A qualitative and quantitative exploration of consumer religiosity and customer evangelism

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Abstract

Over 30 years ago, Guy Kawasaki took a sales job at Apple Computer. Upon receiving his business card, where the job title appeared, he expected to see the word ‘salesperson’; instead, he saw the word ‘evangelist’. Apple was, not for the first time, using the language of religion to describe the passion and commitment of their staff and their vision. When Kawasaki described the behaviour of Apple fanatics as ‘customer evangelists’, he did the same thing: appropriated spiritual symbols to imbue particular, significant meaning. This kind of co-opting of religious language in a marketing context has become more and more common as the lines between consumer culture and social culture have blurred or even disappeared. Religions are consumed as products, while symbolism is appropriated from a religious context to imbue stronger meaning in people’s material existence (Miller, 2003). Years later, Kawasaki wrote the seminal book on zealous customers, and called them ‘customer evangelists’ (Kawasaki, 1991). A decade later, the term has become commonly used in practitioner circles (Goldfayn, 2012; Katz, 2008; Martin, 2011; McConnel & Huba, 2007), and has started being used in scholarly ones (Collins & Watts, 2009; Katz, 2008; Rothschild, Stielstra, & Wysong, 2007; Svensson, 2011).

It is surprising that scholarly literature would discuss customer evangelism, or evangelism marketing, without any evidence beyond the anecdotal. Also surprising is the fact that customer evangelism is often mentioned in word of mouth (WOM) related literature, and less so in consumer religiosity literature. By its very moniker of ‘evangelism’, the phenomenon of customer evangelism has an essential religious component that sets it apart from other WOM types, such as mavens and opinion leaders. However, the scholarly literature seems to follow the industry literature when it
comes to customer evangelism, and the industry literature is not robust even by industry standards.

The contribution of this thesis is to discover and develop a scholarly space for customer evangelism, with authentic roots in religious evangelism. Using religious evangelism as the basis for customer evangelism is a conscious choice. Linking religious and customer evangelism does three things. First, whether ‘evangelism’ is an appropriate word for the phenomenon will depend on how closely it mirrors religious evangelism. Second, developing a theoretical basis for customer evangelism from a religious studies framework builds an authentic foundation for further exploration of the phenomenon. Finally, the perspective presented in the following papers is that the lines between spiritual culture and consumer culture have become blurred. Consumer culture presupposes that people can author their own identity through their consumption and identification with commercial products. Commercial entities appropriate powerful cultural symbols in an effort to imbue their product/brand experiences with heightened meaning. At the same time, people in a spiritual context appropriate religious symbols out of theological context, in a consumption approach to their spiritual life. While traditional community religious and secular organisation membership is declining, non-traditional organisations are reforming and increasing. These include evangelical churches, online communities and consumer collectives.
References


Contents

Abstract ......................................................................................................................... i
References ..................................................................................................................... iii

Contents ....................................................................................................................... v

List of Figures .............................................................................................................. ix
List of Tables ............................................................................................................... ix
List of Abbreviations ................................................................................................... x

Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... xi

Publications ................................................................................................................ xii
  Journal Articles ......................................................................................................... xii
  Book Chapters ........................................................................................................... xii
  Peer Reviewed Conferences ......................................................................................... xii
  Industry Forums and Conferences .............................................................................. xiv
  Textbook Contribution .............................................................................................. xv

1 Introduction .............................................................................................................. 1
  References ................................................................................................................ 8

2 Customer Evangelism: A Literature Review ........................................................... 11
  2.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................... 11
  2.1.1 Kawasaki’s story. ............................................................................................... 11
  2.1.2 Customer evangelism: Thirty years of anecdotes and observations. ............... 12
  2.2 Customer Evangelism in the Literature ............................................................... 15
    2.2.1 Industry publications about customer evangelism. ....................................... 15
    2.2.2 Scholarly publications mentioning customer evangelism. ............................ 16
  2.3 Religious Evangelism: The Early Christian Church and the Apostle Paul ............ 18
  2.4 The Four Key Elements of Customer Evangelists .............................................. 20
    2.4.1 Evangelists have quintessence (religiosity). ................................................. 21
    2.4.2 Authenticity and the evangelist. ................................................................. 24
    2.4.3 Evangelists spread extreme WOM. ............................................................. 26
    2.4.4 Evangelism happens within a formal or informal collective. ......................... 29
  2.5 Customer Evangelism Case Studies .................................................................... 31
    2.5.1 The Mayor of Southwest Airlines: The story of one evangelist. .................... 31
    2.5.2 Customer evangelists as early adopters. ...................................................... 32
    2.5.3 The dark side of customer evangelism ....................................................... 34
    2.5.4 The firm engaging customer evangelism through a consumer co-production model ................................................................................................................................. 35
  2.6 Contribution of this Thesis .................................................................................. 36
    2.6.1 The definition of customer evangelism. ....................................................... 37
    2.6.2 Theoretical basis for customer evangelism. ............................................... 38
    2.6.3 Testing the customer evangelism model. ..................................................... 40
  2.7 Conclusion .......................................................................................................... 41
  References ................................................................................................................ 42

3 Playing the Infinite Game: Marketing in the Post-industrial Economy .................... 51
  3.1 Introduction ......................................................................................................... 51
    3.1.1 A paradigm shift to co-creation. ................................................................. 52
### 4 Communitas and Civitas: Modelling Consumer Collectives

Abstract ................................................................................................................. 63

4.1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 64

4.2 Methodology .......................................................................................................... 67

4.3 Haters, Users, Fans and Followers ........................................................................ 68

4.3.1 Consumer collectives in the online and offline space ........................................ 68

4.3.2 Consumption as a cultural act ............................................................................ 70

4.3.3 The strange energy: Transcendence and quintessence ..................................... 71

4.3.4 Mapping the quintessence effect ...................................................................... 72

4.4 Consumer Collectives as Value Networks ............................................................. 75

4.5 Consumer Collectives are Playing the Infinite Game ............................................ 78

4.5.1 Finite and infinite games ................................................................................... 78

4.5.2 Religions play the infinite game ........................................................................ 79

4.6 Value Actor Motives, Roles and Narratives ......................................................... 84

4.6.1 Outcomes of the consumer collective model ..................................................... 86

4.6.2 Limitations of the consumer collective model .................................................. 86

4.7 Implications and Further Research ...................................................................... 87

4.7.1 Implications for marketing education ............................................................... 87

4.7.2 Implications for marketing research ................................................................ 88

4.7.3 Implications for practitioners ......................................................................... 88

4.8 Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 89

Acknowledgements ..................................................................................................... 90

References .................................................................................................................. 91

### 5 The Hajj: An Illustration of 360-Degree Authenticity

5.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................. 99

5.2 Pilgrimage Tourism .............................................................................................. 101

5.2.1 Types of Authenticity ...................................................................................... 102

5.2.2 The Hajj as a Prototype of a 360-Degree Authenticity .................................... 104

5.2.3 Object and Constructed Authenticity ............................................................... 105

5.2.4 Existential Authenticity ................................................................................... 107

5.2.5 Commercial Authenticity ............................................................................... 108

5.3 Conclusion ............................................................................................................. 108

References .................................................................................................................. 109

### 6 Identifying Customer Evangelists

Abstract ...................................................................................................................... 113

6.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................ 113

6.2 The Rise of Customer Evangelism ......................................................................... 115

6.3 Theoretical Bases for Customer Evangelism ........................................................ 116

6.3.1 SD Logic ........................................................................................................... 117

6.3.2 Quintessence and Transcendent Customer Experiences. (TCEs) ................. 117
6.4 Formative Indicators of Customer Evangelism ................................................. 119
  6.4.1 Customer evangelists produce more WOM about a product than the average consumer, even though they are not incentivised to do so .......... 119
  6.4.2 Customer evangelists have a sacred connection (quintessence) with the product/brand ................................................................. 119
  6.4.3 Customer evangelists are authentically connected to the product/brand .... 120
  6.4.4 Customer evangelists identify themselves as part of consumer collectives .............................................................. 120
6.5 Methodology ................................................................................................. 121
  6.5.1 Sample ................................................................................................. 121
  6.5.2 Method .................................................................................................. 123
  6.5.3 The demographics of customer evangelists ............................................ 125
6.6 Analysis and Findings .................................................................................. 128
  6.6.1 Customer satisfaction ........................................................................... 130
    6.6.1.1 $H^1$: Customer evangelists demonstrate higher levels of customer satisfaction than do non-customer evangelists .................... 130
  6.6.2 Perception of value ............................................................................... 130
    6.6.2.1 $H^2$: Perceptions of product value will increase more among customer evangelists than among non-customer evangelists .... 131
  6.6.3 Intention to purchase ............................................................................ 131
    6.6.3.1 $H^3$: Customer evangelists have stronger future intention to purchase than do non-customer evangelists. ......................... 131
  6.6.4 Shunning the competition .................................................................... 132
    6.6.4.1 $H^4$: Customer evangelists are less likely to consider purchasing from a competitor than are non-customer evangelists. .... 132
  6.6.5 Dimensions of authenticity within the consumer collective ................. 133
    6.6.5.1 $H^5$: Customer evangelists perceive people within the consumer collective as being more honest than those outside the consumer collective .............. 133
  6.6.6 Engaging in a cultish perspective ......................................................... 134
    6.6.6.1 $H^6$: Customer evangelists would feel a stronger connection to other members of OVERS than would non-customer evangelists .............. 135
  6.6.7 Social orientation, online and offline .................................................... 135
    6.6.7.1 $H^7$: Customer evangelists are more socially-oriented than are non-customer evangelists ......................................................... 135
    6.6.7.2 $H^8$: Customer evangelists are more engaged in social media than are non-customer evangelists .............................................. 136
  6.6.8 Customer evangelists are experientially driven ...................................... 137
    6.6.8.1 $H^9$: Customer evangelists are more experientially-oriented than are non-customer evangelists ................................................. 137
  6.6.9 Customer evangelists are more likely to be knowledge-oriented .......... 138
    6.6.9.1 $H^{10}$: Customer evangelists are more likely to seek knowledge from others than are non-customer evangelists .................................. 139
    6.6.9.2 $H^{11}$: Customer evangelists are more likely to use communications from OVERS than are non-customer evangelists ....................... 139
    6.6.9.3 $H^{12}$: Customer evangelists are more likely to share knowledge than are non-customer evangelists .............................................. 140
6.7 Discussion and Conclusion ...................................................................... 141
  6.7.1 Analysis ............................................................................................... 141
  6.7.2 Limitations of this study ...................................................................... 142
6.7.3 Contributions and conclusion ................................................................. 143
References ........................................................................................................ 146

7 Conclusion ....................................................................................................... 151
7.1 Contributions of this Thesis ........................................................................ 152
  7.1.1 First scholarly examination of customer evangelism ............................... 152
  7.1.2 Distinctive, coherent, theoretical basis for consumer religiosity and
customer evangelism ..................................................................................... 154
  7.1.3 Explores consumer religiosity and customer evangelism in empirical
context ........................................................................................................... 156
  7.1.4 Coherent authenticity through 360da ...................................................... 156
7.2 Limitations of this Thesis ............................................................................ 157
7.3 Areas for Further Research ......................................................................... 158

References ....................................................................................................... 162
List of Figures

Figure 1. Segmenting markets by proximity to the TCE. ...........................................73
Figure 2. The consumer collective model, based on Carse’s (2008) religion model.....82
Figure 3. Formative model development and verification in this study. .....................115
Figure 4. Identifying customer evangelists (n = 3,995). .............................................125

List of Tables

Table 1 Comparison of Extreme WOM Generators.........................................................28
Table 2 A Theoretical Evolution: Finite and Infinite Games in Marketing .......................56
Table 2 Consumer Collective Model Roles and Motivations ......................................85
Table 3 Consumer Collective Model Roles Applied ....................................................85
Table 5 Types of Authenticity ......................................................................................104
Table 5 Formative Indicators of Customer Evangelism .............................................121
Table 6 Gender of Customer Evangelists and Non-customer Evangelists (n = 3,995)  
    (p = 0.28) .............................................................................................................125
Table 7 Ages of Customer Evangelists and Non-customer Evangelists (n = 3,995) (p  
    = 0.001) .............................................................................................................126
Table 8 Home Locale of Customer Evangelists and Non-customer Evangelists (n =  
    3,995) (p = 0.057) ...............................................................................................127
Table 9 Income of Customer Evangelists and Non-customer Evangelists (n = 3,995)  
    (p = 0.198) .............................................................................................................128
Table 10 Demographics of the Stratified Sample .........................................................129
Table 11 Correlations between Questions Relating to H5 ...........................................134
Table 12 Correlations between Questions Relating to Social Orientation ..................136
Table 13 Correlations between Questions Relating to Experiential Aspects of  
    Products ..............................................................................................................138
Table 14 Correlations between Questions Relating to the Inclination to Share  
    Knowledge ..........................................................................................................140
Table 15 Hypotheses and Conclusions .....................................................................141
**List of Abbreviations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>360da</td>
<td>360 degree authenticity</td>
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<tr>
<td>CCT</td>
<td>consumer culture theory</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLV</td>
<td>customer lifetime value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUG</td>
<td>Macintosh User Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>personal computer</td>
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<tr>
<td>SCM</td>
<td>supply chain management</td>
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<tr>
<td>S-D Logic</td>
<td>service-dominant logic</td>
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<tr>
<td>TCE</td>
<td>transcendent customer experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>WOM</td>
<td>word of mouth</td>
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Publications

Journal Articles

Collins, N. & Murphy, J. Communitas and civitas: An idiographic model of consumer collectives. *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science*. (Chapter 3 of this thesis)

Book Chapters
Collins, N. & Murphy, J. (2010). The Hajj: An illustration of 360 degree authenticity. In N. Scott (Ed.), *Tourism in the Muslim world*. (Chapter 4 of this thesis)

Peer Reviewed Conferences


Collins, N. & Murphy, J. (2013, May). The road to Damascus leads to one infinite loop: An introspective adventure into Apple Computer customer evangelism. Paper presented at the Asia Pacific Council of Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education Conference, Macao SAR, CN.


