throughout data collection and analysis, triangulation of ideas with the advisor, committee member, and chair of this thesis, and constant immersion in the research site permitted for reflexivity and resonance, which is the ability to have a sensitivity and connection to the community’s culture. Making sure that the research site was thoroughly described with a variety of visuals helped to increase the criterion of verisimilitude as the researcher strived to give a good understanding of what the brand community looked and felt like without having to visit the website. Finally, the fact that this was a new phenomenon never studied before with rich data provided for innovativeness to be achieved.
CHAPTER 4.0 RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter outlines the results of a netnographic investigation that was conducted on the ‘Miracle Whip’ Facebook Fan page. The chapter is organized into three sections. First, the brand polarization marketing strategies and tactics used by Miracle Whip are described in order to understand how this phenomenon is created. The discussion then reviews the impact and responses arising from these strategies from the members of this brand community. Finally, in the last section, the boundaries created in this community are outlined to demonstrate the outcomes and results of this polarizing marketing strategy.

4.1. Brand Polarization Strategies

This study found two brand polarization strategies used by the company in the years 2010 and 2011. The first strategy ‘Take the stand’ was introduced in 2010 and the goals of this strategy were to create an a more emotional campaign for the brand, to attract attention to their social media outlet Facebook, and engage consumers in conversation. The second strategy ‘Love or Hate’ was introduced in 2011. In this subsequent campaign, the strategic goal focused on intensifying these emotional bonds for the brand by getting consumers to share experiences and reasons as to why the brand was liked or disliked. During both years, although the goals and strategies used by the marketer are different, an important pattern is seen in terms of the implementation of tactics.
This involves:

1. Frequently posting quirky comments, visuals, trivia, or questions to engage members in discussions,
2. Use of online social polling,
3. Continually offering small incentives, and;
4. Major incentive in the form of a contest.

All these tactics are unified by the theme of the strategy being used in each respective year.

4.1.1 ‘TAKE THE STAND’ BRAND POLARIZATION STRATEGY – 2010:

In 2010, the marketing strategy was focused around the theme of "Taking a Stand". The goal was to engage consumers in debates in order to demonstrate that Miracle Whip values bold and opinionated consumers. The marketer consistently gave assurance to consumers in the messaging that their opinions mattered and that they should share them with the rest of the community. Members were encouraged, almost pushed towards choosing sides on debate topics, and to make sure that they were publically doing so. The general undertone of the strategy was guided by the brand trying to be youthful, rebellious, daring, and confident, which was often insinuated by the marketer constantly repeating that Miracle Whip is a bold brand.
Most of the posts that the marketer made were in question form and asked members to debate on a general range of American topics that varied from sports to popular television programs. It is noted that the marketer heavily borrowed from current pop culture. The marketer tried to keep the main focus of the brand to food related topics in order not to lose sight of the brand’s positioning.

Early evidence of brand polarization was apparent in 2010 but tactics remained informal and at very early stages of implementation. Polarization was found typically for posts that began to mention and make comparisons of Miracle Whip to Mayo. For example, Figure 15 below provide a very early example of this argument through the Take a Stand posts.

Figure 15: Take a Stand Tab

Source: ($1.00 Miracle Whip Coupon, 2010).
Direct competitor names, such as Hellman, were not mentioned, but simply the category that the brand was competing in. In fact, throughout the official launch of the brand polarization strategy in 2011, Miracle Whip never made direct comments towards a specific brand, but simply chose to use the generic term “Mayo” as their main competitor.

This debate between “Miracle Whip or Mayo” was also interchangeably used with polarizing posts regarding whether members were “Bold or Bland”.

**Figure 16: Polarization Post in 2010**

*Source: (Miracle Whip, 2010c)*

**Figure 17: Bold or Bland 2010 Marketer Post**

*Source: (Miracle Whip, 2010d)*
The marketer suggests throughout all of their 2010 posts that Miracle Whip is the superior brand because it is bold and only those who identify with these characteristics buy the product. Mayo on the other hand is viewed as the bland, boring, and the inferior choice, subtly implying that consumers buying Mayonnaise have the same characteristics.

The marketer added credibility to their polarized messages through the use of celebrities. For example, in one of their most frequently mentioned debates, “Miracle Whip versus Mayo”, the marketer posts that Martha Stewart, a well known American television homemaker, is holding a similar debate and that they should check it out and express what side they are on by posting it on their Facebook page. This added more credibility by demonstrating to members that outside of the community this debate between Miracle Whip and Mayo was taking place, and that it was a worthy enough debate to have considering that even well known celebrity personalities were already doing so without being sponsored.

Figure 18: Polarizing Post, Celebrity Third Party, 2010

Source: (Miracle Whip, 2010e)
Overall, posts made by the marketer in 2010 consistently asked community members to demonstrate their support and affection for the brand by commenting on their posts, and stating that they were bold fans for Miracle Whip.

**Tactics – Social Voting Poll and Small Incentives:**

In conjunction with the marketer’s daily debates and posts was the use of a social voting poll called the “Take a Stand Tab”. Consumers were asked to press the “Like” button on the ”Take a Stand” tab while participating in daily debates. Unlike the usual posts where the “Like” button is found directly under the post, the “Take a Stand” tab was found in a separate section on the Facebook page. As a result, the marketer typically provided members with the link that redirected them to this separate section of the brand page.

![Image of a Facebook post with a link to the Take a Stand Tab](image)

**Figure 19: Links to the Take a Stand Tab on Posts**

**Source:** (Miracle Whip, 2010f)

By pressing the “Like” button on the tab, a visual count of the number of supporters is showcased for the whole community. Apart from just showing support, consumers were also
encouraged to publically post and create their own debates on this separate page on Facebook. What this looked like is unclear, given that the link and the tab itself have expired and have been removed from the page after the implementation of newer campaigns. From the traces of the information that was left, the use of the “Bold versus Bland” argument is seen. Consumers were rewarded for “Liking” the “Take a Stand” tab by receiving a one-dollar off coupon for any Miracle Whip product. Because the “Take a Stand” tab is always encouraged after any post dealing with a debate topic, the free coupon is available multiple times throughout the year making this a very readily available incentive.

Throughout the campaign other small incentives were also given, but are not as frequently as coupons giveaways. Coupons would typically be $1.00 off towards any Miracle Whip product. In 2010, another one of these major small incentives was a free t-shirt giveaway promoted around June. This particular incentive asked proud members to demonstrate their support for the brand by wearing a t-shirt outside the scope of the online community. Again, the t-shirt was generally related to the “Take a Stand” theme, but was also customizable.

Figure 20: Free T-Shirt Giveaway Post

Source: (Miracle Whip, 2010g)
Tactics – Major Contest:

The major marketing tactic used to encourage discussions among consumers was a contest for an all-expense paid trip to the MTV Music Video Award held on August. Ironically, many of the members of the page were observed to be older women, and as a result this contest did not receive much support from members. The MTV Music Video awards is targeted towards teenagers, which indicates that marketer may have been trying to appeal the brand to a newer target market.

Figure 21: MTV Music Video Award Post

Source: (Miracle Whip, 2010h)
4.1.2 ‘LOVE OR HATE’ BRAND POLARIZATION STRATEGY – 2011

In 2011, the brand polarization changed from the “Take a Stand” campaign to the official launch of the brand polarization strategy centered on a "Love or Hate" campaign. The wording in the brand messaging became a lot more aggressive and discriminating in order to create finer distinctions between Miracle Whip and Mayo. Words such as “despise” were used and were more emotionally provoking. There was a keenness to be exclusionary mixed with indifference towards haters of the brand. Instead of mentioning the brand as being simply bold, the marketer concentrated on making members of the community feel that the brand was being unjustly prejudiced against and that members should unite, protect the brand, and ignore the haters. There is an obvious increase in emotional appeal in all their messaging and tactics. Communication also became much more interactive in 2011, with the marketer significantly making more use of visuals in the form of fun product related images and videos from their online television commercials. Links to television commercials uploaded on YouTube and posted on Facebook demonstrated that the brand polarization strategy was executed on both traditional and digital marketing vehicles.

Again, Miracle Whip used celebrities to drive their messaging to a wider audience and establish credibility for their messaging. However, a counter intuitive approach is used in 2011 that brought a lot of attention to the brand. Rather than using a well-recognized endorser to increase brand appeal, they used Pauly D, a reality television star from “Jersey Shore” to increase the polarization effect. An online link to the television commercial is provided that features Pauly D
talking about how he hates the brand. This created one example of an image of “haters” that brand members could use to conceptualize as their enemy.

The marketer’s participation in the community is a lot more frequent in 2011 than in 2010 with a steady and consistent number of polarizing posts each month during the year. A quick analysis of the datasets using a counting method described by Berg (2009) allowed the researcher to identify that April and October were the more polarizing months. Not all posts were always related to the strategy, nor were all posts polarizing, but the marketer did manage to increase overall participation in the community from both members and non-members. In 2010, the total of lovers and haters from was 197 and 18 respectively. In 2011, this changed to 2564 and 416.

Figure 22: Polarizing Post, 2011, Love or Hate Campaign

Source: (Miracle Whip, 2011a)

Tactics: Social Voting Poll and Small Incentives

Two types of social voting polling were used. The first is the use of a “Love or Hate” tab, which was very similar to the “Take a Stand Tab”. Consumers were asked to like the tab on a separate
section of the brand page and instead of creating their own debates they were asked to give reasons as to why they either loved or hated the brand. The second type of voting polls used resembled opinion polls that featured fun topics commonly related to food, eating habits or customs with a “Love or Hate” theme. An example of this is seen in Figure 20. These were sporadically posted all year around.

![Image of a voting poll]

**Figure 23: Love or Hate Voting Poll, 2011**

*Source: (Miracle Whip, 2011b)*

![Image of sample packets]

**Figure 24: Small Incentives, Free Sample Packets**

*Source: (Miracle Whip, 2011c)*

The incentives used more often throughout 2011 in order to attract participation from members were small free packets of samples of Miracle Whip that the marketer would mail to consumers. Coupons were still used but not as frequently as in 2010.
Tactics- Major Contest

Finally, the major contest used in 2011 was more interactive in nature and invited consumers to submit videos on YouTube (another social media platform). Figure 25 and 26 are examples the posts that marketer made explaining the contest details. The contest was titled the "We're not for Everyone Relationship" contest. Members in relationships (i.e. couples) were asked to share their story of how Miracle Whip had impacted their love life. The marketer stated that winners would get $25,000 for either a wedding or a divorce. This strategy was controversial, with some members even threatening to no longer buy the brand because they felt that Miracle Whip was undermining the social issue of divorce. As a way to further promote the contest and increase buzz around it, the marketer also made other posts and voting polls surrounding this relationship contest theme. Figure 27 gives an example of a voting poll inspired by this contest.

Figure 25: Not for Everyone Relationship Contest, Love or Hate, 2011

Source: (Miracle Whip, 2011d)
The next section presents the impact of these strategies and tactics on the online community. Specifically, responses arising from these strategies from the members of this brand community are described.
4.2 Impact of Brand Polarization: Changes in the Brand Community

Generally, it was found that the brand polarization phenomenon is composed of two groups: Lovers that react very intensely and positively, and haters that respond negatively. The data showed that within these two groups there are varying levels of emotional intensity that determine how an individual reacts. This created a unique social structure in the Miracle Whip brand community that incorporated a diverse group of members and outsiders. The brand community findings below are organized based on these two general groups. Within these two general categories of Lovers and Haters, sub-groups exist. These sub-groups were organized by the increasing order of the level of emotional intensity that was determined by the length, content, meanings, and words used in the postings. Lovers are compromised of three sub-groups: ‘One-liners and Chanters’ who have the lowest level of intensity, ‘Reminiscers and Recommenders’ with a medium level of intensity, and ‘Story Tellers and Elders’ who have the highest emotional intensity. There are four sub-groups of haters ranging from ‘lazy haters’ at the lowest level of intensity, ‘friendly haters’, ‘scoffers’ at the middle level, and ‘offensive haters’ at the highest end of the emotional intensity spectrum.

4.2.1 Brand Lovers

Findings from this study show that the range of emotional intensity and connection felt towards the brand can range in this brand community. At the lowest level of emotional intensity are the ‘One liners and Chanters’. In the middle level are the ‘Recommenders’ and ‘Reminiscers’, who demonstrate a deeper emotional connection with the brand given the length and content of their narratives. At the highest level are the ‘Storytellers and Elders’. These brand members in
particular invest more time in participating in the community demonstrated by the meanings that they produce through the type of narratives they choose to communicate in.

4.2.1.1 The One-liners and Chanters

These members were quite common to the community before the “Love or Hate” marketing strategy and are regarded as the members who respond with a “one-liner”. Although these members are seen more frequently before brand polarization, they also exist during the “Love or Hate” campaign. These individuals are members that simply write one word up to a sentence expressing their admiration for the brand. Examples of one-liners are demonstrated below:

![Figure 28: Examples of One-Liners](image)

These posts are made in response to the marketer and are a way to demonstrate quick agreement or support for the brand. One-line admirers don't show up as often to the community website. They simply state their quick opinions and leave. These individuals seem to primarily respond to the marketer’s posts that mention promotional incentives, such as coupon give outs or free samples. The role of one-liners in the community is to create excitement and enthusiasm around the brand or post. The more comments a posts receives, the more buzz that is created around the specific topic and the brand.
Chanters are the second group of admirers and make use of the Miracle Whip slogan or an abbreviation of it. When the marketer seeks support, there are many of these individuals that respond and use the brand’s slogan as evidence of this. Examples of chanters are shown below:

![Examples of Chanters](image)

**Figure 29: Examples of Chanters**

Chants are done to reaffirm the brand’s unique taste, flavor, and core values. This ritual is quite similar to chanting at a sporting event in order to create excitement and create more loyalty towards the brand. Creative chanters use a lot of play on words in order to make the slogan more playful, such as "it's a Miracle in a jar" or “whip the zip”. There are a few more examples of chanters observed in response to the “Take a Stand” strategy, as marketer’s posts during this campaign often required or asked members to give their opinion about why they liked the brand. Relating back to how during this campaign heavily emphasized functional attributes evident from the “Mayo versus Miracle” whip arguments, the slogan that focuses on taste (e.g. “a sandwich isn’t a sandwich without the tangy zip of Miracle Whip”), a product feature may be the reason for its more regular use during the “Take a Stand” campaign. Both groups, One-liners and Chanters, play a large role in transmitting meaning about the functional attributes of the brand. For instance, many comments focus on the products distinct taste, low calorie content, and consistency.
4.2.1.2 Reminiscers and Recommenders

At the middle level of emotional intensity are Reminiscers and Recommenders. Members can be usually seen participating in the community, but not as often as the One-liners or Chanters. As a result of their longer and more meaningful narratives, they were considered to be more emotionally involved with the brand than one-liners and chanters, but not enough to categorize them as extreme lovers of the brand such as the Storytellers and Elders who through their narratives conveyed a deeper and longer-term relationship with the brand.

Reminiscers are individuals who recall and share a favorite recipe in response to the “Love and Hate” marketing strategy. Unlike the previous group, sharing recipes attracts more interaction between members and is used as a way that consumers connect with one another and express admiration for the brand. Individuals posted recipes regarding their favorite food or dish that uses Miracle Whip with an explanation about how the condiment makes the meal better. These recipes tend to be simple such as BLT sandwiches (i.e. Bacon, Lettuce, Tomato) or peanut butter and Miracle Whip sandwiches. The simplicity of the recipes showcases how Miracle Whip doesn’t need much to taste better, it’s good on its own. The degree of simplicity or “weirdness” in the recipe also signals to other consumers who is a “hardcore” Miracle Whip user or lover and who isn’t. For instance, there were some members that would state that they eat Miracle Whip on
its own with plain bread or those that eat it with bananas. These consumers tended to get very strong reactions from other consumers either in the form of praise or disgust.

Figure 31: Examples of Reminiscers Sharing a Favorite Recipe

Figure 32: Examples of Hardcore Reminiscers
Posting recipes is highly motivated by the need for consumers to connect with others or to gain positive affirmation from the group. By allowing individuals to talk about their favorite recipes member conversations and the length of the conversations increased. Members even started to connect and mention one another’s name in the posts and justify their choice, creating more buzz in the group. In terms of meaning transfer, these individuals position Miracle Whip as a comfort food. It conjures up the idea of simple pleasures.

Recommenders are very similar to reminiscers in that they recall pleasurable moments from the past to endorse the brand. Recommenders are very direct in letting the group know that they highly approve the product, a certain recipe, or a members post. They can be seen as the experts of the product and usually give highly narrow and focused advice. Some recommends further promote any incentives from the marketer to other members of the group or outsiders interested in trying out the product.
One unique finding about this strategy was that it attracted a new type of visitor in the community, potential converts. These outsiders did not exist during the “Take a Stand” marketing campaign. There were more posts of outsiders stating that they had intentions and were interested in trying out Miracle Whip. Recommenders played a particularly important role with respect to these types of outsiders as they would be the ones to typically respond back to them by answering any questions that they would have and by encouraging them to try the product out.