**Industry Forums and Conferences**


Collins, N., Watts, L. & Murphy, J. (2011). *Keeping it real: 360 degree authenticity applied to a social work day project at ECU SW*. Paper presented at the Edith Cowan University Research Staff and Student Meeting, Bunbury, Western Australia, AUS.
Collins, N. (2009). *The co-creation of value: Marketing as an infinite game*. Paper presented at Growing Our Own Research Round Table, Edith Cowan University, Bunbury, Western Australia, AUS.

**Textbook Contribution**

CONSUMER RELIGIOSITY AND CUSTOMER EVANGELISM

A GUIDE TO THE SECTIONS OF THIS THESIS

THE FIRST SECTION is the literature review. It consolidates previous research on consumer religiosity and customer evangelists. It identifies the four unique, essential common traits of religious, and customer, evangelists (A).

THE SECOND SECTION, published in an academic journal in 2010, connects Carse’s Infinite Game with Service-Dominant Logic as a way of describing marketing in the post-industrial economy, providing appropriate theoretical bases for consumer collectivity and the contemporary marketers’ mission to engage customers (B).

THE THIRD SECTION is accepted to an academic journal in 2013, and is under revision for publication. It further develops Carse’s Civitas/Communitas religious collectivity model, applying it to consumer religiosity, consumer collectivity and customer evangelism (C).

THE FOURTH SECTION, published in a peer-reviewed academic book in 2010, explores the role and application of authenticity in collective religious consumption experiences (D).

THE FIFTH SECTION, submitted for publication in 2013, quantitatively tests claims about customer evangelism (A).

(C) Consumer Collectives are analogous to religious congregations’ (COMMUNITAS) interactions with their churches (CIVITAS). The CIVITAS has a visionary POET who articulates the AUTHENTIC SACRED MYSTERY at the centre of the collective through their product/brand vision/experience. Consumers the most strongly identified with the product are FOLLOWERS. FANS are products followers without QUINTESSENCE who are still part of the collective. CASUAL USERS, NON-USERS and HATERS of the product sit outside the consumer collective.

(B) The INFINITE GAME metaphor combined with SERVICE-DOMINANT LOGIC describes how marketers and customers seek to continuously co-create value arising from product experiences: both direct (product consumption) and indirect (i.e. consumer collective).

(T) Symbolised by yellow stars in this infographic, authenticity is co-created objectively, culturally, existentially and commercially by all participants in order to have impact.

(A) Evangelists have four essential traits, as identified in the literature (SECTION 1) and tested in this thesis’ empirical study (SECTION 5): they belong to formal or informal CONSUMER COLLECTIVES, have QUINTESSENCE (arising from a TRANSFORMATIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE), are AUTHENTICALLY CONNECTED to the brand/product/users and spread EXTREME levels of WORD OF MOUTH.
1 Introduction

Macintosh is a modern-day example of the power of secular evangelism … [Apple] started with a vision; then it became a product supported by a cult; finally, it became a cause—propagated by thousands of Macintosh evangelists. (Kawasaki, 1991)

95 percent of the [Apple] market are mainstream consumers. These are regular tech shoppers who are not yet evangelists … They are referred to Apple on a regular basis. And it is not go buy this, either. It’s listen to how wonderful this is! Nothing is more powerful … than genuine enthusiasm for and belief in a product. (Goldfayn, 2012)

The first book to discuss customer evangelism was published in 1991 (Kawasaki), and the most recent was published in 2012 (Goldfayn). The time span between these books is approximately 20 years, yet the same firm is used as a textbook example of customer evangelism: Apple Computer. There are a couple of reasons for this. First, Apple Computer was the organisation at which Guy Kawasaki first became an evangelist. He was aware of his transformation from salesperson to evangelist because the Apple marketing department (the area that employed him) placed the word ‘evangelist’ as his job title on his business card. Apple did not hire salespeople, Kawasaki recounts—they hired evangelists. They expected all the religious fervour, zeal, devotion and sacrifice from their employees that one would expect of someone with that job title (Kawasaki, 1991). Kawasaki later articulated that a segment of Apple customers were as evangelistic, or even more evangelistic, than Apple staff. Kawasaki extrapolated his experience at Apple into his book.
From that day, the argument for customer evangelism has been based on similar anecdotes of consumer religiosity mixed with extreme word of mouth (WOM) behaviour. The term ‘customer evangelism’ is still strongly correlated with Apple as a textbook example of the phenomenon.

The particularly fanatical segment of Apple users have been documented in industry literature (Goldfayn, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007), scholarly literature (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Muniz & Schau, 2005) and various media, including a feature-length documentary (Shelly, 2008). It is argued and demonstrated that the consumer collective of devoted Apple customers are not only loyal customers, many of whom evangelise the product—they also forgive Apple’s every transgression. They overlook failed products or poor service; in fact, some even compensate for it by learning to help themselves and others (Goldfayn, 2012). They generate media attention by waiting for hours at new product and store launches, regardless of the weather. They declare their love for Apple products as individuals in online and offline environments. They are organised into formal and informal groups, and can be called upon to mobilise when a company does not provide a Mac-friendly product. The zealous behaviour of Apple users who are so enthusiastic about the product can seem bizarre to the casual observer. In Western society, it is more socially acceptable to be passionate about a sports team than passionate about a computer or mobile telephone. When a casual observer looks at Apple, they may ask, ‘why are these people so crazy about this product?’

When marketers look at consumer collectives, they see opportunity. Consumer collectives are a resource that can add brand value, such as peer product support, WOM marketing, cataloguing of company lore and attendance at brand-related events. They do all this more cheaply, more authentically and often more passionately than people hired to do
so. For marketers, when they look at Apple, the question is, ‘how can I get my customers to do that for my product/brand?’ Kawasaki emerged from his first experience at Apple Computer in the late 1980s, and subsequently authored two books. His first book, *The Macintosh Way* (Kawasaki, 1989), detailed his experience at Apple as part of a product development team. The second book, *Selling the Dream* (Kawasaki, 1991), drew on Apple as well. This book had a more lasting effect on the marketing industry because *Selling the Dream* introduced the concept of customer evangelists. Kawasaki writes in a relatable, enthusiastic style. His ability to tell entertaining anecdotes while supporting his claims is convincing. Kawasaki was indeed selling a dream—the dream that marketers could harness the value of self-organised, self-resourced product zealots and dollars for the bottom line. Kawasaki was selling the dream that the same motivating force that shifted Christianity from cult to dominant religion could be the same force motivating current customers to attract new customers. For the next few decades, marketing pundits picked up on the customer evangelism idea. Whether it was in a specific context (such as consumer electronics) or a general new and exciting marketing strategy, the arguments were convincing that producers could develop, shape and direct customer evangelism.

The effect of customer evangelism on customer lifetime value (CLV) was never quantified in the literature. Nor were there studies investigating how many customers in a group are likely to become evangelists, whether specific products are more likely to have evangelists, or whether specific variables have a greater effect on customer evangelism. Yet the literature supporting customer evangelism continues to grow in both industry and scholarly circles. It is surprising that scholarly literature would discuss customer evangelism, or evangelism marketing, without any evidence beyond the anecdotal. Also surprising is the fact that customer evangelism is often mentioned in WOM related
literature, but less so in consumer religiosity literature. By its very moniker of ‘evangelism’, the phenomenon of customer evangelism has an essential religious component that sets it apart from other WOM types, such as mavens and opinion leaders. However, the scholarly literature seems to follow the industry literature when it comes to customer evangelism, and the industry literature is not robust even by industry standards.

Methodologies used to investigate the phenomenon of consumer religiosity to date focus on either the anecdotal (industry literature) or the qualitative (scholarly literature). The limitations of these approaches prevent further development and investigation of associated phenomenon, such as customer evangelism. A specific perspective on consumer religiosity focused on customer evangelism requires an interdisciplinary approach—one that closely mirrors religious behaviour in the spiritual realm. Such an approach would not only be appropriate from a disciplinary perspective, but would also be an authentic approach to the phenomenon.

A quantitative approach to consumer religiosity and customer evangelism is important for several reasons. The first is because quantitative analysis delivers a specific kind of testable hypothesis. Quantitative analysis can be used for broad application, can support or eliminate variables, and can be used to predict phenomenon and discover causal relationships. The industry literature purports to deliver the antecedents to customer evangelism; however, it does not use the appropriate methodology to do so. There are few, if any, published studies of an empirical nature focusing on consumer religiosity, and customer evangelism specifically. Quantitative analysis is required to engage in predicting behaviour and generalising results (Flyvbjerg, 2001; Meier, 2006).

Until the studies in this thesis, there were no published literature reviews, theoretical bases, conceptual models or other foundations for an empirical study. The lack of
theoretical, conceptual and empirical analysis of customer evangelism endangers the validity of the concept. Even though industry pundits have touted customer evangelism as a marketing strategy for over 30 years, and scholarly researchers have discussed the phenomenon, there has yet to be support for the concept through a variety of methodologies and repeated testing. Practitioners have been using customer evangelism as part of marketing strategies for decades; however, there has not yet been a scientific basis to determine whether the concept actually exists, much less whether it works.

The contribution of this thesis is to discover and develop a scholarly space for customer evangelism, with authentic roots in religious evangelism. By using theories describing religious behaviour, and applying them to consumer collectivism on a personal and collective level, this thesis takes the “evangelism” moniker seriously. This thesis builds on the work of researchers in the discipline of Consumer Culture Theory (E. J. Arnould & C. J. Thompson, 2005). Those researchers have used the same techniques to explore consumer culture as have been taken with other examination of culture. This thesis starts with a theoretical description of religious collectivism and then uses that framework to richly describe consumer religiosity and customer evangelism. This kind of explorations of religious and customer evangelism does three things. First, whether ‘evangelism’ is an appropriate word for the phenomenon will depend on how closely it mirrors religious evangelism. Second, developing a theoretical basis for customer evangelism from a religious studies framework builds an authentic foundation for further exploration of the phenomenon. Finally, the perspective presented in the following papers is that the lines between spiritual culture and consumer culture have become blurred. Consumer culture presupposes that people can author their own identities through their consumption and identification with commercial products. Commercial entities appropriate powerful cultural
symbols in an effort to imbue their product/brand experiences with heightened meaning. At the same time, people in a spiritual context appropriate religious symbols out of the theological context, in a consumption approach to their spiritual life. While traditional community religious and secular organisation membership is declining, non-traditional organisations are reforming and increasing. These include evangelical churches, online communities and consumer collectives.

Over 30 years ago, when Kawasaki took the sales job at Apple Computer, Apple was not looking for salespeople—they were looking for evangelists. When Kawasaki sought to describe the behaviour of Apple fanatics as customer evangelists, he did the same thing: appropriated spiritual symbols to imbue particular, significant meaning. This kind of co-opting of religious language in a marketing context has become more and more common as the lines between consumer culture and social culture have blurred or even disappeared. Religions are consumed as products, while symbolism is appropriated from a religious context to imbue stronger meaning to material existence (Miller, 2003).

It is important to note that the mere appropriation of religious terms in a marketing context does not constitute consumer religiosity. Calling Kawasaki an ‘evangelist’ did not make him a better salesperson. Rather, it established an expectation of him and reflected the organisational culture of Apple at that time. Likewise, calling one’s customers ‘evangelists’ does not make them spread more WOM. Rather, it describes a particular set of characteristics among passionate customers who tend to act in a particular way. Customer evangelists have specific, deeply rooted intrinsic motivations. The papers in this thesis use qualitative and quantitative techniques to support the managerial implications of having customer evangelists, and demonstrate that there are cases in which customers do feel so
engaged in a product that the term ‘evangelist’ is appropriate, as the religious and consumer contexts run parallel to each other.

This thesis develops an authentic perspective on the theoretical basis of consumer religiosity and customer evangelism, and results in one of the first qualitative studies on customer evangelism and consumer religiosity. The contribution of this thesis is to conduct the groundwork on customer evangelism that has been missing since Selling the Dream was published in 1991. The solid foundation for customer evangelism is drawn from the literature in religious studies, philosophy, anthropology, tourism, psychology and, of course, marketing. From that foundation, a conceptual model is developed. Along with this foundation is an exploration of authenticity in a consumer collective context, clarifying one of the more challenging aspects of the model. Finally, an empirical exploration of customer evangelism is conducted, providing quantitative evidence for many, but not all, of the claims made by Kawasaki in 1991 and the books that came afterwards. This thesis is a jumping off point. It sets the groundwork and develops investigations into customer evangelism. The result aims to be a more robust scholarly approach to phenomenon, with more evidence-based generalisable findings for practitioners.
References


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THE FIFTH SECTION, submitted for publication in 2013, quantitatively tests claims about customer evangelism (A).

(A) Evangelists have four essential traits, as identified in the literature [SECTION 1] and tested in this thesis’ empirical study [SECTION 5]: they belong to formal or informal CONSUMER COLLECTIVES, have QUINTESSENCE (arising from a TRANSFORMATIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE), are AUTHENTICALLY CONNECTED to the brand/product/users and spread EXTREME levels of WORD OF MOUTH.

(C) Consumer Collectives are analogous to religious congregations’ (COMMUNITAS) interactions with their churches (CIVITAS). The CIVITAS has a visionary POET who articulates the AUTHENTIC SACRED MYSTERY at the centre of the collective through their product/brand vision/experience. Consumers the most strongly identified with the product are FOLLOWERS. FANS are products followers without QUINTESSENCE who are still part of the collective. CASUAL USERS, NON-USERS and HATERS of the product sit outside the consumer collective.
2 Customer Evangelism: A Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

[Customer] Evangelism is much more powerful than advertising because Evangelism says ‘I believe this and if you join me in this belief … something exciting is going to happen. It is going to be great for me and for you’. (Kawasaki, 1991, p. 114)

2.1.1 Kawasaki’s story.

In the 1980s, Kawasaki started working for Apple Computer. He was employed to promote the new Macintosh Apple operating system to software developers to encourage them to develop products for the revolutionary new graphical user interface. In the nascent personal computing industry, his job title generally would have included the words ‘marketing’ or ‘sales’. However, Apple was seeking more than a salesperson, and Kawasaki’s business card had a one-word job title under his name: ‘evangelist’ (Kawasaki, 1991).

Apple Computer was the first to use the word ‘evangelist’ in a marketing context. By giving Apple staff this title, they were sowing the seeds of their expectations: zealotry, devotion and the search for salvation in the new MacOS (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Kawasaki, 1991). The term ‘evangelist’ is now frequently used as a job title for positions in marketing and technology. A recent (December 2012) search for the word ‘evangelist’ in a vertical job search engine (simplyhired.com) resulted in over 2,600 jobs with the word ‘evangelist’ in the title.