Figure 35: Potential Converts Visiting the Miracle Whip Website
4.2.1.3 Storytellers and Elders

The last two groups of members are at the highest level regarding emotional intensity. These members post very long comments, typically in the form of narratives, in response to the “Love or Hate” marketing strategy. These comments are especially notable when the marketer tries to include outsider and hater opinions in their messaging. Storytellers and Elders were rarely seen during the “Take a Stand” marketing strategy. Brand polarization increased the number of members that shared these narratives significantly.

Storytellers give accounts regarding personal experiences with the product. The most common being family-related narratives such as the retelling of childhood experiences with the product of and how Miracle Whip played a large role in shaping family values and ties. They are highly nostalgic in nature and are strongly tied to the consumer’s identity because the eating behaviors they describe are deeply embedded into their lifestyle. Storytellers also gave more credibility to the brand polarization effect as many narratives described how families were split between lovers and haters of the product.

Figure 36: Examples of Storytellers
Another noticeable form of narrative in the community was fables. These were creative, fun fictional short stories that expressed brand loyalty or love. Here, the brand or product is sometimes personified in order to get across a deeper meaning for the brands existence.

![Figure 37: Examples of Lovers Telling Fables](image)

On the other hand, elders are members who share narratives about the length of time that they have been using the product. They post narratives in a very straight-forward way that demonstrates and expresses to other members their loyalty and love for the brand.

![Figure 38: Examples of Elders](image)
These two groups of lovers were the most significant members in producing and creating meaning for the brand as they presented community members with more content to reflect upon. They also were the main drivers towards developing a superior attitude toward the brand during the brand polarization marketing strategy as their stories provided more concrete evidence regarding the importance, necessity, and value that the product contributes to their lives. Lovers became much more vocal, bizarre, and playful shaping a desirable environment for those seeking instant social gratification.

4.2.2 Group of Haters

Haters were an important category of members in the community because the way in which loyal members responded to them established why the brand polarization phenomenon was so successful. The four categories of haters ‘Lazy Haters’, ‘Friendly Haters’, ‘Scoffers’, and ‘Offensive Haters’ are described below.

4.2.2.1 Lazy Haters

Lazy Haters are the most common and noticeable type of hater typically using “one-liners”, that is they simply posted one word replies back to the marketer to express their dislike towards the brand (e.g. gross, disgusting, or Mayo, yuck or ew). Lazy haters respond equally to both the “Take a Stand” and “Love or Hate” campaign. Although, the visibility and number of haters in general is low, they added credibility to the marketer’s posts and created just enough tension to keep lovers motivated to post more comments in support of the brand.
4.2.2.2 Friendly Haters

One unique type of hater that played a very important role in maintaining and reaffirming the values of a playful and humorous community were Friendly Haters. The way in which the marketer communicated their posts during the “Love or Hate” marketing strategy attracted this certain type of hater. Miracle Whip directly asked "haters" that still buy the product, but don't consume it, to give their opinions and reasons as to why they didn’t consume the product. This changed the dynamics of the community because these haters would also posts humorous teasing insults that were more funny than rude. This reduced the tension in the group and made the environment a fun but trivial argument. Many times, these haters attracted members to respond in a light, humorous and friendly manner, depending on how funny the comment was.
4.2.2.3 Scoffers

Prior to the brand polarization effect, haters were noted to already exist in the group. Usually, most haters were one-time visitors, but during the “Take a Stand” marketing campaign there were a couple of recurring haters that participated in the community replying back to both marketers and member posts. They used sarcasm to dislike and criticize the values the marketer was trying to transmit. Comments that dealt directly with the community’s values were normally the post that these haters attacked. For example:

Figure 41: Examples of Scoffers
These two specific haters frequently made clear direct attacks towards the marketer and the community. Through sarcasm they mocked members for thinking that Miracle Whip actually cares about them or their opinions. Haters typically alluded to the fact that Miracle Whip obviously has a commercial intent. That the marketer is trying to sell a product and that they are all being deceived. There is a level of distrust towards the product and marketer, with haters often affirming negative product attributes. This includes the product being “fake”, plastic, not real mayo, and unhealthy. These types of comments were a method used by haters to enlighten members to the reality of their blind love and membership in the community. Community members typically responded by ignoring these types of comments or by playfully laughing back at the hater making the sarcastic post seem pesky and unimportant.

### 4.2.2.4 Offensive Haters

Less frequently there were very offensive and derogatory comments observed in response to both the “Take a Stand” and “Love or Hate” campaign.
In this offensive comment, the hater talks about how he would like to put Miracle Whip on some Crackers; crackers being a derogatory term for lower income Caucasian individuals from areas like the Southern United States. Very offensive comments would often get a reply back from lovers in a similar sarcastic and dry tone but not as rude. The marketer is observed to rarely get involved in mitigating these comments.

![Image of offensive comments]

**Figure 43: Examples of Offensive Haters Using Strong Language**

Overall, surprisingly there were not as many haters identified as expected prior to this study. Haters were also found not to be as offensive but rather individuals who simply wanted to join in the fun.

**4.3 Outcomes of Brand Polarization: Construction of Symbolic Boundaries**

This next section offers the findings for the research site from the symbolic construction approach. There is evidence that members draw symbolic boundaries in this community in order to maintain it. A few patterns formed around what these boundaries are and how they are constructed in order to differentiate Miracle Whip brand community members from outsiders; lovers versus haters.
4.3.1 Broad Boundary Work Strategies and Processes

The data revealed that there are two types of boundary work strategies that are used by members in this community in order to construct symbolic boundaries. The two main strategies used by this community are boundaries that are created within the community by members having conversations amongst themselves. The second strategy produces boundaries through member and outsider interactions. In other words, boundaries were created by conversations within the community and by interactions that connect to the outside social reality and connect brand community members to what is beyond their group.

The first strategy did not require or involve any direct interaction with outsiders. This was the most pronounced strategy used for the construction of symbolic boundaries demonstrating that outsiders do not always have to actual exist, just the idea or perceived knowledge of what outsiders could be like. Furthermore, because the number of lovers significantly increased while the numbers of haters remained few, this type of strategy was naturally used. During the “Take a Stand” strategy, the marketer labeled their brand as bold and mayonnaise as bland. These meanings were carried into the “Love or Hate” marketing strategy, but were articulated clearer and in more detail. Prior to this, no real enemy existed, but by the marketer during the “Take a Stand” campaign established and initiated this concept. An outsider was personified and that allowed for contrast evaluation to occur. The dialogue was relatively repetitive during the “Take a Stand” campaign, with members usually arguing about product attributes and whether Miracle Whip was bold or bland. The dialogue became more sophisticated during the “Love or Hate” campaign because many of the lovers started to use narratives that required a reference to an outsider, adding more realism and detail to the ideology of the “other”. The primary contributor
to this development can be attributed to the marketer, which asked in many posts to focus on this idea of who this outsider was. Therefore, a unified belief and image of an enemy, but not an actual outsider is needed to activate contrasting evaluation.

The second strategy generally occurred before the brand polarization phenomenon (i.e. during the “Take a Stand” campaign), as members in the community responded directly to haters more often. Symbolic boundaries were created through direct interactions brand community members had with outsiders. Haters enhanced and progressed oppositional consciousness dialogues. Outsiders were unexpected and unpredictable which constantly kept brand community members challenged through the introduction of novel topics that members would normally not discuss. These topics dealt with a variety of aspects that opposed and questioned the values of the community and elements of the collective identity.

By lovers responding back to haters, they negotiated whether they accepted or rejected this new piece of information that entered the community. Most of the replies were rejections of whatever the hater commented on, maintaining the core values of Miracle Whip. Outsiders created the tension necessary to mobilize and motivate an oppositional consciousness dialogue. The tension created by outsiders rather than the marketer also held a greater level of authenticity. During the “Take a Stand” strategy that created a lot of the tension, but ultimately brand community members understood that the marketer was also part of the group. Conversely, during the “Love or Hate” campaign, there were more haters involved in creating tension, but members replied less to haters, as they were not as aggressive.
4.3.2 Types of Boundaries

Boundaries that are clearly seen are those that are characterized by an “Us versus Them” narrative, which translates as the “Miracle Whip versus Mayo” dialogue. From these dialogues, various boundaries are drawn that negotiate the brand community’s structure, membership, and participation social rules. Similar to the community’s social structure reported previously, the symbolic boundaries ranged from low to high intensity and from within to beyond brand community. The boundaries stated below are organized in increasing order of this spectrum.

4.3.2.1 Geographical Boundaries

The Miracle Whip brand community is situated on an open online platform, but the data demonstrated that most of the members that belonged and participated were consumers from the U.S. The informal language in which participants communicated with one another was based on the U.S. context, American slangs and terms.