Kawasaki was amazed by the passion that Apple staff had for their products. However, he was more struck by the passion of some of the customers. ‘Macheads’ are to
Apple Computer what ‘Trekkies’ are to the Star Trek franchise (Kawasaki, 1991; Shelly, 2008): obsessive, emotionally connected customers for whom the product/brand is a significant part of their identity. Once he left Apple, Kawasaki published a manifesto, hoping to guide other products and brands to developing zealous customers of their own. Unsurprisingly, he called the zealous customers ‘evangelists’ (Kawasaki, 1991).

Kawasaki claimed that customer evangelists are akin to religious evangelists. They are an unpaid volunteer army of product/brand users who spread WOM. They are indefatigable, tireless and effective because they believe in the product/brand in the same way religious evangelists believe in their religion. Kawasaki posited that the same intrinsically motivated, effective, unpaid sales force could exist for almost any company or cause if producers/firms went about their business in a particular way (Kawasaki, 1991).

Kawasaki’s book created a new concept in the marketing industry. Although the notion of WOM was not new (Dichter, 1966), the idea of customer collectives—such as brand communities (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001), subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), brand cults (Schlanger & Bhasin, 2013) and so forth—had not yet been proposed. Consumer religiosity had also not been introduced beyond the sociology of obsessed fandom for sports, rock bands and technology (Jenkins, 1992; Kozinets, 2001). Kawasaki was one of the first to articulate that a customer’s obsession with a product was a commercially productive behaviour that could be leveraged as a marketing strategy across any product category (Kawasaki, 1991).

2.1.2 Customer evangelism: Thirty years of anecdotes and observations.

Although Selling the Dream is accessible in its language and introduces captivating ideas, it is, by its own admission, a collection of Kawasaki’s observations. Kawasaki was the first to articulate the phenomenon, and is thus still considered the key expert in the field
During the 1990s, Kawasaki was invited to return to Apple to galvanise customer evangelists as part of their marketing strategy (Shelly, 2008). His legend in the field lives on today. As recently as 2013, he was giving webinars on creating customer evangelists, this time promoting evangelism using social media tools (Vocus, 2013).

Evangelism started to lose its religious connotation the more it was used in business contexts. Industry books touted evangelism as part of radical marketing strategies, or as strategies in and of themselves (Hill & Rifkin, 1999; McConnel & Huba, 2007). The most recent book was released in 2012, from a consultant whose firm is called the Evangelism Marketing Institute (Goldfayn, 2012). The Evangelism Marketing Institute (http://www.evangelistmktg.com/services/consulting/) claims that they use ‘proven techniques’ to help their clients create evangelists among their consumers. However, a survey of the literature demonstrates very little has been proven to date. Blogs, videos, tweets, websites, podcasts and so forth discuss customer evangelism with anecdotal evidence, and offer prescriptive advice about turning customers into evangelists.

Consultants giving prescriptive advice based on little theoretical scientific or international evidence to support their claims are not extraordinary. What is perhaps more extraordinary is the enthusiasm with which the scholarly community embraced customer evangelism, despite it having no additional supporting evidence beyond anecdotes from the industry.

At the turn of the century, scholarly articles explored customer evangelism as an aside to something else: the rise of social media (Rothschild et al., 2007), WOM marketing (Seeberger, Schwarting, & Meiners, 2010), consumer collectivism (Foux, 2005) or as part of viral marketing models (Rothschild et al., 2007; Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). These references to customer evangelism did not provide any additional clarification of
what they meant by the phenomenon, nor did they provide evidence for it. They mention it more as a *fait accompli*. Only one author used sound case study techniques to explore the effects of customer evangelism (Rao, 2002).

During the 30 years since customer evangelism was introduced, the concept has flown from anecdote to anecdote, then jumped to conclusions and prescriptive advice. The adolescence of a concept—involving theoretical development, conceptual development, taxonomy development, and qualitative and quantitative testing—does not exist for the customer evangelism concept. Both industry and scholarly authors accept the conventional wisdom originally developed by Kawasaki: customer evangelism exists; it is good; and it is possible for producers to create it, or at least influence it.

A critical review of the customer evangelism literature raises questions. For example, is customer evangelism a pithy way of describing opinion leaders (Rogers, 1983)? Does the concept have its own unique definition and topology? Can any product be evangelised (as is suggested in the industry publications) or are there products that are so mundane they cannot be elevated to such sacred status? Is a customer evangelist someone who is naturally inclined towards generating WOM marketing? Are they someone galvanised into action by the product experience? What proportion of the customer population can be expected to be customer evangelists? Would this number change depending on the product category? If someone is an evangelist for one product, can they be an evangelist for others? How much like religious evangelism is customer evangelism? Do they have the same antecedents and outcomes? Are customer evangelists effective at convincing people to use products? Finally, of course, how much influence do firms have in the creation and behaviour of evangelism?
This study commences with a review of the claims made in the literature and the methodologies used to make those claims. A definition of customer evangelism is developed based on religious evangelism, and the customer evangelism industry and scholarly literature. Illustrative anecdotes from the literature are shared to demonstrate the range of evangelism experiences. Finally, the contributions of the papers in this thesis for the customer evangelism literature are outlined.

2.2 Customer Evangelism in the Literature

If you have an enchanting product or service, evangelists will find you. If you are selling crap, then it is hard to find evangelists to work with you. The essence is … create something great. The evangelists will find you. (Kawasaki, 2004)

2.2.1 Industry publications about customer evangelism.

Most industry authors are business consultants and professional speakers. They have blogs, Twitter feeds and connect through social media such as Facebook. The books, blogs and websites follow the same theme: they are collections of anecdotes and case studies, mainly of businesses in the United States (US), who have an extraordinary following. Authors formulate advice for producers about how to engender such adoration from their customers by putting together principles based on these cases. Scientific methodologies are not employed in the development of any models, nor are there follow-ups with quantitative or qualitative testing. However, the books include excellent examples of evangelism, both in terms of the breadth and depth of the phenomenon and the commonalities between cases. Market Rebels (Rao, 2008) seems to be the only book targeted towards industry in which the researcher has also published related work in scholarly journals. This book includes
case studies about customer evangelists; however, the book’s topic is broader than evangelism.

There is growing interest in consumer religiosity by independent documentary filmmakers who make films exploring consumer subcultures, such as the consumer collectives of Macintosh evangelists (Shelly, 2008). Dramatic films also are exploring consumer collectives, such as obsessions with Apple products, Star Wars and Star Trek (Newman, 2008). These films demonstrate how customer evangelism forms part of the landscape of consumer religiosity, as well as how consumer religiosity and customer evangelism also forms the landscape of modern society and individual identity in Western culture.

2.2.2 Scholarly publications mentioning customer evangelism.

During the late twentieth century, there was growth in marketing-related research regarding consumer religiosity, and the sacredness as a construct in a profane context (Belk, 1988, 2012; Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Miller, 2003; Muniz & Schau, 2005; Porter & McLaren, 1999). Secular evangelism, marketing evangelism or customer evangelism has been mentioned in scholarly publications in a manner that suggests that readers should be familiar with the phenomenon (Foux, 2005; Rao, 2002; Rothschild et al., 2007; Seeberger et al., 2010; Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). Specific definitions vary, but follow the same theme: that customer evangelism is a combination of consumer religiosity and WOM.

Customer evangelists are commonly understood as unpaid salespeople who reach potential customers at the moment when they have a need for the product, and introduce the product as a solution to a problem (Foux, 2005). A customer evangelist has personal buy-in
to the success of a product or brand. As they perceive that they have co-ownership of the brand, obtaining new users for the product is a win–win situation for the customer evangelist and the company. A customer evangelist does need to be a high-level purchaser or to even purchase at all in order to provide value to the producer. An evangelist delivers value through WOM marketing. The evangelist’s ability to generate revenue indirectly is the key advantage for producers (Rothschild et al., 2007).

Customer evangelists are characterised by loyalty, voluntary recommending and feedback, and consequently ensure a continuous reference program (Seeberger et al., 2010). ‘Motivated evangelism’ refers to when individuals recommend products that have enhanced benefits when both individuals are users—such as Facebook or Skype (Subramani & Rajagopalan, 2003). Different kinds of evangelism are built on the same premise: that a customer is so enamoured by a product that it becomes elevated to a sacred status. They are then intrinsically motivated to involve others in the product. This core definition is reflected in all the definitions and applications of customer evangelism in both the industry and scholarly literature, as discussed in this section. However, questions remain: Is ‘evangelism’ the appropriate word to describe customers who react so positively to product experiences that they attempt to engage others with religious zeal? How closely does customer evangelism align with religious evangelism? By delving into religious evangelism, which started with the early Christian Church, parallels can be found and the case for customer evangelism can be strengthened.
2.3 Religious Evangelism: The Early Christian Church and the Apostle Paul

Religions merit our attention for their sheer conceptual ambition; for changing the world in a way few secular institutions ever have … for those interested in the spread and impact of ideas, it is hard not to be mesmerized by the example of the most successful educational and intellectual movements the planet has ever witnessed. (de Botton, 2012)

As a grassroots movement, the early Christian Church stands out as a formidable case. Christianity transformed from a disparate group of outlawed, underground cults to a nationally endorsed religion in roughly 300 years—a quick reconfiguration for that era (Green, 1970). To grasp how remarkable the spread of Christianity is, one should note that the adoption of the religion was among largely illiterate and poor populations, against the wishes of the establishment. At that time in history, there was no broadcast media, no advertising, and little communication beyond WOM. Roads connecting communities were travelled mostly on foot. Yet the Christian message spread so quickly, and so strongly, that it became a tide that could not be turned.

What later became known as Christianity was, in its formative years, a series of sub-communities who argued that the messiah awaited by Jewish people had arrived. However, for the sake of clarity in this literature review, the term ‘Christianity’ is used to describe the dominant sub-community before it was technically known as such. This will also exclude from reference the other smaller and less well-known Christ-centred cults.

Christianity in its predominant form was developed on a foundation laid by Paul, who is often referred to as the first evangelist. The brief background on Paul in this section
focuses on his contributions to evangelism, rather than his significant other contributions to the religion and Western culture. Paul was born Jewish, and there is evidence that he was also a citizen of Rome. An educated and literate man, he had Rabbinical training (common for Jewish men at the time) and was fluent in many languages and the literature of the day, as well as the classics. He was a businessman and well-travelled. Before his conversion experience, he worked with the Roman government to identify and prosecute followers of Christ’s teachings—a task he later admitted he completed willingly and with great zeal (Cate, 2006). Polytheists, such as the Romans, did not concern themselves with Jewish cults beyond their potential to destabilise the economic and political status quo in the region where they were the dominant religion. Paul, on behalf of the Empire, helped eliminate Christian uprisings through the Romans’ brutal means, until, one day, he had a conversion experience of his own (Cate, 2006; Green, 1970).

Before adoption as the official religion of Rome, Christianity was a decentralised movement without a hierarchy or canon (Miller, 2003). Paul developed philosophies, practices and methods to further promulgate his brand of Christianity. He broadened the target market for conversions. As a result, Paul is widely held responsible for bringing his version of Christianity out of the shadows of Judaism and into a religion of its own (Green, 1970). Before Paul, decentralisation and prosecution made evangelising Christianity a struggle. Most Christian cults were targeting a limited and tough audience: Jewish people. When they preached to Jewish people that some of their most deeply held traditions were not necessary, such as circumcision and dietary laws, there were few willing to convert to Christianity. The practices the Jewish people were encouraged to abandon went to the very heart of how they identified themselves, and thus abandonment of them was not palatable (Green, 1970).
Paul was a privileged individual because he was a Roman citizen and could straddle cultures. His extensive travel made him aware of the opportunities beyond the Jewish world. After preaching to Jewish people without much success, he developed a strategy that worked far better—he targeted gentiles (non-Jewish people). This approach dealt with a barrier that existed in previous evangelism efforts: if one was to be Christian, one had to be Jewish first. As Jewish people seldom allowed conversions, this limited the market for the Christian message to existing Jewish people. However, Paul took a bold step—by indicating that gentiles could convert to Christianity, he set Christianity apart as its own religion. The result was that gentiles embraced the new religion in much greater numbers (Green, 1970).

He spent the rest of his life encouraging his fellow evangelists to spread the message to everyone who would listen—no matter the cost to their personal safety. Specifically, he gave them a methodology to do so based on the practices and philosophies he developed. He put evangelists in touch with each other, visited local Christians, and groomed some Christians to become evangelists themselves. By doing so, he created communities with rituals, social norms, hierarchies and mythologies (Cate, 2006). The detail and richness of Paul’s work is vast, and his methodologies are echoed in the marketing perspective of evangelism in several key ways. If one deconstructs Paul from a customer evangelism perspective, based on the literature to date, one can find several parallels between the definition of an evangelist and Paul’s experience.

2.4 The Four Key Elements of Customer Evangelists

It is within your power to experience a crowded, loud, slow, consumer-hell-type situation as not only meaningful but sacred, on fire with the same force that lit the
stars … Not that that mystical stuff’s necessarily true: the only thing that’s capital-T True is that you get to decide how you’re going to try to see it. You get to consciously decide what has meaning and what doesn’t. You get to decide what to worship. (Wallace, 2009)

By amalgamating the evangelism literature and the customer evangelism literature, four key elements emerge as necessary and sufficient for customer evangelism to be present.

2.4.1 Evangelists have quintessence (religiosity).

Philosopher David Foster Wallace (2009) proposed that sacredness is a moment of reconfiguration—a choice to delve beyond meaning in everyday situations. This reconfiguration may occur under a variety of circumstances; however, the one he explored in detail is witnessing something extraordinary, such as a gifted athlete performing physical feats unattainable to even the best in the game.

In his article for the New York Times Magazine (2006), Wallace posited that Roger Federer’s performance in tennis is similar to Michael Jordan’s performance in basketball, and other singularly influential athletes. Through their physical genius, they reconfigure the idea of what is possible in the game. For those who have an appreciation of tennis, Wallace posited, watching Federer can be a religious experience. Wallace stated that if one has an understanding of what is physically possible for even a world-class tennis athlete to achieve, then watching Federer can create a feeling of sacredness—it can be a transcendent customer experience (TCE).