Figure 44: Examples of Geographical Boundaries – Cultural Language
Both posts above make strong references to the U.S marketplace culture. The first is a phrase commonly used by Americans to describe something that is cool, and the second example is of a historical feud between two famous American families that disputed along the West Virginia–Kentucky borders. These expressions would be unfamiliar to others who have not shared similar cultural experiences. Discussion topics, usage experiences, jokes, and many narratives all had to some extent Americanized undertones or references. This boundary only became evident when outsiders from other countries posted comments on the website.

Figure 45: Examples of Geographical Boundaries – Location, U.S. and International

When outsiders or members from other parts of the world, such as those from other countries like Canada, France, UK, South Africa, made comments and participated in the community, the cultural boundary became stronger. This is evident in both the “Take a Stand” and “Love or Hate” marketing strategy. Promotional activities and tactics used in the community such as contests, free samples, and coupons where limited to residents in the USA. However, boundaries were slightly more pronounced during the “Love or Hate” campaign because of new potential customers that wanted to try the product, but were not eligible for to receive a free sample. Members outside of this geographical scope started to complain. They felt that they were being
isolated and in a sense banished from the group for not being able to participate in these promotional activities. This was detrimental for this group of consumers as some questioned their membership and threatened to leave the group. As a result, though this may have not been an intentional act from the marketer, they slowly shaped the community to have more American members from the U.S.A.

This also had several implications on how members in the community compared themselves to outsiders. Members of the community started to compare and make references to outsiders closer to their cultural frame of reference. For example, boundaries became more refined than just a broad U.S. versus International boundary, but within this highly U.S. brand community, it seemed that there was a “north versus the south” boundary.

Figure 46: Examples of Geographical Boundaries – Northern versus Southern U.S.

Many of the outsiders who gave reasons as to why they did not like Miracle Whip explained that “southerners” just don’t consume this product, and that they are Duke’s fans.

Figure 47: Examples of “Southerners”
Regardless of being a lover or hater of the brand, posts from all individuals participating in the community unintentionally created boundaries regarding locality.

Consequently, geographical boundaries were mostly within the brand community because the discussion revolved more around the type of lovers that belonged in the group. There were two main geographical distinctions made in the group. These geographical distinctions defined the marketplace boundaries of the group and were not really negotiated between lovers and outsiders, but within lovers of the groups. This resulted in low emotional intensity.

### 4.3.2.2. Moral Boundaries

Given the fun and playful nature of the community, members in the group were seen as having a high tolerance towards the opinion of haters. Although the community had a lot of pride for the product, they were very accepting towards visitors and outsiders. Rather than being very strict and exclusive about the community, members seem to be flexible embracing both Miracle Whip members and others.

Support of this tolerance is seen when brand members engage in dialogues about how they buy both Miracle Whip and Mayo during the “Love or Hate” campaign, but have a preference for Miracle Whip. Members often state how there is a place for both products, it all depends on the usage situation.
The contribution that haters make to the community also adds to this highly tolerant environment. Similar to how members talk about buying both products, haters often comment on how they buy Miracle Whip for a loved one such as their husband, wife, or child. Unintentionally, they boast about how the product is good by showing that they must go out of their way to purchase this brand and comment about it online. Again, it is important to mention that the marketer was the one involved in guiding and attracting these types of haters by purposely asking during their brand polarization campaign, who despised the brand but still bought it for a loved one.
This high tolerance led to a very respectful environment with very little trash talking evident in the data. There was a small increase in trash talking during the “Love or Hate” campaign, but it was kept quite polite, similar to childish teasing and playing around. There was virtually no swearing in the data or any extremely offensive content.

![Examples of Common Trash Talking](image)

**Figure 50: Examples of Common Trash Talking**

Moral boundaries were commonly activated when members or haters compared products or product elements or whenever individuals shared family narratives regarding the role of Miracle Whip in the household. In terms of intensity, this boundary is much higher than geographical boundaries because of the nature of the discussion that takes place. Geographic boundaries were more hidden in conversation and did not have such an emotional impact as moral boundaries. However, although moral boundaries have a tendency to evoke strong emotions, it was not consider the highest boundary to yield these responses. With this type of boundary there is definitely an increase of interaction occurring between members and outsiders evident in this ‘give and take’ dialogue that was not as evident in Geographic boundaries. Thus, the high tolerance in this community makes this boundary less intense than cultural boundaries, which is discussed in the next section.
4.3.2.3. Cultural Boundaries

Boundaries were used to distinguish the ideal Miracle Whip member. This type of boundary is known as cultural boundaries as they mainly pertain to the type of personality that members should have and the norms concerning participation. All these characteristics were used as exclusion and inclusion criteria in the group. Cultural boundaries can be subdivided into two groups. The first symbolic boundary is based on the preferred type of personality members should have based on community engagement rules. The second boundary is based on the preferred type of personality based on product element associations.

Cultural Boundary – Preferred Personality Type based on Community Engagement Rules

Members in the Miracle Whip brand community strived to keep easy-going values rather than uptight values. There is an understanding in the community that most of the conversations that occur are not serious in nature. Those that are attracted to the community are those that are just looking for fun. Boundaries are activated when members and haters alike react differently to what the norm of this community is. This boundary was seen more during the “Love or Hate” marketing strategy given that some posts made by the marketer were more aggressive and emotionally provoking. An example of this is demonstrated below in Figure 48:
Figure 51: Example of Members Maintaining a Playful Community Culture

This particular snippet was in response to the “We’re not for Everyone” relationship contest, where Miracle Whip was promoting to give a cash prize to a wedding or a divorce. Many members in the group instantly corrected Person A, who was seen as being uptight, even though she clearly had been a regular member of the community. The reaction that she created was quite significant given that members typically did not directly reply back to haters or members on the website. When outsiders breach the group, the common response is an avoidance of conflict by members simply ignoring the comments made from outsiders. However, Debbie, being a member and threatening to leave the group presents a perfect case of how strongly valued a playful environment is, and that the type of people that are real members are easy-going and humorous. Cultural boundaries were important for establishing the rules of participation in the community.
Cultural Boundary – Preferred Personality Type based on Product Element Associations

The second boundary was created through members understanding of unique product elements evident through the use of boundary terms such as unmayo, unboring, and bold throughout both the “Take a Stand” and “Love or Hate” campaign. Although these boundary terms were used to describe Miracle Whip as a product, the community used these terms to transfer these characteristics to the collective and individual member identities. Mayonnaise is seen as bland and plain, and consequently these terms are often used to describe and refer to outsiders that use that type of product.

Figure 52: Example of Mayo versus Miracle Whip Argument Using Personality Traits

Where these personality boundaries are more noticeable is through member narratives regarding “others”. Members would usually tell a story about how they love the brand, and then they would proceed to making a quirky comment about how an outsider of the group does not understand this because they are too traditional or too conservative to try it out. They also stereotyped these individuals as having “no taste buds”.

Members commonly differentiated themselves from others based on these bold product attributes. Many times members would talk about the unique characteristics of Miracle Whip such as it is flavorful and indulgent, and a low calorie condiment. It is a key ingredient to many staples. It has a sweeter, tangy, zesty taste. It has the supernatural ability to make any sandwich taste great. Lovers categorize all these product attributes as the individual’s sense for good taste.
Those that don't like Miracle Whip, the outsiders, are often portrayed as being delusional about the brand's superiority and don’t fit in with the culture. They often argue that it is clearly evident that Miracle Whip is the better choice, if not the only choice.

From previously mentioned boundaries, cultural boundaries are at the highest level of emotional intensity because it required the defense of the group norms and members’ identity, all at the heart of the communities sense of self.
CHAPTER 5.0: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore and examine the brand polarization phenomenon within the Miracle Whip Facebook brand page. Prior to this investigation, no academic evidence existed for this phenomenon. Existing understanding, particularly from marketing industry experts, assumed that brand polarization strategy was about one particular event or activity at one specific point in time (Luo et al., 2013). This strategy was defined as the creation of brand dislike through offensive marketing messages and tactics directed at one group of consumers in order to have a positive impact on another consumer segment (Torok, n.d.; Napoletano, 2012; Barone, 2013). Missing from all this was the need to uncover how exactly this strategy is implemented, in what way is this effect formed, and why it works. Findings from this study make early contributions by offering new insights regarding brand polarization phenomena to the consumer behavior discourse in the areas of brand community and brand strategy.

This chapter is divided into three main sections: discussions, contributions, and conclusions. The discussion section contains three sub-sections: brand strategy, brand community, and evolving symbolic boundaries within the context of brand polarization phenomena. The second section, contributions, offers both the conceptual and managerial contributions. Finally, in the conclusion section, limitations and future research avenues are provided.
5.1 DISCUSSIONS

The first section of this discussion examines the findings relating to MW brand polarization strategy and addressed the first research question of this study that was to outline the strategies and tactics used by the marketer during the brand polarization phenomenon. In the second section, findings regarding the MW brand community within the context of brand polarization strategy are described as well as the second research question of this study is addressed. Finally, discussion regarding the findings of symbolic boundaries arising from the symbolic construction approach and the third and final research question is answered.

5.1.1. Discussion - Brand Polarization Strategy

For both the “Take a Stand” and “Love or Hate” marketing strategy it was evident that there was a wide range of tactics applied during each campaign while the tactics were quite similar in nature, the type of theme and messaging that guided each strategy differed. For example, there was a change in the amount of visuals used, frequency of posts from the marketer, type and regularity of incentives (e.g. coupons and contests), and interaction occurring in the community when the polarized marketing strategy, the “Love or Hate” campaign, was executed all three of these elements increased substantially. Both campaigns also tried to reach newer target markets. For example, during the “Take a Stand” campaign, tactics appealed more to youthful target markets such as with the MTV music video award major contest. Conversely, during the “Love or Hate” campaign Miracle Whip tried to appeal to couples and new potential customers with incentives such as free samples and the “We’re not for Everyone Relationship” contest.
On a much deeper level, the changes between both marketing strategies seemed to involve moving the brand from a rational to emotional appeal for the brand and included three levels in the community. The rational appeal is based on functional attributes for the brand such as distinctive taste. This is evident in the “Miracle Whip versus Mayo” themed posts. For example, when the marketer made posts about how Miracle Whip makes certain recipes taste better than mayo. A shift to a more emotional appeal is seen through the “Bold versus Bland” posts. The marketer no longer referred to the brand as simply tasting different, but as being a brand only for those that define themselves as bold individuals. Finally, at the highest level of polarization were posts targeted towards creating an emotional appeal and stronger consumer identities with the brand observed through the “Love versus Hate” themed posts. The repeating polarized ideas at the three levels continually reminded consumers, especially those that love the brand, about an invisible line that divides them between non-members. This further perpetuates the polarized dialogue that Miracle Whip is trying to build, creating more buzz and keeping the brand top of mind.

This study finds that Miracle Whip’s use of brand polarization was not a one-time strategy but the company used a number of strategies employed over a longer period of time. The use of various strategies over time can be deeply embedded in casual conversations and interactions. Luo et al. (2013) offer suggestions on how to manage polarizing brands. The authors suggest three broad strategies: placating the haters, poking the haters, or amplifying a polarization attribute. Although the authors suggest that the marketer chose between one of three strategies it is evident from this study that a variety of strategies is what create his polarized effect.
Particularly, Miracle Whip chose to provoke haters by highlighting several polarizing attributes. These attributes ranged from product elements such as taste to more emotional identity related topics such as what it meant to be a Miracle Whip lover. A polarizing product element can act as a good starting point to engage consumers in a polarizing dialogue, but it should not be the entire focus or the driving force of the campaign. Eventually, polarization should increase in emotional intensity through emotional appeals regarding the product or brand. Miracle Whip was able to identify some of these characteristics by listening carefully to consumer conversations. For example, in the “Love or Hate” campaign, the marketer identified that there were various consumers that hated the product, did not consume it, but would buy the product for another individual in the household. From this finding, the marketer developed the “We’re not for Everyone” video contest, which asked polarized couples to share their story of how Miracle Whip drove a wedge in their relationship. By haters having the ability to express the reasons why they didn’t like the brand, some of them gained an appreciation for the brand and perceived Miracle Whip as being generous.

Miracle Whip also used many types of communication vehicles in order to create this effect. For example, the marketer leveraged various social media platforms, specifically Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter. This digital component was complemented by an offline component, television commercials. Consequently, brand polarization is not as industry experts claim, one strategy used during one individual event, but it is a number of events over time with the intended goal of eventually distinguishing the community and the brand from others in the marketplace. These smaller cumulative tactics and events increase the intensity of the polarization in the group, which become stronger from one strategy to the next.
5.1.2. Discussion - Brand Community within the Context of Brand Polarization Phenomena

The results indicated that within the Miracle Whip Facebook brand page, the most impacted brand community element was consciousness of a kind and this changed with the impact of brand polarization tactics. Rituals and traditions and sense of duty manifested on much weaker and variable forms than the first element and were consequently harder to clearly identify.

Given that a large part of the brand polarization strategy is to identify and verbalize a sense of difference in the group, it is not surprising to see that the element that was the most affected was consciousness of a kind. This initiated what Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) call the demarcation process. Discriminating values proposed in the “Take a Stand” strategy such as being fun, bold, and opinionated, were carried over into the “Love or Hate” strategy but were negotiated with more intensity and clarity. New values were also added to this negotiation process through brand polarization, such as a superior attitude and family orientation. These values were not simply seen as what brand community members shared in common, but in a slight shift of perspective, these values symbolized what made brand members different and unique from others (i.e. mayonnaise lovers).

Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) identified that a large part of establishing a consciousness of a kind in the group is based on legitimacy, the process of shifting through “real” or “fake” members. Brand polarization greatly affected this legitimacy process as evident in the social hierarchy that developed in the group during the “Love or Hate” campaign and was not as strongly observed prior in the “Take a Stand” strategy. Before the brand polarization phenomenon, members
typically responded in one-liners. They were not necessarily deeply impacted from their participation and would visit the website more for commercial value. When the brand polarization strategy was implemented in the “Love or Hate” campaign, this novel marketing strategy intrigued lovers, admirers, potential customers, and haters. Here, a social hierarchy developed from both inside and outside interactions, which led members within the community to organize themselves differently. This finding supports Kozinets (2010) and Fournier and Lee (2009) studies that demonstrate that legitimacy does develop social hierarchies. However, this research study particularly adds an important insight by revealing the way this shifting procedure is instigated. Without the participation from outsiders in the Miracle Whip group, the distinction between lovers of the group would not be visible. Legitimacy became more prevalent during the polarizing campaign because more lovers of the brand visited and participated in the website than they had in previous campaigns challenging the admirers that formerly dominated the community social structure. Lovers, particularly ‘Elders and Storytellers’, added depth and meaning to what it meant to be a Miracle Whip fan through the use of rituals such as longer narratives compared to admirers who simply replied with a one to two sentence post. There was a significant increase in the use of different types of narratives that kept the conversation moving forward. Other members would see these longer posts and support for the brand and would feel more confident to share their stories. These longer discourses helped members deeply reflect about the brand values such as reasons why the product is more superior. In contrast to the one-liners, their posts did not make sufficient contribution to continue this type of conversation.

Sense of duty in the group is the process that integrates, recruits, and retains new members (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). During the “Love or Hate” campaign, there was a new type of
outsider, which participated in the community, potential converts. These individuals were highly encouraged by Lovers, specifically Recommenders and Reminiscers, to try out the Miracle Whip brand. Prior to this study, it was assumed that all outsiders of the group would be deemed as a definite threat to the resilience and survival of the group (Cohen, 1985), but the findings demonstrate quite the opposite. The brand polarization strategy expanded the reach of the brand community, bringing haters to the community but also attracting potential converts which helped the survival of the community when Lovers convinced them of the benefits of the product.

During the “Take a Stand” marketing strategy, sense of duty was more difficult to identify; it was quite weak and erratic. One of the major ways that it was developed was through Lovers and Recommenders in particular, who shared important product information to existing and new members thus helping these individuals expand their usage behavior. For example, Recommenders shared information about the brand, flavor, and recipe uses. Additionally, a clear sense of duty developed when members acknowledged others by “liking” their post. Regardless, sense of duty was difficult to maintain in the group as it varied at different points in time. Consumers demonstrated bursts of commitment like posting regularly in the community once a day for three or four days in a row, then they would not return until months later. These findings align with McAlexander’s et al. (2002) assumptions that not all three brand community makers co-exist and that they can vary in the degree they manifest at different points in time depending on the brand communities life cycle.

Brand community literature has shown that continual communication, engagement and discussion is highly supported by the type of online platform provided for members to use
(Sicilia and Palazón, 2008; McWilliam, 2012). In the Miracle Whip community, it was noted that the technological interface hindered the development of sense of duty in the group. The layout of the Facebook page was very different in 2010 and 2011, when both the “Take a Stand” and “Love of Hate” strategy was hosted, as the “timeline” layout didn’t exist. The layout played an important role on how these members communicated or showed their sense of duty. It is hard to go through all the comments that are posted and such a task requires much effort, especially on posts that have a larger amount of participation. Specific virtual spaces where Lovers can regularly meet did not exist, further hindering the ability for these regular participating members to connect with one another. Niche groups are virtually impossible to create, as a brand page is considered a niche group in itself on the Facebook platform (Zaglia, 2013). There were indications of regular members desiring for this type of interaction, but they never had the opportunity to connect because their posts were constantly lost in all the participation occurring in the community. As a result, sense of duty was low and participation was bought with constant incentives given by the marketer.