A field experiment of a live brand community event demonstrated that certain peak- and-flow experiences can result in subjective self-transformation. These experiences were
reconfiguring ones, where the result was a strengthened tie with the brand, product and the brand community for certain participants who were not yet part of the community (Schouten, McAlexander, & Koenig, 2007). The industry literature indicates that a sense of community reinforces and feeds evangelistic behaviour (Goldfayn, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007).

In a more recent publication on consumer religiosity, Belk (2012) reinforced Wallace’s view. During some consumption activity, an extra layer of meaning can develop. This meaning can imbue a profane object with sacredness. Belk called this type of sacredness ‘quintessence’, and demonstrated that it is intrinsically constructed through the consumer’s perception of the product interaction, independent of the producer’s intent. Some objects have quintessence due to the context within which they are acquired, such as family heirlooms or gifts. Some have quintessence due to their rarity, especially when in a collection, such as a baseball card or coin. Some mass-produced objects have meaning due to the way they strike the consumer: as perfect in form and function (Belk et al., 1989). In all cases, quintessence is not something built in to the product by the producer.

An example of quintessence unrelated to customer evangelism is the conflagration of Coca-Cola with American nationalism. In the 1980s, when ‘New Coke’ was launched, part of the backlash against the new product came from American veterans who drank Coca-Cola when they were serving overseas. They saw Coca-Cola as being an American drink, bound up in American symbolism. Angry letters written to the company indicated that, to these veterans, changing the formula was akin to burning the American flag on their front lawn (Pendergast, 2000). An example of quintessence relating to evangelism, quite literally, is a recent study of participants in faith-based volunteer tourism. The respondents
who indicated that the experience changed their life were also the most likely to encourage others to volunteer for the same organisation (Collins & Murphy, 2013a).

Quintessence sets customer evangelism apart from other types of extreme WOM generation, such as mavens (Walsh, Gwinner, & Swanson, 2004), opinion leaders (Rogers, 1983), connectors and salesmen (Gladwell, 2000). Previous research has demonstrated that one can categorise extreme WOM generators as knowledgeable (mavens), influential (opinion leaders), charismatic (salesmen) and socially connected (connectors). However, they do not, as an essential characteristic, have quintessence or perceive the brand or product as sacred.

Taking Belk’s assessment, one can surmise that any product can evoke quintessence—from the rare object d’art to mass-produced items that strike the consumer in a particular way. However, in the many anecdotes and case studies about customer evangelism, certain types of products dominate: they are either innovative (such as automobiles or online entertainment rental services) or offer a potential for a unique brand experience in the product category (such as Apple Computer, Krispy Kreme doughnuts or Southwest Airlines).

Although the quantitative evidence is not comprehensive (Collins, Glaebe, & Murphy, 2012), the qualitative literature claims that the number of evangelists is low, in both religious and customer evangelism. Although exact figures of evangelists have yet to be mooted, religious evangelist numbers are estimated as below 2%, even though 99% of Christians believe that it is every Christian’s responsibility to convert more Christians ("Evangelism Statistics," 2009).
2.4.2 Authenticity and the evangelist.

Authenticity has been extensively researched in fields such as philosophy (Golomb, 2002; Trilling, 1974), psychology (Guignon, 2002) and tourism (Collins & Murphy, 2010; Gamin, 2004; Steiner & Reisinger, 2006; Wang, 1999). Authenticity is also an area of rising interest in marketing, touted as the new consumer sensibility (Gilmore & Pine, 2007). Authenticity has also been discussed as a marketing strategy (Lewis & Bridger, 2000; Peterson, 2005). The literature on authenticity agrees that the perception of authenticity is positive and has a halo effect on the producer–product–customer relationship. However, the literature is inconclusive about the definition of authenticity, and is much less conclusive on how to develop, implement and measure authenticity.

A 360 degree approach (360da) to authenticity, which includes components of authenticity previously explored in philosophy, psychology, tourism and marketing, has been offered as a holistic, if complex, definition (Collins & Murphy, 2010) with movement towards qualitative measurement of authenticity (Collins, Watts, & Murphy, 2011).

From the perspective of customer evangelism, authenticity is key to several aspects. The concept of authenticity is central to Paul’s experience. It is also a topic of debate and discussion in varying fields, such as philosophy, psychology, management, tourism, the arts and anthropology. Marketing literature is also increasingly focusing on authenticity as a marketing strategy.

Paul felt that it is not enough to believe—it is essential that an evangelist is authentic in their actions as well. This became known as the ‘life and lip’ approach. An evangelist would live the gospel first (life) and then talk about it to others (lip). The power of the message was bound to the authenticity of the messenger. This authenticity remains
CONSUMER RELIGIOSITY AND CUSTOMER EVANGELISM

the case with Christian evangelists today. Evangelists must be authentic observers of the perspective they are attempting to promote, otherwise this reflects poorly on them and their message. In Paul’s time, life and lip was a new idea. In his era, religion was bound up with individuals’ socioeconomic identity. Paul explicitly wrote about the requirement of having a sincere belief and acting in accordance with that belief (Coleman, 1963; Green, 1970).

In the *Master Plan of Evangelism* (Coleman, 1963), a book considered a bedrock guide for modern Christian evangelists, the life and lip approach is extolled as the only way an evangelist can operate. Paul’s emphasis on authenticity carries through to this day. In this book, Coleman presents another point: there can only ever be very few who are up to, or can take on, such a task. However, their effect can be great: evangelists can carry many others with them through their personal power.

Based on the ideas of Kierkegaard, Camus and Heidegger, modern psychology views authenticity as an existential connection to a holistic self, as opposed to the constructed identity in the everyday world (Guignon, 2002). Paul gained acclaim among the Romans and Jewish hierarchy by persecuting Christians. His education and culture worked together to propel him in this successful direction. His conversion reconfigured his view and transcended his programming and cultural expectations. From a religious perspective, this is the miracle of Paul’s conversion. From a psychological perspective, Paul changed and subsequently acted in a way that was emotionally and spiritually authentic—he was true to himself. This phrase, which is taken from Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, is one that the father of modern authenticity uses to describe, but not define, authenticity (Trilling, 1974).

The literature on customer evangelism indicates that an organisation must be authentic in order to promote a meaningful level of engagement with its customers (Goldfayn, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007). The emphasis in the industry
literature is mainly on objective authenticity (truthfulness) and constructive authenticity (cultural appropriateness). Existential authenticity (Collins & Murphy, 2010; Wang, 1999) is discussed vis-à-vis consumer collectives, of which evangelists are often a part. The authenticity literature posits that authentic messages are intrinsically motivated, and are appropriate in both the source and the context and channel of delivery (Beverland, 2005; Gilmore & Pine, 2007).

2.4.3 Evangelists spread extreme WOM.

For the latter part of his life, Paul was dedicated to spreading the word of God. From a religious perspective, this type of activity is called ‘mission’ (Hiebert, 2008)—another word that has crossed over into many secular uses. Interestingly, although Paul seemed to be quite convincing in person, his pronounced effect on Christianity relied mainly on asynchronous, recorded communication—his letters and other writings. This allowed him to reach audiences beyond his geographical area and his life.

In a similar way, the internet and social marketing has created opportunities for consumers to self-publish and self-broadcast. Customer evangelists have become more powerful because there are fewer barriers to broad audiences. A customer evangelist no longer has to rely on their networks alone; they can leverage the internet and social media to preach to contacts outside their social circle (Goldfayn, 2012).

Extreme WOM generation is a key defining characteristic of an evangelist, but is not the only defining characteristic. However it is this dedication to spreading WOM that makes the evangelist so attractive to firm to cultivate. The value of WOM is not only in the amount of “free” advertising it generates (Kumar, Petersen, & Leone, 2007), but also in its use as a proxy for brand equity, as in the Net Promoter Score concept (Reichheld, 2003).
The consequence of this is that individuals who spread higher levels of WOM have a disproportionate effect on the firm’s ability to meet their goals. As a consequence, and especially with the rise of digital means of communication, the last twenty years have seen an increased examination of people who generate more than average WOM; especially positive WOM. The industry and scholarly literature have both crafted terms to describe generators of extreme WOM. These concepts are contrasted to customer evangelism in Table 1.
Table 1

*Comparison of Extreme WOM Generators*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Key reference</th>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>Contrast to evangelism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opinion leaders</td>
<td>Gladwell (2000), Rogers (1983)</td>
<td>A person who is respected in the community, who diffuses messages for others in the community.</td>
<td>Evangelists need not be held in high esteem by the community, or be considered particularly knowledgeable about the product. Others do not necessarily hold evangelists in high esteem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mavens</td>
<td>Gladwell (2000), Walsh et al. (2004)</td>
<td>A person who is acknowledged by the community as being knowledgeable, or an expert, on a particular subject. Usually they provide peer support to others regarding a product/brand on a voluntary basis. Their attachment to the product/brand is a rational, considered choice based on the options available.</td>
<td>Evangelists are not necessarily very knowledgeable about a brand/product, nor are they considered more knowledgeable than the average user. Evangelists are engaged in a product/brand based on an emotional/spiritual attachment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salespeople</td>
<td>Gladwell (2000)</td>
<td>Similar to an opinion leader, salespeople diffuse information for others. However, their power rests in their charisma and perceived credibility.</td>
<td>Evangelists are not necessarily charismatic.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fan or fanboy/girl</td>
<td>Gray, Sandvoss and Harrington (2007); Newman (2008); Pustz (1999); Redden and Steiner (2000)</td>
<td>Fans have an authentic attachment to the product/brand that is, in some cases, extreme (fanboys/girls). In extreme cases, they are heavily opinionated towards their product/brand and rationally defend it. Usually fans (fanboys/girls) have a high level of knowledge about the product/brand; however, this is not necessary. Fans do not necessarily spread WOM as a defining characteristic.</td>
<td>Evangelists are very similar to fans; however, evangelists by definition spread extreme WOM, while fans do not. Fans are also not necessarily attached to the product/brand in as zealous a manner as evangelists, and fans do not necessarily use their own resources to promote the product/brand.</td>
</tr>
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None of the above terms are mutually exclusive—for example, one can be an opinion leader and a customer evangelist. However, one may be a customer evangelist and may not be an opinion leader. A survey of extreme WOM generators demonstrates that
customer evangelism is its own discrete phenomenon based on a specific set of traits and behaviours beyond WOM generation.

### 2.4.4 Evangelism happens within a formal or informal collective.

The term ‘consumer collective’ is an umbrella for a phenomenon that has risen to prominence in marketing research since the late twentieth century (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Variously called ‘brand communities’ (Cova, Pace, & Park, 2007; McAlexander et al., 2002; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009), ‘subcultures of consumption’ (Chalmers & Arthur, 2008; Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), ‘consumer tribes’ (Shanker, Cova, & Kozinets, 2007) and ‘brand cults’ (Belk & Tumtab, 2005), consumer collectives are groups who form for the specific purpose of celebrating a brand or product. These groups may not be geographically based, but often will attempt to meet face to face on a regular basis to further engage with other product users and perhaps the producer.

The industry literature on customer evangelism claims that consumer collectives create an environment in which customer evangelists can be identified, developed and nurtured (Goldfayn, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007). The collective provides a sense of community and reinforces passion for the brand through the activities and communication of the group. The groups generally form around product/brands with strong images, a rich history and a competitive marketplace (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001) The consumer collective members share common beliefs and values, along with unique and specific jargon, rituals and modes of symbolic expression. Each group has their own hierarchy, based on participation in group activities, brand expertise and individual commitment to the group’s consumption values (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).
There is evidence that participation in consumer collectives reinforces emotional ties to the brand. The community also fosters an environment of brand trust, support and loyalty through the peer support available in the group setting (Casalo, Flavian, & Guinaliu, 2007; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten et al., 2007). Consumption then becomes an organising force. Groups of people sharing a personal identification with the product or brand then develop a tribal identity that is also based around the consumption of the product category (Kozinets, Hemetsberger, & Schau, 2008). This behaviour can become elitist or cultish (Belk & Tumbat, 2005).

Research suggests that consumer collectives tend to have hard-core members who exhibit extreme commitment. These members have characteristics that include:

- objectification: objects are viewed as sacred through a transcendental frame of reference
- commitment: an individual’s attachment to the subcultural identity
- sacrifice: resources are foregone in order to engage in the subcultural activity
- mystery: the sacred cannot be understood cognitively—including the individual’s own attachment to the brand
- ecstasy: the consumer’s experiences are emotionally intense peak-and-flow experiences (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Chalmers & Arthur, 2008; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

Although customer evangelists are often members of consumer collectives, being a member of a consumer collective does not mean that one is driven to share WOM or leverage personal resources to engage others in the product/brand. This characteristic of an evangelist makes them a unique subgroup of the consumer collective community.
2.5 Customer Evangelism Case Studies

2.5.1 The Mayor of Southwest Airlines: The story of one evangelist.

Rich Marcotte, a marketing director, travelled frequently on business. He usually flew a round trip out of Chicago several times per week, and always did so with Southwest Airlines when he could. Travelling with Southwest Airlines—a low-cost, no-frills airline—made good business sense. As one would expect, Marcotte became well known to the Southwest staff in his most frequently visited cities (McConnel & Huba, 2007).

Marcotte never worked for Southwest, nor was he ever compensated by Southwest for his behaviour at the gate and with other passengers when travelling. However, a friend nicknamed him ‘The Mayor of Southwest Airlines’ because he took it upon himself to evangelise about Southwest to other passengers who may have been less fervent about the airline (McConnel & Huba, 2007). He also took it upon himself to calm upset passengers due to travel problems. He spoke to passengers in the waiting area about the frequent flyer program. He assisted new Southwest travellers with the unique Southwest boarding system. He discussed the benefits of travelling Southwest to people who were not Southwest travellers. Marcotte estimates that he spoke positively about Southwest to approximately 9,000 people at airports around the company just during his travel time alone (McConnel & Huba, 2007).

If Marcotte was simply satisfied with his Southwest experience, he may not have reacted with the passion about the brand that he did—something about the Southwest experience clicked with Marcotte. During his life, Southwest Airlines did more than relocate him from place to place safely. It appealed to him on an emotional, even spiritual, level. To Marcotte, Southwest was what an airline should be.
The customer evangelism literature uses examples such as this to demonstrate the profound energy customer evangelists have. The literature also posits that the effect customer evangelists have is exponentially greater than their resource cost to the producer. However, until such claims are tested beyond case studies and anecdotes, it is difficult to determine the validity of that claim. The following section reviews the gaps in the customer evangelism literature and the contribution of this thesis towards closing that gap.

2.5.2 Customer evangelists as early adopters.

Constitutive legitimacy is the general public adoption of an innovation. This is also known as the ‘bandwagon stage’ (Rogers, 1983). In the late 1800s, the automobile was struggling for constitutive legitimacy. Fuel stations were scarce, automobiles were unreliable, and parts were hard to attain as mass production had not yet commenced. Roads were not designed for automobiles—roads had no traffic lights or markings, poor surfacing and potholes, and no common set of road rules, which made automobiles dangerous for passengers, as well as pedestrians and horses (Rao, 2002).

Early adopters are captivated by a new technology, and often work with producers to iron out the wrinkles and help a product find larger acceptance. An early adopter understands that the product is imperfect in its nascent stages, but has faith in the product innovators to continually progress the product. Early adopters are not daunted; they often revel in the fact that they can spot new ideas before they are mainstream (Rogers, 1983). As with other technologies, there were early adopters of the automobile.

Most early adopters of the automobile organised into local automobile clubs. The automobile clubs included customer evangelists who used their resources and skills to stage reliability competitions. These were public events in which automobiles were put through a
series of tests to demonstrate their superiority to the horse in terms of reliability and speed (Rao, 2002). Automobile reliability tests were an excellent example of customer evangelism. The evangelists used their own resources for these tests because showcasing their authentic joy and zeal brought them pleasure. They were successful at enrolling others in their point of view about the future of transportation. These events were a form of entertainment for crowds, as WOM marketing often is (Lang, 2011). Finally, the manufacturers received feedback when their cars were tested. All this was done without the financial support of the manufacturers themselves (Rao, 2002).

The wider adoption of the automobile led to better manufacturing, road rules, the proliferation of fuel stations and eventually mass production. It is worth noting that, as the car was adopted widely, customer evangelists and their automobile clubs did not stop gathering or promoting, but their focus shifted. They become more brand-centric (Maynard, 2009; Schouten et al., 2007) and refined their scope to specific reliability tests relating to speed (Rao, 2002).

The customer evangelists named in the current study are also early adopters; however, not all customer evangelists are early adopters. For example, in the case of Apple Computer, early adopters formed Macintosh User Groups (MUGs) and engaged in behaviours analogous to those described above (Kawasaki, 1991; Shelly, 2008). Evangelists also remain committed to the product/brand, which is not always a positive if the producer wishes to change direction (Muniz & Schau, 2005). Customer evangelists can also engage in fanboy/girl-type behaviour, which can alienate wider markets for the product (Shelly, 2008).
2.5.3 The dark side of customer evangelism.

During the 1990s, Apple Computer was struggling. Steve Jobs had left the company and the management was producing what many saw as an expensive personal computer (PC). Educational and graphics companies, Apple’s mainstay consumers, were migrating towards more cost-efficient competitor platforms. Media outlets predicted Apple’s demise amid Apple’s plummeting sales and lack of vision. Kawasaki was brought back to Apple to mobilise Apple grassroots customers in a deliberate attempt to leverage Apple evangelism and shift the tide towards Apple (Shelly, 2008).

The hard-core Apple user community was, of course, sticking by the brand. It was easy to find the Apple evangelists because many belonged to formal user group communities. Kawasaki reached out on behalf of Apple and developed an evangel-list of the most active Apple zealots, and communicated with them to mobilise Apple’s front line. Whether it was attending a product launch, boycotting media who ran negative stories about Apple, or staging write-in campaigns to support Apple products, these evangelists were tireless. However, they were sometimes extreme in their motives to defend the Apple brand. Soon they did not need Kawasaki’s prompting, and acted on their own (Shelly, 2008).

It was during this time that Apple evangelists started to gain a reputation in the wider community as fanatical and aggressive. By the time Jobs returned to Apple, Kawasaki’s defensive strategy was abandoned because negative perceptions of Apple users were alienating new customers—a counterproductive result for the evangelists and the company. When Jobs returned, he channelled the zealous more positively by using the
evangelists to create enthusiasm for their new products, such as the colourful new iMac computers and, later, the iPhone (Shelly, 2008).

Another example of evangelism’s dark side can be found with Apple. An online community seethed that Apple abandoned a functioning, forward-thinking product—the Apple Newton Personal Digital Assistant (Muniz & Schau, 2005). When Apple abandoned the Newton, the hard-core collective stayed on, and resented the company for their abandonment. Evangelists were vocal in their support of the Newton, and in their disdain for what they felt was a betrayal by Apple.

2.5.4 The firm engaging customer evangelism through a consumer co-production model.

Unlike most bands, the Grateful Dead performed their songs differently at each show, which made each concert a unique experience. As a result, Grateful Dead fans (also called ‘Deadheads’) would attend multiple shows in a row, even travelling with the band from venue to venue, city to city, on tour. The more dedicated members of the Deadhead consumer collective could do this for months, or even years, with the Grateful Dead’s support. The band enabled this behaviour by relaxing copyright restrictions on their brand to allow their customer evangelists to create their own merchandise (to sell to other concertgoers), and also created a taping area at each concert where the sound was optimal for recording. These recorded live tapes could then be sold to fans. Like wine vintages, different Grateful Dead concerts became known for different techniques and experiences (Hill & Rifkin, 1999).

The band accomplished several things with this approach. First, they enabled their customers to buy more products (tickets) by partnering with their customer evangelists to
develop a sustainable lifestyle, while promoting their product (concerts). Second, they ensured that each concert was an experience that lay beyond the strict entry and exit of the concert hall. Like tailgating at a football game, the community of Deadheads spilled out into the parking lots and beyond. Newcomers to the Grateful Dead then had maximum exposure to the most faithful and enthusiastic evangelists welcoming them into the fold. Finally, the Grateful Dead community created a mystique about the band that enhanced their brand and viability even when they stopped touring. The Deadheads’ influence can be witnessed in the industries of food, fashion, art and other creative industries (Hill & Rifkin, 1999). This model of co-production has become more prevalent and public with the rise of Web 2.0 and social media. Customer evangelists are in a perfect position to leverage co-production opportunities and drive.

2.6 Contribution of this Thesis

The concept of customer evangelism has constitutive legitimacy. The term is used in industry and research publications, as has been outlined in this paper. This is likely because the phenomenon has been observed repeatedly and consistently over time. However, after 30 years in the industry consciousness, the time has come to test the claims made by industry and scholarly researchers.

Testing the claims made in the industry and scholarly literature is important for several reasons. It is not unusual for industry pundits to make unsubstantiated claims regarding the effectiveness of the techniques they espouse. However, once the scholarly literature begins referring to a concept, it is important that it has academic merit. Otherwise, practitioners who follow methods espoused in the industry and scholarly literature may be wasting their time on initiatives that do not work, while scholars are building concepts and
assumptions on untested ground. Espousing techniques that are unsupported when applied endangers the reputation and legitimacy of the scientific enterprise.

Moreover, the concept of customer evangelism has claimed a very specific intersection in the literature: consumer religiosity/WOM marketing/authenticity. These three areas in and of themselves have captured the imagination and interest of scholars and industry pundits alike for their promise to develop into a profitable marketing strategy. The sustained interest in customer evangelism with scant evidence demonstrates there is a will for the concept to be meaningful in application. This thesis, and the related published work arising from it, takes steps towards supporting customer evangelism as a concept. Thereafter, scholars and practitioners alike can move forward with the concept with more confidence than before. Until now, customer evangelism has been a leap of faith: something people believe in with little or no supporting evidence. This thesis addresses the following issues as its contribution.

2.6.1 The definition of customer evangelism.

Customer evangelism has not been defined in a manner that can lead to empirical testing or measurement. Although the definition of customer evangelism is consistent across all the literature, there is no measurable definition of the phenomenon that can lead to empirical measurement of whether evangelists exist, and what effects they might have.

This literature review amalgamates perspectives from the industry and scholarly literature on the definition of customer evangelism. This review generates a definition from the findings in the marketing literature and the religious literature. The final paper in the series, ‘Identifying Customer Evangelists’, applies the definition to a quantitative data set using the definition in this literature review. The results of the analysis support the
definition in this paper in this data set. The final paper also supports several other characteristics identified in the literature review.

The empirical data show that customer evangelism numbers are small. The literature is quantitative in nature and thus does not claim to know numbers of evangelists, although there are allusions that the numbers may parallel religious evangelists. Religious evangelism numbers are estimated as being 5% or less in some American studies. The empirical study in this thesis supports that customer evangelists may comprise less than 5% of the overall active customer population. However, whether the proportion of evangelists varies depending on the product is not something that can be determined by one empirical study, and is an area for future research.

2.6.2 **Theoretical basis for customer evangelism.**

There is little theory established about the customer evangelism phenomenon. This is surprising because a concept at the nexus of marketing and religiosity has many theoretical wellsprings to draw from. Related research is established in the areas of philosophy, religious studies, consumer culture theory (CCT), social network theory and marketing. A theoretical foundation for customer evangelism is important because theories attempt to explain behaviour, and then determine what can influence or change the behaviour once the theories are tested. A theoretical basis also gives researchers a direction in which to move forward with testing using different methodologies, in order to ensure that the results either support or do not support the overarching theory.

The first three papers in this thesis develop such a foundation for customer evangelism, drawing from several disciplines and aligning strongly with both marketing
and religious studies literature. This paper is the first in the series, reviewing the literature and identifying the lack of a theoretical basis for the customer evangelism concept.

The second paper in the series, ‘Playing the Infinite Game: Marketing in the Post-industrial Economy’, discusses the paradigm of customer co-creation of value and service-dominant logic (S-D Logic). This paradigm is the only one through which customer evangelism can be viewed, due to its ability to argue for differing consumer reactions to the same product. The metaphor of the infinite game used to develop an understanding of the operationalisation of S-D Logic is drawn from the religious studies literature, creating a connection between consumer religiosity and the creation of value in a consumer context.

The third paper in the series, ‘Communitas and Civitas: Modelling Consumer Collectives’, delves deeper into the metaphor of the infinite game and the *civitas/communitas* model of congregation engagement. This model, which is used to describe how religious organisations engage their audiences, is used here to detail the relationship between firms and their consumer collectives. Building on literature arising from the S-D Logic paradigm, the paper describes co-creation value networks. The paper also draws from the S-D Logic literature that describes markets as social constructs that are subject to the same power dynamics as other types of social networks.

The contribution of this paper is to use both religious studies literature and S-D Logic literature to describe the interactions between firms and their consumer collectives, including customer evangelists. Both this and the second paper collectively propose a theoretical basis for consumer religiosity, consumer collectivism, and subsequently customer evangelism.

The fourth paper in the series, ‘The *Hajj*: An Illustration of 360da’, examines the concept of authenticity more closely. In the marketing and religious studies literature,
authenticity and its definition, application and measurement remains an open question. This paper develops a 360° framework, developing a holistic model against which consumer experiences can be assessed for comprehensive authenticity. The process of developing the model takes the views of consumer collectives into account, and thus provides a theoretical context and definition for authenticity. This definition is applied in the case study discussed in the paper; however, it is also the basis for the application of authenticity in a quantitative context in the final paper.

2.6.3 Testing the customer evangelism model.

Customer evangelism is an attractive proposition to producers, yet its effects on the value network (giver, receiver and producer) have not previously been tested in an empirical manner. To date, case studies and anecdotes are the only related published work in the area. Although research comprised of social phenomena is more context-dependent than research in the natural or mechanistic world (Flyvbjerg, 2001), the current available research is limiting. Although propositions made by consultants and industry authors are untested, there is a stronger push than ever before by producers to leverage peer communication. As a result, marketers are keenly interested in the area of extreme WOM behaviour.

The final paper on this thesis, ‘Identifying Customer Evangelists’, takes a step towards empirical measurement by defining evangelism, developing a conceptual model of evangelism, and then testing that model with data sourced from an Australian online entertainment service. As far as the author is aware, this is the first work that attempts to test the claims about customer evangelism that have been made by industry and scholarly authors.
2.7 Conclusion

It is time to shift the focus away from anecdotes and case studies, and towards a research agenda comprised of different methodologies and a variety of foci. This should include the benefits and drawbacks of being a producer with customer evangelists. However, it should be richer than just the producer’s perspective—it should also include the evangelist’s perspective and the perspective of those who are the target of evangelism.
References


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CONSUMER RELIGIOSITY AND CUSTOMER EVANGELISM

A GUIDE TO THE SECTIONS OF THIS THESIS

THE FIRST SECTION is the literature review. It consolidates previous research on consumer religiosity and customer evangelists. It identifies the four unique, essential common traits of religious, and customer, evangelists (A).

THE SECOND SECTION, published in an academic journal in 2010, connects Carse’s Infinite Game with Service-Dominant Logic as a way of describing marketing in the post industrial economy, providing appropriate theoretical bases for consumer collectivity and the contemporary marketers’ mission to engage customers (B).

THE THIRD SECTION is accepted to an academic journal in 2013, and is under revision for publication. It further develops Carse’s Civitas/Communitas religious collectivity model, applying it to consumer religiosity, consumer collectivity and customer evangelism (C).

THE FOURTH SECTION, published in a peer-reviewed academic book in 2010, explores the role and application of authenticity in collective religious consumption experiences (D).

THE FIFTH SECTION, submitted for publication in 2013, quantitatively tests claims about customer evangelism (A).

CONSUMER COLLECTIVE (COMMUNITAS)

- Authentic, sacred feeling at centre of collective
- Brand followers (i.e. evangelists)
- Brand fans (i.e. mavens, opinion leaders)
- Brand casual users, non-users and haters

(C) Consumer Collectives are analogous to religious congregations’ (COMMUNITAS) interactions with their churches (CIVITAS). The CIVITAS has a visionary POET who articulates the AUTHENTIC SACRED MYSTERY at the centre of the collective through their product/brand vision/experience. Consumers the most strongly identified with the product are FOLLOWERS. FANS are products followers without QUINTESSENCE who are still part of the collective. CASUAL USERS, NON-USERS and HATERS of the product sit outside the consumer collective.