5.1.3. Discussion - Symbolic Boundaries within the Context of Brand Polarization Phenomena

In the Miracle Whip brand community, two main boundary work strategies were used that generated three specific types of boundaries each differing in emotional intensity level. The first method that was used to create boundaries was amongst members only and was kept within the brand community, while the second strategy extended beyond the community and involved outsider interaction. The most widely used strategy by members in this community was the
former, which adds insight to the current literature on symbolic boundary creation. Skogen and 
Krange (2003) suggest that in order to activate oppositional consciousness there must be at some 
level some form of outsider interaction. Much of the literature currently does not outline how 
much outsider interaction is in fact necessary for this to occur. The findings from this study show 
that not many outsiders are actually necessary in order to activate boundary creation. An 
oppositional conscious dialogue with an abstract idea of an outsider prompted by the marketer 
was enough to help consumers motivate this demarcation process. Actual outsider interactions 
catalyzed this process but were not a required condition for boundary work. In this way we find 
that a perceived threat to the community is enough.

The three types of boundaries found in the Miracle Whip brand community were geographical, 
moral, and cultural boundaries. Each boundary increased in emotional intensity respectively, 
which impacted the response lovers had and in turn influenced the brand community structure. 
Geographical boundaries demonstrated that even in such an open and public online platform 
such as Facebook, country specific boundaries could be drawn to maintain certain type of 
consumers. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001), McAlexander et al. (2002), and Sicilia and Palazón 
(2008) all argue that online brand communities transcend geographical boundaries. The findings 
in this study demonstrated that this is not always the case, but invisible geographical boundaries 
can be drawn even on open online spaces. The Miracle Whip community was heavily composed 
of consumers from the U.S. that created very Americanized culture in the online community. 
Within this Americanized brand community, members also began to draw boundaries between 
those who lived in the northern or southern part of the United States. The creation, activation, 
and maintenance of this boundary was done through the marketer, who often stated that
promotions and incentives such as free sample sand coupons were only available to consumers in the U.S. The brand community also heavily relied on incentives to motivate and increase participation. In this way geographical boundary work was also unintentionally incentivized. Tilly (2004) posits that one mechanism that drives boundary changes is the incentives of rewards or punishments across boundary relations. When members of the community that resided outside of the U.S. or outsiders visiting the website wished to participate in the incentive programs and were told by the marketer that they could not do so, this punished outsiders but rewarded members residing in the U.S. As a result, it was not surprising to see some members get angry and threaten to leave the group as they felt excluded from the benefits of being a member. Online symbolic boundaries in this case are not as open as assumed.

As boundaries increased in intensity, we find moral boundaries in the middle, where again the findings are contrary to the literature conducted on symbolic boundaries. Online communities have been shown to be prone to conflicts with outsiders behaving rudely and offensively. Animosity and tension are often created in what is considered flaming, another form of trash talking (Reid, 1999; Williams and Copes, 2005). It was expected that because the main goal of the “Love or Hate” marketing strategy was to create finer distinctions and polarize consumer groups that tension and animosity would increase in this community. However, because of the moral boundaries of this community, many of the haters were friendlier rather than aggressive. Members of the group had a high tolerance towards the opinion of haters, but this was highly aligned with the type of dialogue the marketer set and guided. Although the marketer made posts that were controversial and aggressive, there was an understanding in the group that this was done in a playful and respectful manner. This environment and campaign attracted haters and
outsiders with similar values, but differentiating opinions about the product. This is in line with Cohen (1985) who found that boundaries could develop at various degrees depending on the “outsider” making the threat. It is clear that because haters were mainly friendly, no serious trash talking or conflict fully developed. The type of response that members have with outsiders regulated this and members were always playful and polite even with some rare examples of offensive and rude haters.

At the highest level of intensity were cultural boundaries. Two specific cultural boundaries were noted from the findings: Preferred Personality Type based on Community Engagement Rules and Preferred Personality Type based on Product Element Associations. The first boundary was based on community norms and it was observed that the Miracle Whip community valued members and outsiders that were easy-going rather than uptight. Easygoing community members were individuals that understood that the community was a virtual space to have fun and that arguments that developed within the community were not to be taken too seriously. They also assumed that the nature of the whole brand polarization strategy was to tease one another about a very trivial matter. Easygoing members were outgoing and very humorous, whereas those that were considered uptight were individuals who were easily offended by the marketer or others. Lovers maintained this boundary whenever other members or outsiders challenged this boundary. As a result, the community had a very strong playful environment that made the brand polarization phenomenon a positive consumption experience.

Another cultural boundary that was drawn was based on product elements. Members of the group had a good understanding about Miracle Whip being bold, liberal, opinionated, tasty
whereas Mayonnaise was seen as traditional, boring, bland, and tasteless. These ideas were negotiated throughout both the “Take a Stand” and “Love or Hate” campaign, but became more pronounced during the polarizing campaign. These values were heavily grounded to specific product elements like Miracle Whip’s unique taste and mayonnaise’s subtle plain taste. Cultural boundaries were formed when consumers started to use these characteristics to describe themselves. In this way, the ‘love or hate campaign’ created a better understanding of what it entailed to a member of the brand community, which consumers used to construct the self. Cohen (1985) suggests that when there is a threat to the community from outsiders, members will either be motivated to create distinctions from the need to protect the self or take the opportunity to construct their own personal identity. Because this boundary is more deeply embedded with member’s sense of self, it is not surprising to see in the findings that this boundary created the most controversial dialogues and emotional intensity.

With respect to the boundaries in this community in general, the implementation of smaller tactics over time significantly influenced boundary work in the community. Since different tactics attracted and produced different types of brand community lovers or haters, different kinds of boundaries were also constructed in the group. Boundaries in this community were fluid and changing all the time because whenever a different tactic was used, different groups in the community reacted differently towards it. The brand polarization strategy is not about two groups, the lovers and the haters with one fixed boundary, rather it is a strategy that invites many different in-group and out-groups with different boundaries to add to the community’s consciousness of a kind.
5.2 CONTRIBUTIONS

In the next section, the conceptual and managerial contributions of this research are discussed.

5.2.1. Conceptual Contribution: Expansions to the Brand Community Model

The impact from beyond has been largely ignored in brand community literature. Previous studies, such as in the area of oppositional brand loyalty, have indirectly tackled this idea of how “others” can create meaning within the community. The problem with many of these theories is that they don’t take into account a holistic and general view of outsiders and how they can impact the community as a whole. For example, with oppositional brand loyalty, studies have looked at different forms of this phenomenon (Thompson and Sinha, 2008), the different types of dialogues used (Hickman and Ward, 2007), the type of rivalries that are created (Ewing et al., 2013), and how it functions (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz and Hamer, 2001). However, outsiders can have a much larger impact than just the type of dialogue consumers engage in and the meanings created from it, and not all dialogue that exists in brand communities with outsiders always uses oppositional brand loyalty to create differences.

The brand polarization phenomenon captured in this study provided an Figure of how the broader marketplace can have an impact on brand communities. As the findings demonstrated, not all outsiders that participate in the community are haters. There are varying degrees of haters, which in turn expose varying degrees of lovers within that community. These interactions change the social structure, the way in which community members organize themselves. Ultimately, this
influences the three brand community makers as different members contribute to the meaning of the collective identity uniquely. This will either maintain or transform the overall brand community structure.

Arguably, the current brand community relationship models in the marketing and consumer behavior literature remain narrow and ignore the realities of what is occurring in the marketplace. A conceptual model proposed at the beginning of this study building on the assumptions suggested by McAlexander et al. (2002) consumer centric model is presented once again below:

![Figure 54: Boundary Conscious Community - Proposed Model from Chapter 3](image-url)
The model simply assumes that various outsiders that existed in the social marketplace, other members of Facebook but not the brand community, would affect the way in which members defined themselves overall. This change would be represented by the changes that occurred to the boundaries.

This model has been revised to take into account the insights provided from the results of this study.

![Boundary Conscious Community - New Revised Model](image)

**Figure 55: Boundary Conscious Community - New Revised Model**

The model demonstrates the complexity of the interactions and effects that outsiders can have on the brand community. To begin, the major impact that brand polarization has on brand communities is that it produces awareness concerning the demarcation process. In the Miracle
Whip Facebook brand community, consumers were not particularly aware nor motivated to negotiate meaning regarding how they were different from others prior to either the “Take a Stand” and “Love or Hate” campaign. Once the marketer guided consumers into this dialogue, members began to discuss more consistently these differences. This established what is called a ‘boundary conscious community’ because the major activity in the group focuses on generating meaning regarding these differences.