CUSTOMER EVANGELIST

(A) Evangelists have four essential traits, as identified in the literature [SECTION 1] and tested in this thesis’ empirical study [SECTION 5]: they belong to formal or informal CONSUMER COLLECTIVES, have QUINTESSENCE (arising from a TRANSFORMATIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE), are AUTHENTICALLY CONNECTED to the brand/product/users and spread EXTREME levels of WORD OF MOUTH.
Playing the infinite game: marketing in the post-industrial economy

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Abstract As traditional paradigms crack under pressure in the post-industrial economy, concepts about producer/customer relationships are taking centre stage. This paper uses the metaphor of an infinite game to richly and succinctly describe the interdependent relationship in the value co-creation paradigm. The paper explores implications stemming from shared power, a proposed ethos for academia and industry, and a further discussion. The authors also analyse the use of metaphor as a tool for richer understanding of new ideas.

Keywords Value co-creation, Brand communities, Consumer culture theory, Metaphor, Service-dominant logic

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between marketing’s academic and operational world is a close one. As the economic world evolves, so do academic fields. Drawing from various discussions in the academic world (Lusch et al. 2008; Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000; Vargo and Lusch 2004; Wikstrom 1996), the co-creation of value concept seems a fit for the rapidly changing industrial environment.

Indeed looking at Web 2.0 applications it seems obvious that mass customisation (Gilmore and Pine 2007), customer content development, social networking and the rise of Brand Communities (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001) and Consumer Tribes (Cova et al. 2007) are proof that the “invisible hand” economic models and the

*Correspondence details and biographies for the authors are located at the end of the article.
rational thought-based psychological models are no longer as tight a fit as they were thirty years ago. Humans are social beings and make decisions, including purchase decisions, based on social factors as well as psychological and economic ones (Rao 2008).

In order to understand the radical nature of co-creation, it is useful to take a brief look back at the traditional view of marketing and markets; the strong quantitative culture of business and industry and the perception by producers about power-sharing with consumers in value creation and brand ownership.

Moving toward a way of brokering the discussion between industry and academia, the authors will argue that the use of metaphor is particularly appropriate in this case. Then the metaphor of the “infinite game” (Carse 1986) will be introduced as a way of understanding the concept of value co-creation. Once the metaphor is established, the authors will cherry-pick instances in various industries where a co-creation/infinite game perspective was particularly useful and generated financially rewarding results. Finally, the authors will posit a way forward toward a new way of looking at relationships in the post-industrial world.

**A paradigm shift to co-creation**

The goods-based, economic, producer-centric approach of the Managerial Marketing Mix is catchy and easy to understand. Yet, the model favoured goods and failed to explain the dynamics of a person-to-person real-time interaction that was not mass-produced. Out of this conceptual gap arose Services Marketing theories (Sweeney 2007).

Services Marketing led to Relationship Marketing, as the role of the consumer took centre-stage in a theoretical and operational context. Previously prosperous industries were under threat by technological innovation, globalisation and increased competition. This threat is exemplified by the American Automobile industry. They have the dubious honour of failing to respond to rising fuel prices and increased safety concerns twice in thirty years, which resulted in little innovation and disastrous results on sales (Friedman 2008; Rao 2008).

Service-Dominant Logic (S-D Logic) (Vargo and Lusch 2004) is a nascent academic term, but S-D Logic's relevance to the business environment is startling. S-D Logic is just one of many key discussion points in academic circles proposing that the consumer and the producer are partners in creating the value of a product. To see each product as an experiential one, as S-D Logic does, makes the quantum leap from an industrialised economy to an experience economy fully and completely. To move into an experiential economy has implications for the roles of producers and consumers.

The Value Co-Creation argument is that the experiential component of a material good has potential value-in-use, but not actual value in itself (Vargo and Lusch 2004). Goods are no longer perceived as having in inherent value, and producers are no longer sole value creators. Producers, and their goods, need the consumer to create value whilst the good is in use. In other words, the producer makes the flint but the consumer lights the spark. This view has major implications for marketers and the organisations that employ them in terms of their ability to affect the marketplace. Are producers, and marketers, prepared to relinquish the power they thought they had as producers of value?
The decentralisation of value creation

The Value Co-Creation premise completes a journey away from a producer-centred marketplace to one where the experiential power of the product is shared. In the world of the Internet and web-based industries, this decentralisation is everyday business. YouTube, eBay, Twitter, MySpace and Facebook exemplify successful decentralisation. Co-opting the consumer in the product creation process is pivotal. In practice, however, the resources required for a successful relationship is difficult for producers to manage even for industries with seemingly endless budgets. Some of the resources required are hard for producers to adhere to in an economically-driven marketplace: authenticity, devotion and passion, for example.

However, as consumers respond to mass customisation and experiential approaches, producers attempt to position their products in a more engaging way with varying degrees of success. These days, even the market recognises the economic value of repeat sales, brand equity and Word of Mouth (WOM) marketing (Gilmore and Pine 1999).

WOM, which could previously only be measured notionally through assumptions about sales patterns and purchasing behaviour, can now be quantified absolutely in a Web 2.0 world as consumers use the web to discuss their product experiences. With their claim on authenticity, the consumer-to-consumer communication channel often trumps official communication from the producers themselves, and becomes a performance indicator for products (Gilmore and Pine 2007; Kawasaki 2009; Muniz and Schau 2007). For example, book publishers monitor customer reviews on Amazon.com as key performance indicators. Publishers admit customer reviews have greater sway over future sales than professional endorsements printed on the book, unless of course, the endorsement is from Oprah (Grant 2009).

Former Apple Evangelist and current entrepreneur Guy Kawasaki argues that Value Co-creation is a hard sell to industry (Kawasaki 2009). Marketers and those who employ them want to believe they own the entire value production process. They are comfortable with what they know, what they have been taught, and the superiority of believing they are controlling the entire process. CEOs and CFOs are less interested in marketing theory and more interested in financial return. It's one thing to enjoy thinking about marketing in a particular way, but without a visionary CEO – and most are not – why would industry even engage in the discussion, much less realign their practice (Kawasaki 2009)?

Kawasaki brings up a critical point. How can Value Co-Creation become as hot a topic in industry as it is in academia? Is there a metaphor that can capture the essence of the theoretical and operational advantages of looking at the marketplace in the S-D Logic paradigm?

THE METAPHOR OF THE INFINITE GAME

A metaphor is a part of speech that resembles a joke. There is a cultural context, a form of delivery and language that makes it effective. Also, the more a metaphor is explained, the less effective it is at delivering the punchline. But, like humour, metaphor has been used at least as far back as written language as a way of communicating (Peres 1998).
There are various types of metaphors. This article will focus on a metaphor that is normally used as a method of description. We say that item A is item B. By comparing the two we point out key features and a system of elemental relationships which are similar (Turner 1974).

Aristotle was the first person in the Western tradition to study the use of metaphor in his *Poetics*. He wrote about the value of metaphors in language, particularly artistic language. Derrida described the use of metaphors as the antithesis of scientific language, used to obscure rational knowledge rather than further define it (Turner 1974). Derrida’s view was that metaphors could trap language and therefore our thoughts could be shaped by the use of language itself. Metaphor has come under criticism in academic circles for this very point: does it further the scientific agenda of classification and reduction? Or does it bring something else to the table? (Hendrikse and Muijen 1998; Turner 1974).

The value of a metaphor is that it describes phenomena in a holistic way, rather than a reductive way. A holistic description gives a richer understanding by using cultural connotations of language to describe the qualities of a concept which might not be apparent if viewed in a more scientific, reductive way (Hendrikse and Muijen 1998).

The use of metaphor to describe phenomena is an accepted academic tool, often used in Philosophy to describe theoretical concepts (Peres 1998), and used in Marketing, particularly in Consumer Culture Theory (Arnould and Thompson 2005; Belk and Tumminia 2005; Belk et al. 1989). Academics often use this tool because the analogy drawn by metaphor is powerful in its ability to fill in the gaps of a technical description (Spiggle 1994); researchers use the tool because their subjects often express themselves that way (Belk et al. 2003).

Rather than seeing the use of metaphor as a way of describing phenomena in a fundamental, fixed way, metaphor is a good “jumping-off” point to stimulate discussion and start innovative thinking around concepts (Peres 1998). This is especially useful for people who are introduced to new concepts outside the realm of their experience. A metaphor will take something with which they have experience and use it to describe something previously not within their experience (Hendrikse and Muijen 1998).

The construction of an appropriate metaphor is systemic. First, the audience must be able to connect with the metaphor. It is essential to find a metaphor which is within the realm of the audience’s experience and which is striking enough to have an element of surprise as well as a cultural context that limits the requirement for explanation. The metaphor should be introduced in a context where the audience is secure and receptive; metaphor requires an intellectual leap, which the audience may not take if the communicator does not entice them on the journey. Finally, the burden of selecting the appropriate metaphor rests with the communicator, who should be familiar enough with the culture and language of the audience to construct a metaphor which is systemically parallel to the original concept (Hendrikse and Muijen 1998).

Selecting the appropriate metaphor to describe Value Co-Creation can provide an immediate, accessible, rich understanding of the concept and how it could work. This understanding is especially valuable to those in industry who find the new economy threatening; and if it can be demonstrated that this approach can yield profits as well as superior business practices in a complex, rapidly changing marketplace.
The infinite game

James Carse published *Finite and Infinite Games* in 1986. With a background in Religious Studies and Philosophy, he wrote these opposing metaphors as universal tools to describe all pursuits in life.

A *finite game* has fixed rules and constraints; players must meet requirements to play. There is a way to win and the point of the game is to be on the winning team when the game ends, thus the opposition must lose. One must qualify to play, and environment is fixed, so that scores can be tabulated. Entry and exit from the game is governed by the rules. Carse uses sporting matches and pursuit of an educational qualification as examples of finite games (Carse 1986).

Marketing, when viewed through an industrial economics as traditional theories do, resembles a finite game. It has a fixed scoreboard of profits, losses, share prices and so on. Opposition exists in markets. Companies play to win. The rules are fixed. Every industry has barriers to entry, some more than others. The game is played in time periods such as daily, monthly or quarterly accounting periods. The game has finite rules regarding measurement and the rules, although not always enforced, are acknowledged as the benchmark against which winning is judged.

The evolution toward Relationship Marketing was a move toward the *infinite game*. In an infinite game, the point is not to win. The point is to keep playing. And to keep playing, the rules have to change. No one can play forever, so it is essential to include as many people as possible in the game and lower the barriers to entry. Current players recruit new players to keep the game alive.

Finite players play within boundaries. Infinite players move boundaries to keep playing. Infinite players go out of their way to engage others in a continuous relationship, reaping rewards for both parties (Carse 1986).

This grass roots ethos of an infinite game inherently recognises the decentralisation of power, and each individual's ability to co-create the experience, and value, for themselves and others. The infinite game aligns neatly with S-D Logic, and to some extent, Relationship Marketing (see Table 1, overleaf). The issue for marketers who attempt to play the infinite game is that it does not align neatly with other discipline models often used in industry — such as accounting, economics and finance.

It can, however, align very well with areas of psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy and so on. As the urgency around business sustainability grows, business disciplines are moving toward paradigms that lend themselves more neatly to an infinite game model.

Marketing as an infinite game recognises the value of the gestalt — what everyone brings to the table is worth more than each player on their own. Products, brands and corporations evolve organically within market environments, and survive or thrive depending on their ability to engage with the consumer. The goal of an organisation would be to evolve so that players can keep playing. Rather than organisations seeking to “manage change”, evolution would be seen as the key component to survival within and outside of the organisation. The evolution would be a true partnership with producers and consumers having a stake in the ongoing survival of the game. As part of this process consumers are no longer “targets” for marketers, but partners.

Deriving profits from an infinite games model seems fantastical, but there are real-world businesses where this model has proven financially successful. These business models need people to *play*. They derive profit through a partnership with their customers, rather than using their customers as targets. These particular examples were selected primarily because of their ability to profit in industries undergoing crisis of change.
TABLE 1 A theoretical evolution: finite and infinite games in marketing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theory</th>
<th>4 Ps</th>
<th>Services Marketing</th>
<th>Relationship Marketing</th>
<th>S-D Logic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Disciplines</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>Economics &amp; Psychology</td>
<td>Psychology &amp; Social Sciences</td>
<td>A New Foundation for Marketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power Structure</td>
<td>Producer-centric, with the consumer as &quot;target&quot;. Mass media is key to reaching audiences. Communication is centralised and in one direction: from producer to consumer.</td>
<td>Producer-centric, but recognising consumer contributions in a service context, commencing experiential focus. Mass media still holds key to communication model.</td>
<td>Consumer moves from &quot;target&quot; to submissive partner, mass customisation concepts start to form, producers see the decline of mass media and seek niche media outlets</td>
<td>Peer to peer communication value rises [reviews, blogs, etc], producers see consumers as powerful partners able to mobilise. Mass media further declines, niche media rises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indicators</td>
<td>Fixed players, outcomes and boundaries</td>
<td>Fixed players, outcomes and boundaries - goal is to standardise to align further with 4 Ps</td>
<td>Boundaries expanding to incorporate communities of users; emergence of web and social media shifting power to consumers; Concepts of brand equity rise in importance</td>
<td>Products and categories change to continually engage consumers in an ongoing brand value partnership; sustainability of the brand requires a constant evolution of approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Game | Finite | Finite | Finite, moving toward Infinite | Infinite |

Note: the evolution of major marketing theory [Sweeney 2007]

The Grateful Dead

The inner workings of the music industry are screaming about new technologies and the death of their domination over the music distribution channels. Artists themselves take various positions on this: some believe that subverting their paid distribution channels is a kind of theft; others have used the opportunity to gain a wider audience. Many have taken advantage of iTunes, to date, the most successful music distribution model in the world. However, iTunes, in the case of music distribution, is no saviour to the music distribution company that now has a lonely place as an industry middleman rather than an essential part of the recording artist moneymaking machine (Ullian 2007).

The Grateful Dead was a band known for a few things. First, they had an unusual approach to live performances. They were completely different than their recorded performances and no two concerts were the same. Their music, and approach to music, was the embodiment of the San Francisco counterculture from which they sprang. Every concert was an opportunity to jam. Their tours were ongoing; their
official recordings were simply static versions of the variations they played with every
day (Hill and Rifkin 1999).

As a result of the variety in their set, fans would elect to see many shows, rather
than just go to one. Some people followed them on the road for years in a cross
between a Brand Community (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001) and a Consumer Tribe
(Cova et al. 2007). These “Deadheads” earned a living the only way they could in such
a nomadic lifestyle: through their association with the band (Hill and Rifkin 1999). 
They recorded concerts and sold the bootleg albums. They sold food and drink at
concerts. They developed merchandise, like T-shirts, and sold them at concerts. The
band never received a commission or payment for any of these activities. Rather, they
endorsed them. For example, a section of the concert area was reserved for people
choosing to record the experience (Hill and Rifkin 1999).

A version of the band continues, in one form or another, until today. Band members
who survive perform in various ensembles, tribute bands recreate entire concerts
based on bootleg recordings, and the Brand Community and Tribal aspect of this
band persists, leading to remastering and redeveloping of band product (Morowsky
2009).

The financial success of the Grateful Dead is not attributed solely to their gift
culture approach to their music. The authenticity of the musicians’ approach to
jamming, coupled with the experiential nature of the product and the cultural
zeitgeist of the time, aligned itself well to produce an enduring and one can suggest,
infinite, game. This approach is in direct opposition to the majority of the music
industry ethos as it has evolved under a traditional marketing model. Closely guarded
copyright enforcement coupled with a fierce protectionism of distribution channels
was the key to profit margins in the music business, which one could argue was
more business than music at in its most profitable history. Some musicians are now
making more of an effort to cultivate their Brand Communities and Consumer Tribes
to attempt to draw larger audiences to their shows, rather than using the show to
support sales of the album as album sales are now at their lowest point. The music
industry is scrambling: attempting to find profits in an industry where their relevance
is questionable (Ullian 2007).

The approach put forward in the Grateful Dead example was unusual in its
time; today it would still be the minority approach. The goal of the band was to
keep engaging audiences through their performances, and they did. Their authentic
approach resonates with audiences who were not even born at the time they were in
their heyday, and the legend of the Deadhead Community lives on through the thrill
of events, trade and the community of their followers who keep playing even though
all the members of the band itself cannot.

**Ryanair**

When travel by air was new and expensive, the feel of the airline industry was like
a cruise ship. Passengers were well-dressed and privileged. Mass air travel brought
the tenor down a bit but the idea of a fare including everything: food, pillows,
blankets, entertainment and more was one to which the major airlines subscribed.
The economy class ticketed passengers were not the profitable ones; the business
class and first class passengers were the ones who provided the lion’s share of dollars
(Meter 2006).

Ryanair has rethought the concept of travel by reducing cost barriers. The more
people playing the air travel game on Ryanair, the more profits. By charging for every
add-on, Ryanair provides nothing for their low (and sometimes free) fares other than the seat, the seatbelt and the goal to get passengers to their destination safely. Luggage, entertainment, pillow, Internet use, phone use and, of course, food, adds a cost to the ticket price. If a flight is late or cancelled there is no compensation. Staff buy their own uniforms and have to provide their own stationary. Flights depart and arrive from hard-to-get-to airports away from capital cities. Ryanair looks for more add-ons to charge for rather than add value by including more in the base ticket prices. By the estimation of their CEO, the average fare in 2005 was less than $60 while profit margins were 22%, higher than any other airline in Europe (Meier 2006).

Ryanair wants to go one step further and make flying free. Cheerfully blunt about the Irish airline’s goal, Ryanair crows about cutting corners and attempting to devise ways to charge passengers for “extras” that everyone thought was built in the ticket price. The goal for their CEO is to get passengers to play by travelling – but rather than approaching cost cutting and surcharges in a dour, shameful way, CEO Michael O’Leary and Ryanair are joyous. They are authentic about their goal and the way they are getting there. The purchase of a Ryanair ticket, even if it is free of charge, is in itself a contract of shared power. The customer weighs the value of each aspect of travel and decides for himself or herself the value, customising their travel experience to suit their needs. The opposite of bundling, this approach doesn’t make the customer feel “nickel and dimed” by the option to pay for everything except the use of the seatbelt, rather they feel empowered to spend or not (Meier 2006).

There are many other examples of business lowering barriers for their customers to play in the hopes of engaging them in the content of the product and deriving benefit from that engagement. Casting an eye over the most shining examples of value co-creation, some key aspects shine through: flexibility, innovation, change and joy.

Creating a rich understanding

The goal of using metaphors to communicate is not to dissect and categorise phenomena. Metaphors force a pulling back, a succinct description of the overall picture with the subtleties of connotations in language. In using metaphor to explore an idea, the idea itself changes (Hendrikse and Muijen 1998). The metaphor and the concept are both affected by the association – much like the producer and consumer must partner to create value through their interaction.

However, the infinite game resonates with value co-creation and with other concepts emerging since the birth of the internet. The first part of the metaphor is the infiniteness of the endeavour, and the requirement that the game evolves to survive. Although evolution is a scientific concept, business does not lend itself to the same kind of scrutiny. There is not the same sense of longevity. Particularly in recent years, industry has aligned business with a short game: the Global Financial Crisis is a great example of the result of a finite game.

In order for games to be infinite and for the evolution, players must seek opportunities for expansion and evolution more than growth. Sometimes this means shedding one identity and adopting another. Many times playing an infinite game would require strategies based on the long view, sacrificing the gains of the present for the future gains. In recent years, key industries like automaking, financial services, publishing and construction have played short games.

Equally as important as the concepts of evolution and sustainability arising from
the “infinite”, is the “game”. Some feedback Carse received about his choice of the word “game” indicated that readers thought calling something a game is trivialising it. Games are something people engage in for enjoyment, and Carse, as a Religious Studies Professor discusses weighty matters (Carse 1986). However, in the marketing context the metaphor works well because it provides a rich sensation of the authenticity, connectivity and joy of the pursuit of marketing.

CONCLUSION

This article helps lower barriers in the ongoing marketing discussion regarding value co-creation. The use of a metaphor gives individuals currently not participating in the discussion the ability to access the concepts within it.

By providing an appropriate metaphor with its rich description of the co-creation concept, industry can drop into the conversation about using paradigms and theory to describe phenomena and develop strategic positions in the marketplace. Without the ability to access these concepts easily, the barriers to industry can be too high. And high barriers means the discussion will not have enough creators of value within it.

On of the key takeaways is not that the value co-creation theory is new. It is that the theory is a better fit than the more economically-based paradigms used in the past (e.g. manufacture, distribute, sell). Value Co-creation has room for input of other disciplines, including sociology and philosophy while retaining the uniqueness of the discipline of marketing in a post-industrial world.

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A GUIDE TO THE SECTIONS OF THIS THESIS

THE FIRST SECTION is the literature review. It consolidates previous research on consumer religiosity and customer evangelists. It identifies the four unique, essential common traits of religious, and customer, evangelists (A).

THE SECOND SECTION, published in an academic journal in 2010, connects Carse’s Infinite Game with Service-Dominant Logic as a way of describing marketing in the post industrial economy, providing appropriate theoretical bases for consumer collectivity and the contemporary marketers’ mission to engage customers (B).

THE THIRD SECTION is accepted to an academic journal in 2013, and is under revision for publication. It further develops Carse’s Civitas/Communitas religious collectivity model, applying it to consumer religiosity, consumer collectivity and customer evangelism (C).

THE FOURTH SECTION, published in a peer-reviewed academic book in 2010, explores the role and application of authenticity in collective religious consumption experiences (D).

THE FIFTH SECTION, submitted for publication in 2013, quantitatively tests claims about customer evangelism (A).

(C) Consumer Collectives are analogous to religious congregations’ (COMMUNITAS) interactions with their churches (CIVITAS). The CIVITAS has a visionary POET who articulates the AUTHENTIC SACRED MYSTERY at the centre of the collective through their product/brand vision/experience. Consumers the most strongly identified with the product are FOLLOWERS. FANS are products followers without QUINTESSENCE who are still part of the collective. CASUAL USERS, NON-USERS and HATERS of the product sit outside the consumer collective.

(A) Evangelists have four essential traits, as identified in the literature [SECTION 1] and tested in this thesis’ empirical study [SECTION 5]: they belong to formal or informal CONSUMER COLLECTIVES, have QUINTESSENCE (arising from a TRANSFORMATIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE), are AUTHENTICALLY CONNECTED to the brand/product/users and spread EXTREME levels of WORD OF MOUTH.
4 Communitas and Civitas: Modelling Consumer Collectives

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Abstract

Purpose
To propose a conceptual model for consumer collectives that incorporates elements from CCT and religious studies literature into an S-D Logic foundation.

Design/Methodology/Approach
Key findings in CCT and S-D Logic relating to consumer collectives are discussed. These are then incorporated into a model from the religious studies literature on the interplay of religions. The resulting model is a combination of the three areas, which delivers a guide regarding consumer and producer motives and behaviours in the value network.

Findings
Consumer collectives are a growing part of marketing strategies because they are so powerful and have unlimited potential. CCT has delivered a rich body of knowledge that can be applied in operational environments. S-D Logic has provided a framework that is the vehicle to apply that knowledge. Religious studies—specifically Carsian models of religion—offer a road map for marketers on ways to apply this learning. The resulting model delivers a basis for further research of the phenomenon.

Research Implications
The resulting model provides a thorough and authentic marketing and religious studies basis for further research into consumer collectives.
Practical Implications

The resulting model also provides a guide for practitioners regarding opportunities and limitations when attempting to leverage their consumer collectives.

Originality/Value

This paper is of value to researchers and practitioners in the area of consumer collectives and consumer religiosity. By providing a marketing (S-D Logic) and religious studies basis for modelling motives, roles and behaviour in a value network and interdisciplinary learning in CCT are more readily operationalised for further research and practice.

4.1 Introduction

The Church … thoroughly understands … how to deal with enthusiasts … She knows that, when religious feelings have obtained the complete empire of the mind, they impart a strange energy, that they raise men above the dominion of pain and pleasure, that obloquy becomes glory, that death itself is contemplated only as the beginning of a higher and happier life. She knows that a person in this state is no object of contempt. He may be vulgar, ignorant, visionary, extravagant; but he will do and suffer things which it is for her interest that somebody should do and suffer, yet from which calm and sober-minded men would shrink. She accordingly enlists him in her service, assigns to him some forlorn hope, in which intrepidity and impetuosity are more wanted than judgment and self-command, and sends him forth with her benedictions and her applause. (Macaulay, 1840)

In the 1980s, religious language was gaining traction in the marketing world. Apple Computer pioneered this momentum, with corporate salespeople referred to as ‘evangelists’ and the moniker printed on their business cards (Kawasaki, 1991). Apple
Computer also started to use religious language to describe the faith and zeal of their followers. Battling for market share in a rapidly developing and highly competitive industry, peer-to-peer networks were a key, inexpensive and strategic way to broaden their user base. One Apple Computer strategy was to harness what Lord Macaulay (1840) referred to as the ‘empire of the mind’ and ‘strange energy’ of Apple-friendly computing enthusiasts. These enthusiasts remain a volunteer missionary sales force who use their leisure time and social contacts to promote Apple products to others; enlist them in the Apple Computer perspective; warn them away from competitors; provide after-sale support through peer-to-peer networks; and, most of all, amplify the Apple brand image (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Kawasaki, 1991; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). These missionary forces called themselves ‘Macheads’ and literally kept Apple in business during some difficult periods (Kawasaki, 2004; Shelly, 2008).

Around this time, product-centred social networks came to the attention of marketing researchers. These consumer collectives (Schouten et al., 2007) include various product-centred cultural networks: brand communities (Cova et al., 2007; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), brand cults (Belk & Tumbat, 2005), subcultures of consumption (E. Arnould & C. Thompson, 2005; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) and consumer tribes (Shanker et al., 2007).

Over the last 20 years, consumer collectives have been studied extensively, mostly through the lens of CCT—a collection of theories producing rich research into the phenomena (E. Arnould & C. Thompson, 2005). CCT uses methodologies from the social sciences to understand consumption behaviour in a cultural context. With respect to marketplace culture, the results are irrefutable: consumer collectives exist and affect producers, consumers and others in the marketplace. Their effect can improve brand equity, sales and share market prices.
Scholars have proposed various conceptual models regarding types of consumer collectives (Shanker et al., 2007; Von Hippel, 2005). This paper responds to a call for further research into consumer motives, roles and narratives using the framework of the S-D Logic paradigm (Arnould, Price, & Malshe, 2006). This model also delivers something unique: an emphasis on quintessence—the feeling of sacredness that is the catalyst for consumer religiosity (Belk et al., 1989). By considering the sacred experience—rather than the product, brand or firm—at the centre of the collective, a new picture emerges about behaviour in this context.

A model proposed in this paper uses S-D Logic as a foundational principle—specifically, it uses recent work on value networks (Lusch, Vargo, & Tanniru, 2010; Vargo & Lusch, 2004) and articulating markets (Storbacka & Nenonen, 2010). S-D Logic speaks directly to the marketing potential in consumer collectives’ potential to create clout, marketability or market positions for products through cultural experiences. An S-D Logic approach sharpens attention on value co-creation, pinpointing the value creation aspect of the activity.

Second, this model uses a religious studies foundation. James Carse’s (1986, 2008) work on the interplay (infinite game) between religious organisations (civitas) and their followers (communitas) provides the basis for the new model. This approach creates a nexus between the CCT and S-D Logic literature with another established discipline. The interplay of religious communities as value networks helps test the authenticity of the assertion that consumer collectives are like, or have replaced, religious and other cultural collectives (Miller, 2003). The connection with religious studies literature enhances the contribution of religious anthropology—a strong vein running through CCT analysis of consumer collectives (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Belk et al., 1989; Chalmers & Arthur, 2008; Porter & McLaren, 1999).
Finally, this model sheds light on the perspective in the quotation introducing this paper. Conventional wisdom and industry literature regard consumer religiosity as producer driven—essentially a marketing strategy (Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007). Synthesising the gains from CCT, perspectives from S-D Logic and religious studies counters the perception that solely producers are always in the driver’s seat. Rather, the actors in the value network work in tandem. Various actors at various times co-create culture, and from that culture arises the value exchange. The product experience at the centre of it all is used, discussed, ritualised, mythologised, synthesised, lived, breathed, expelled and discussed—again and again. Control of the narrative is a constant tension, but the reward is a cultural one, affirming and reaffirming the choice of the actor to strongly identify with the product and brand.