In these boundary conscious communities, the results indicated that brand members use both direct and indirect information from outsiders for contrast evaluation. The direct outsider is situated outside the larger social market place and can be either haters or potential consumers interested in the product. The outsider is not as part of the community but is involved in the meanings that are negotiated within the group. They participate in conversations with a particular member (i.e. the focal community member) and from this interaction they can impact the boundaries that are created. The boundaries that are affected depend on the type of lover and the type of hater and their respective emotional intensity. There are various boundaries that exist in the community, and the model shows that these boundaries can be fluid or rigid. Boundaries closer to the community are more stable, while those further to the outside are more flexible.

Miracle Whip members also used an abstract concept of a hater mostly made up from indirect references and stereotypes they had in their minds. Similar to what prior studies have shown that brand communities are more imagined communities with well-developed ideologies (Anderson, 2006), this study found that brand members could also develop imagined and abstract ideologies concerning outsiders. This abstract imagined outsider was placed within the brand community,
because in the Miracle Whip community this ideology was formed and maintained within the confines of the community. It is also a member in the community because other members constantly engage in an abstract relationship with this “outsider” in order to construct the self. In a boundary conscious community, this phantom member is extremely important in order for all other four members in the group to respond to contrast evaluation. Without this abstract ideology of an “outsider” boundaries would be harder to construct and a community have weaker resilience. The enemy had to be clear enough to transmit strong values into consciousness of a kind, but abstract enough in order to stay flexible when new reference information is introduced.

Finally, the three brand community makers are represented within the community and depending on the overall consumer experience that the focal consumer has with other members in the group (i.e. the imaginary outsider, and real outsiders), the three brand elements can either increase, stay neutral, decrease, or change in the form or order of manifestation. Additionally, aligning with McAlexander et al. (2002), certain brand community makers may not manifest at all or simultaneously all at once. For example, in the Miracle Whip community, members constantly added to consciousness of a kind through their increase in participation, which created more dialogue in the group increasing the meanings that were being negotiated. Rituals and traditions slightly increased but changed in form as more intense lovers visited the website and used new styles of narratives that were previously not observed prior to polarization. Sense of duty slightly increased with Recommenders and Reminiscers, but was virtually non-existent. All three brand community elements did not manifest at the same time. Before polarization, there was no sense of duty, weak forms of narratives were being used with most members using one-liners, and had a weak consciousness of a kind. After polarization, the group had an opportunity to strengthen
consciousness of a kind and there was a slight increase in rituals and traditions, but a weak sense of duty. In terms of symbolic boundaries, rituals and traditions determine the strength of boundaries. The more a ritual or tradition is used to communicate and reinforce a boundary in the group the more stable, activated, and prevalent the boundary becomes. Sense of duty on the other hand determined the flexibility of boundaries and continued the maintenance of them. If members constantly protect a boundary, as in the case of cultural boundaries in the Miracle Whip brand community, the harder it will become for outsiders to change these boundaries.

This model demonstrates in what way an expansion is made to the brand community literature from current models by taking into account the impact from beyond.

5.2.2. Managerial Contribution

Managing brand communities can be challenging, especially given the complex social processes that occur within these settings. Polarizing a brand can serve as another tool in a marketer’s repertoire to manage these environments. It gives the opportunity to add strategic focus, cohesion in the group, and clear brand positioning. First, brand polarization can be seen as another method for market segmentation. It defines and draws the attention of various consumer groups and outsiders. Through the interactions these consumer groups have a better identification of lovers is seen in the community. This makes targeting “lovers”, the true die-hard fans of the brand, much easier. Marketers can then specifically create effective and focused messages to these consumers, strengthening the bonds between the product and the brand. The brand polarization effect also creates unity in the community in the sense that it establishes a specific goal that all lovers can
follow. Finally, this phenomenon is effective at transmitting strong values that can help consumers in establishing a stronger identity with the brand.

This study presented a successful case of how brand polarization can be used in order to strengthen the brand, but there are a few areas in which this polarizing strategy could have been improved. One major disadvantage that Miracle Whip had was with their inconsistent and weak sense of duty. Fournier and Lee (2009) mention that good brand community management should increase customer loyalty, decreases marketing costs, authenticate brand meanings, and provide ideas to help grow the business. The marketer in this community constantly gave out coupons and free samples in order to incentivize participation. This can be a costly endeavor over time and also has the potential of diluting brand equity. Eventually, consumers should buy the product at full price, but with the constant coupon handouts consumers may form expectations to always find the brand on sale. Creating a strong sense of duty on the other hand can help resolve this problem as consumers begin to appreciate the community more for its social value rather than its commercial value. One of the reasons why sense of duty was so weak in this brand community was due to the fact that the marketer did not provide the resources or opportunities for lovers to build strong bonds. Fournier et al. (2005) suggest that strong brand loyalty is created through the quality of the relationships that are provided in these communities. Building a stronger sense of duty by offering more opportunities for consumers to connect and to find social value could lead to less reliance on price promotions to motivate and incentivize participation in the community. The findings demonstrated that lovers desired social value, evident by members that repeatedly visited the community, but they are unable to connect with others because of the way the community operated and the layout of the website.
An alternative to price promotions could be rewards or incentives in the form of social and status achievements. In Sicilia and Palazón (2008) study of the Coca-Cola virtual brand community, rewards for participation were based on social status. Every week, the front page of the website would indicate the “member of the week” and provided a positive reason as to why that member was chosen. Similarly, Miracle Whip could have a social incentive where only true Lovers are showcased and celebrated publically in front of the entire community. Fournier and Lee (2009) state that community is all about serving the customer. The tactics and incentives must fit the strategy and the target market.

Choosing the right online platform is also important. The technological limitations of Facebook hindered these consumer connections because the layout could not support strong connections for this larger brand community. The page was a little chaotic and needed structure in order to facilitate easier consumer conversations. Although there is only so much that the marketer can do in terms of layout changes on Facebook, it can plan and present information in an easier way to yield better understanding about the community. Simple communication signposts given in their posts could have been used. The banner at the top of the page could also be a convenient area that can orient new and old members on how the brand community works. Furthermore, it is important to remember that Facebook has its own specific target market and it has its limitations. The online platform should fit the strategy and target market the marketer is seeking.

One final area where brand polarization could have been more effective can be found with how the marketer in the Miracle Whip brand community managed potential customers. These were
consumers that demonstrated interest in trying out the brand. Fournier and Lee (2009) discuss the idea of engineering a strong brand community by providing members specific roles to play in the community. Since the brand polarization phenomenon segments the lovers of the group more accurately, the marketer should invest, equip, train, and provide these lovers with resources to aid them in integrating new members in the group. By allowing the lovers and experts of the community to do the role of integration, this keeps the authenticity necessary for a genuine brand community to develop. The role of the marketer should be to facilitate conversations, make engagement easier, respond to needs, but not be over controlling (Fournier and Lee, 2009). The marketer can consider creating a special tab or page on Facebook outlining values or instructions on how to help new members.

Brand polarization is much more than a single campaign. It is a long-term strategic task that involves constant monitoring and managing of consumer conversations. The rich meaning creation that ensues from such a strategy indicates the weight of importance and change that it can have on the overall structure of the brand community. As such, this strategic goal should not be taken lightly. Marketers should consider whether they are willing to invest time, effort and resources into such a strategy. Of course, brand polarization can be viewed as having potentially a higher risk than placating the haters, but with any digital strategy that uses social media there should be an awareness that haters do exist, that online platforms are readily used outlets to publicize hate, and that outside interactions are inevitable in this open space. Miracle Whip demonstrates that embracing haters in a playful but firm manner can create the best formula for managing haters without deteriorating brand equity in the long run.
5.3. CONCLUSIONS

This section offers limitations and future research directions.

5.3.1 Limitations

Understandings and findings in this study were based on one specific context, the Miracle Whip Facebook Fan Page embedded within the Facebook social media website. It was to be noted that the brand polarization marketing strategy was executed through both traditional and digital marketing channels. At some points during the campaign, the marketing strategy interwove both mediums simultaneously. For example, in order to introduce the “Love or Hate” campaign Kraft aired polarizing commercials on television while asking consumers to voice their opinions online. Additionally, within the social media sphere, Kraft used Twitter, YouTube, and Facebook together to execute this strategy. As a result, the netnographic study conducted for this investigation focused entirely on the Facebook brand community that only captures a partial side of this phenomenon.

Finally, technological issues were identified which can be a limitation to this study. This study was conducted during 2013 to 2014. Datasets were collected during these two years, but the data originated from 2010 and 2011 posts. It was noted that the number of comments counted automatically on a post on the Facebook page did not always align with the number of actual posts collected in the dataset. This could be due to the fact that consumers have the ability to deactivate their Facebook membership or block their posts from public viewers. There is always
a risk and possibility that consumers did this during the two to three years time span that the posts had originally been created. Certain promotions, such as the “Take a Stand” tab, also had an expiration time, and once the promotional period ended the tab disappeared. Thus, because Facebook data is real-time data, archiving and collecting past posts may not always be complete.

5.3.2 Future Directions

From the brand strategy side, more cases of brand polarization can be studied. As mentioned above, there are more cases outlined in the Luo et al. (2013) paper that could present interesting topics to continue the study of brand polarization. For example, it would be interesting to compare and contrast brand polarization strategies that are more offensive and rude or to see if the product category such as a service versus a convenience product has any impact on the mechanisms outlined in this study. Potential cross-cultural studies could also exist for example how brand polarization in the United Kingdom is created versus that of the United States. Another potential research avenue would be looking at different brand polarization groups more deeply and their motivations to participate.

Brand polarization also introduces new opportunities to look at brand communities. In a study by regarding word-of-mouth of online brand communities, Brown, Broderick and Lee (2007) noted that an interesting avenue of research would be to look at how individuals integrate online with offline information. A study on how the commercials used by Miracle Whip were integrated with the online social media component could help shed light in this area.
Unique to this study was the examination of the construction of symbolic boundaries within the brand community literature. Examining brand communities and their boundaries can become a fruitful avenue for future theory developments in consumer behavior. As Lamont and Molnar (2002) state, boundaries have been a useful theoretical tool in sociology and anthropology. It has allowed researchers to capture the dynamic dimensions of social relations in the production, diffusion, and institutionalization of alternative systems and principles of classifications. Similarities and differences across contexts and types of groups at structural and psychological levels can also be analyzed using boundaries. In particular, cultural sociologists have looked at how boundaries are shaped by various contexts and cultures (Lamont and Thévenot, 2000). Processes such as boundary crossing and boundaries shifting can also be relevant areas of study (Lamont and Molnar, 2002).

Looking at different elements and levels such as the ones aforementioned above in brand communities can help to better understand the three main makers of brand community is formed, particularly consciousness of a kind. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) found that members could quickly identify shared similarities in the group, but have a harder time verbalizing common differences. This may be due to the fact that boundaries are ordinarily found in the deeply embedded norms that communities often maintain subconsciously, as it was seen with cultural boundaries in the Miracle Whip brand community. Using this new theoretical lens can allow future marketing researchers to better grasp the formation of consciousness of a kind capturing more accurately the realities occurring in brand communities. Outsider interactions are also automatically taken into consideration, making it a more complete way to understand how the external environment is impacting brand communities.
References


Miracle Whip. (2010, June 24g). It’s time to wear your heart on your sleeve, literally. Well, actually your chest. You can now get your debate or any debate on your very own t-shirt in our Take a Stand tab. [Facebook]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/miraclewhip/posts/114257091954067


Miracle Whip. (2010, August 4h). Are you bold enough for the MTV Video Music Awards? Take a stand and you could win the ultimate trip for two including tickets to the show, limousine arrival, $1000 spending money, airfare and hotel accommodations. Click here to find out how: http://bit.ly/aR2M3i [Facebook]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/miraclewhip/posts/136999166337933

Miracle Whip. (2010, August 16f). Don’t forget to enter for the trip to the MTV Video Music Awards. Make sure to finish your entry by clicking through and entering your information after voting or creating a debate and remember you can enter daily. Enter now: http://bit.ly/a9rW74 [Facebook]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/miraclewhip/posts/134061576636561


Miracle Whip. (2011, July 17d). How has Miracle Whip impacted your relationship? Are you united in love or hate? Do you have a condimental divide? Starting tomorrow tell us your story for a chance to win $25K towards your wedding or divorce! [Facebook]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/miraclewhip/posts/10150234962682811

Miracle Whip. (2011, July 27e). Lots of great videos coming in for the “Not for Every Relationship” contest! Tell us your story for a chance to win $25K towards your wedding or divorce. Don’t forget, your video can’t be over 60 seconds, have more than 2 people, and must include your significant other! Check out some of the eligible contest submissions at www.miraclewhip.com [Facebook]. Retrieved from https://www.facebook.com/miraclewhip/posts/190781557650511


Seraj, M. (2012). We create, we connect, we respect, therefore we are: intellectual, social, and cultural value in online communities. *Journal of Interactive Marketing, 26*(4), 209-222.


## Appendix A: Documentation of 2010 to 2011 Dataset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM #</th>
<th>Post Date</th>
<th>TACTIC</th>
<th># of Likes</th>
<th># of Comments</th>
<th>LOVERS RESPONSE</th>
<th># OF LOVERS</th>
<th>HATER RESPONSE</th>
<th># OF HATERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>May 18, 2010</td>
<td>Do you back the bold or stand for the blind? Make your case on our &quot;Take a stand&quot; tab.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>June 7, 2010</td>
<td>We know MIRACLE WHIP fans are bold souls. If you weren’t, you’d settle for Mayo. And we know you’re passionate about more than just MW. That’s why we want to give you a forum to take a stand on all kinds of debates, not just MIRACLE WHIP vs. Mayo. Get ready to raise your voice on our &quot;Take a Stand&quot; tab and Daily Debates. So the only question is...are you bold enough to take a stand?</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>June 9, 2010</td>
<td>We were psyched to learn about Martha Stewart’s own Twitter debate on Miracle Whip vs. Mayo. Join in and take a stand! Vote for flavor. <a href="http://bit.ly/mtaMstewarttweets">http://bit.ly/mtaMstewarttweets</a></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>June 16, 2010</td>
<td>The eternal debate continues. Michigan wants to know where you stand: Miracle Whip or Mayo?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>June 24, 2010</td>
<td>It’s time to wear your heart on your sleeve, literally. Well, actually your chest. You can now get your debate or any debate on your very own t-shirt in our &quot;Take a Stand&quot; tab.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>June 30, 2010</td>
<td>Calling all sandwich lovers. Which deli meat do you prefer with your Miracle Whip? Click here to take a stand.</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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## Appendix B: Haters 2010 to 2011 Dataset

<table>
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<th>Post Date</th>
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<th># of Comments</th>
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<th># OF LOVERS</th>
<th>HATER RESPONSE</th>
<th># OF HATERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>May 18, 2010</td>
<td>Do you back the bold or stand for the bland? Make your case on our 'Take a Stand' tab.</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>Nathan Ortono</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I mix Miracle Whip into Mountain Dew and put it right in my baby's bottle! He loves it!!!! And with Walmart's everyday low pharmacy prices, the insulin is cheaper than real food. too!!! May 18, 2010 at 5:11pm</td>
<td>Like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>June 9, 2010</td>
<td>We were psyched to learn about Martha Stewart's own Twitter debate on Miracle Whip vs. Mayo. Join in and take a stand! Vote for flavor. <a href="http://bit.ly/MarthaStewartTweets">http://bit.ly/MarthaStewartTweets</a></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Blanche Scott Goetz</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Used to use MW, now use Dukes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>June 16, 2010</td>
<td>The eternal debate continues. Michigan wants to know where you stand: Miracle Whip or Mayo?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>33</td>
<td></td>
<td>Cal Ford</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>neither one are worth a crap.......</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ITEM #</th>
<th>Post Date</th>
<th>TACTIC</th>
<th># of Likes</th>
<th># of Comments</th>
<th>LOVERS RESPONSE</th>
<th># OF LOVERS</th>
<th>HATER RESPONSE</th>
<th># OF HATERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Feb 23, 2011</td>
<td>How do you feel about Miracle Whip? Some people love it. Some people hate it. And then's cool. What's not cool is not having an opinion. As a product's member of our FB page, we want to know why you love it. Check out our &quot;Love or Hate?&quot; tab to confess your love and we'll give you a $1 off coupon. Just our way of saying, you're awesome too. <a href="http://www.facebook.com/applications#!/13514400516095">http://www.facebook.com/applications#!/13514400516095</a></td>
<td>354</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sherr Menaden; Hate it; Twallman/</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lathom McKee; Hate it, but Husband loves it/ Feb 23</td>
<td>Like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Feb 24, 2011</td>
<td>If you love us? We love you. If you hate us? That's cool, too. We're not for everyone. Are you MW? Tell us why at [<a href="https://bit.ly/dbaWy">https://bit.ly/dbaWy</a>] and check out our TV spot in case you missed its premiere before American Idol last night.</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mary James</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>MIRACLE DEEP NUTS NISSANJI FUCK MIRACLE WHIP!! MAYO ALL DAY! February 26, 2011 at 11:14pm</td>
<td>Like</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>