Consumer collectives are a growing part of marketing strategies because they are so powerful and have unlimited potential. CCT has delivered a rich body of knowledge to apply, S-D Logic has provided a framework, and religious studies—specifically Carsian models of religion—offer a road map for marketing researchers and practitioners.

4.2 Methodology

The conceptual model in this paper is based on a series of metaphors. Indeed, a key concept in this paper, the infinite game, is a metaphor for hire, with many applications (Carse, 1986). Metaphors are powerful and often effective tools for furthering one’s understanding, especially if the subject matter is new or beyond one’s primary experiences (Spiggle, 1994). Philosophy has used metaphors to describe phenomenon for millennia, and research subjects often describe their own experiences using metaphors (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003; Peres, 1998).
However, a key concern with metaphor is that all the elements of the comparison should match (Peres, 1998). The value of the metaphor is in appropriate comparisons, and drawing connections among relationships in different, but similar, constructs. The end result is a holistic, authentic understanding of a new idea based on a story about a familiar idea (Hendrikse & Muijen, 1998). The challenge in using a religious metaphor in a marketing context is that many marketers are unfamiliar with the religious studies discipline. Therefore, this paper takes an appropriate step-by-step approach.

First, key points regarding consumer collectives are summarised to facilitate communicating the critical consumer culture elements featured in the proposed conceptual model. Next, the Carsian models of the infinite game and *civitas/communitas* are detailed, illustrated and incorporated with the S-D Logic and CCT elements. The resulting conceptual model, with three levels of operation and understanding, is strongest when appreciated holistically.

Throughout, examples illustrating key points are discussed. The examples are not proofs; rather, they help illustrate the model. A conceptual paper proves that this model should be left to empirical work. The purpose of the conceptual model is to bring together disciplines to provide a valuable perspective on phenomenon (MacInnis, 2011).

### 4.3 Haters, Users, Fans and Followers

#### 4.3.1 Consumer collectives in the online and offline space.

Consumer collectivism has existed for millennia. One could argue that consumer collectivism describes what transformed Christianity from a cult to a state-endorsed religion in under 400 years (Green, 1970). During the era of horse-drawn carriages, consumer collectives of automobile enthusiasts held public exhibitions to encourage acceptance of the automobile (Rao, 2008). Gene Roddenberry created *Star Trek* for a
consumer collective of science fiction enthusiasts. These sci-fi devotees had their own conferences and clubs before Rodenberry wrote the legendary show (Pearson, 2007; Porter & McLaren, 1999). Apple Computer enthusiasts grew out of computer hobbyist clubs. Members would keep in touch with each other through the post and newsletters to discuss their product experiences (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001). Harley-Davidson enthusiasts would gather to attend company orchestrated rides (Hill & Rifkin, 1999; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Consumer collectives existed well before today’s internet and Web 2.0.

The internet strengthened these collectives, particularly in two ways. First, members of a collective could now own brand real estate, such as a web page, blog or wiki, without the consent of the producer. These public, unofficial ‘fan’ sites are often as convincing and comprehensive as official (producer) sites. This is so much the case that official sites usually declare their official status to differentiate themselves from the fan-generated content (Scodari, 2007). Online consumer collectives communicate/co-create at little or no cost, and this asynchronous communication leaves an indelible record that creates more content, support, guidance for new users, and endorsements for those outside the community (Casalo et al., 2007; Kozinets et al., 2008).

The second significant internet development is the trail this activity leaves behind. For the first time, companies and researchers can witness, track, measure and respond to consumer collective activity. The behavioural aspects of the consumer collective are similar both online and offline, but the digital environment enhances the ability to collaborate. Most of all, the cultural content is (largely) public. Product discussions are less promotional and more cultural—and producers may not be in charge of the discussions. However, they are often expected to participate in discussions.
The development of consumer collectives online is a natural extension and provides empirical evidence of what CCT researchers have been observing for decades. Consuming is more than an economic or psychological act; cultural forces at play are so significant that they must be part of the equation (E. Arnould & C. Thompson, 2005; Featherstone, 1991).

4.3.2 Consumption as a cultural act.

The marketplace provides a palette for consumers to fashion their individual and group identities. Individuals, even those who purchase nothing, are consumers. One consumes advertisements, points of view, belief systems, vicarious experiences and media, from mass to narrow-casted media (E. Arnould & C. Thompson, 2005; Featherstone, 1991). When one consumes culture, one processes it. The act of processing and sharing culture is imbued with the experiences and perspectives of those sharing (Turner, 1969).

In the postmodern world, individuals are the authors of their own identity, assembled piecemeal from experiences throughout their lives. Profit-driven firms create many experiences, and commercial consumption is an irrevocable and significant part of the bricolage of identity (Miller, 2003). Actors in cultural networks actively attempt to enrol others in their point of view by deliberately orchestrating symbolic meanings and social markers of brands and products. Cultural communication is developed intentionally to arouse an emotional response that then corresponds with how individuals who experience the product see themselves (Featherstone, 1991).

Apple Computer can be used as an example. The company’s well-known ‘Think Different’ campaign was a narrative about genius, featuring photographs of visionaries in the arts, politics and sciences. The campaign, which included Einstein, Gandhi, Picasso and the like, used Apple Computer branding. Many of the people featured could
never have used an Apple Computer, since they died before an Apple Computer even existed ("Ten years after "Think Different"", 2010). Apple Computer’s implication was that buying into the mainstream (Windows) perspective was a mistake. The visionaries in the campaign were metaphorically akin to the Apple user: someone who could see beyond the ordinary. Apple users emphatically embraced this message. This campaign reinforced the brand culture as an elite and aspirational product. This perspective was consistent with the product pricing and the user base, which tended to be more educated and affluent than the average computer user (Baumann, 2008).

As the Apple example illustrates, product experiences are more than a way to satisfy one’s internal desires—they are a way to express social meaning and identity. Goods are a token of the associated experiences, or the resources from which the experience springs (E. Arnould & C. Thompson, 2005; Belk et al., 2003; Featherstone, 1991). The meaningfulness of cultural experience is often negotiated through the goods in the marketplace; value is embedded in the experiences, the meanings that flow from those experiences and the retelling and reliving of these experiences (McAlexander et al., 2002). The meaningfulness of experiences varies, with some experiences transcending the profane into the realm of the sacred, and transforming the individual’s worldview (Belk et al., 1989).

4.3.3 The strange energy: Transcendence and quintessence.

TCEs contain aspects of peak or flow experiences. TCEs generate lasting shifts in attitude that lead to self-transformation and bond to an identity associated with the experience (Schouten et al., 2007). The feeling is ecstatic, is euphoric and has lasting halo effects on both the consumer and their attitude towards the product. The resulting halo effect on the product from this experience is quintessence.
Quintessence elevates an object from the mundane to the sacred. Quintessence may be experienced if the object has associated cultural meaning associated with it, such as a gift, family heirloom or object used in a significant cultural ritual, such as a wedding ring. However, quintessence can also exist for mundane products if the product experience is so in sync with the consumer that it heightens their product experience (Belk et al., 1989). The result of these feelings is that the consumer assimilates the product into their identity. The resultant effects can be witnessed at brand fests or in online forums (Schouten et al., 2007).

TCEs are rooted in the cultural context of product co-creation. That user, with his or her unique set of belief systems and attitudes, is struck in a particular way by a particular product at that moment in time. Suddenly, the user experiences a shift—something changes (Schouten et al., 2007). This shift is a powerful user co-creation experience. Those who have experienced this shift often seek others who have also had the shift. Even before the internet, user groups managed to find each other and form communities across geographical boundaries. (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). The resulting consumer collectives have social norms unique to their specific culture, although they can follow general social rules (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schau et al., 2009).

4.3.4 Mapping the quintessence effect.

If one segments value networks by proximity to the TCE, a visualisation of consumer collectives emerges, as shown in Figure 1. At the centre of the consumer collective is shared mystery and transformation. Proximity to that transformation results in quintessence positive consumption (the darker dots). Distance from the TCE indicates a less affecting experience, and those outside the consumer collective. The darkness that lies at the outer edges of the network symbolises those who are passionately against the brand—usually those with quintessence for the competition.
Consumer collectives mainly consist of followers—those who identify with the brand perspective so strongly that they have assimilated the brand experience into their identity. Consumer collectives are largely comprised of followers. These followers are passionate about the brand because they are products of a TCE, and possess quintessence (Collins, Murphy, & Glaebe, 2011). Followers co-create culture through their creation and consumption of cultural content about the brand. In many cases, they also co-create products and take a role in the product innovation or distribution processes (Hemetsberger & Reinhardt, 2009; Jenkins, 1992; Pitt, Watson, Berthon, Wynn, & Zinkan, 2006; Von Hippel, 2005).

Followers express their adherence to brand culture and their brand identity differently, based on their individual preferences. Evangelists take it upon themselves to act as a missionary force, enrolling new users in the product, while geeks maintain the lore, or knowledge base, of the group. Fanboys/girls are flamethrowers who defend the product against the competition, and mavens compare knowledge, constantly benchmark where the product is against other products in the category and share their point of view with others (Collins, Murphy, et al., 2011).
There are those who lack quintessence, but participate in brand culture. These fans seem indistinguishable from followers at first glance. They add to group knowledge bases, attend brand fests and may spread WOM and defend the brand. However, they do not identify with the brand as strongly as do followers, and are therefore less likely to spread as much WOM about the brand and participate in other consumer collective behaviours. They do not perceive product value in the same way, and differ from followers in questions of product loyalty (Collins, Murphy, et al., 2011).

Product users may purchase the product and consume the product culture; however, they do not consume or generate as much product culture as fans and followers. As the name suggests, they are utilitarian in their approach to the product and are not strongly invested in the product culture. Users include product consumers, as well as those who consume product messages, but are not called to action by them.

Finally, haters passionately oppose the brand, often because they follow the opposing brand. This was comically depicted in the film Fanboys (2008), in which Star Wars fanboys disrupted a Las Vegas Star Trek convention. The Star Wars fanboys were depicted as being likeable characters, whereas the Trekkers were depicted as geeky, socially awkward obsessives—a derogatory reputation that Trekkers have gained in popular culture (Jenkins, 1992).

Mapping consumer collectives, as in Figure 1, sets the stage for the nexus between religious studies and consumer collective behaviour. Segmenting groups by their emotional connection with the cultural experience mimics the way religious organisations often mobilise their congregations. In the modern era, in which religious symbols are prevalent and consumed as commercial commodities (Miller, 2003), evangelical churches set themselves apart through their adherence to the strength of their transcendent experiences. Evangelical churches are also the only religious
organisations to reverse the trend of shrinking congregation numbers in the US, and are growing at a rapid rate (Putnam, 2000).

Relating quintessence experiences to marketing requires considering consumer collectives through a paradigm that is uniquely suited to the marketing discipline, and is able to consider the creation and re-creation of value in social and cultural networks. The most suitable paradigm is S-D Logic.

### 4.4 Consumer Collectives as Value Networks

As paradigms shift from goods-based logics to service-based logics, marketers and market researchers are reframing goods-centric modes of thinking. One of the more recent reconfiguring works relates to supply chain management (SCM). From a service-dominant perspective, value chains are no longer links in a linear model, but are webs of relationships. The producer is a catalyst, creating partnerships at different levels and with different actors. Goods are resources that fuel relationships, rather than acting as the central point of relationships (Lusch et al., 2010).

These value networks echo the value constellation concept, in which interconnected nodes act asynchronously to deliver tangible and intangible output, thereby creating value, equity and market positions for the producer (Lusch et al., 2010; Normann, 2001). There is recognition, especially through work in CCT, that people act in a social environment and derive value from the network of relationships upon which transactions are exacted. These relationships are a social operand resource (Arnould et al., 2006).

On its own, each node cannot create value, nor can goods encapsulate value. The intangibles in the value network—such as experiences, relationships, shared knowledge and competencies—provide value for the organisation and the consumer, as well as every other node in the network (Lusch et al., 2010). To thrive in a networked
environment, each node must be agile, learning, and consistently defining its position in the marketplace. How a firm defines itself culturally (to itself and others in the network, including customers) is paramount. To understand how essential culture is, one must reimagine the value chain and reimagine markets.

The economic idea of an objective market is so ingrained that Storbacka and Nenonen’s (2010) phenomenological view of markets—that there is no empirical market—seems extraordinary. Rather, markets are sociocultural spaces, where exchanges occur based on relationships in networks. Firms jockey for position. Firms’ ability to articulate or script their desired position depends on their ability to enrol others in their vision and business practices. Firms develop the influence to enrol others through clout—their ability to articulate and practice their vision and bring others with them. This increased marketability is the actualisation of their vision. The more dense and powerful a firm’s activities or cultural positions are, the more clout they have, and thus the more ability they have to leverage relationships and create markets and demand for their product (Storbacka & Nenonen, 2010).

The aforementioned automobile enthusiasts can be used as an example. In their early development, individual automotive companies lacked the clout to create demand for their automobiles. Until Henry Ford’s mass production and dominance, automobile manufacturers were small and struggling. Automobiles were unreliable, noisy and complex to operate. Further, many towns had no decent roads or fuel stations for automobiles (Rao, 2002). Several factors led to the mass acceptance of the automobile, with early adopters (Rogers, 1983) being instrumental to this. They took to the streets—literally—with the invention. By evangelists hosting public spectacles involving racing and reliability challenges, automobile enthusiasts supported the scripting of automobile manufacturers, and actively increased their clout (Rao, 2002).
The great advantage of the S-D Logic perspective is that it represents the cultural story of commerce in a way that previous marketing models have struggled to encapsulate (Sweeney, 2007). Only S-D Logic considers the phenomenological, social and economic perspectives of value, and how value drives people and firms to leverage their resources to co-create value with others. Consumer collectives are a great example of this because their existence is both a celebration of the brand by generating value (culture) through interaction, and is a way for firms to generate value (clout) in markets. Strong product culture adds density to clout within a network—a source from which the firm can draw strength to implement its clout.

On the positive side, consumer collectives co-create cultural capital about the product by actively coordinating and participating in brand activities. Evangelising, maintaining the lore and myths, developing and participating in rituals, promoting the brand, co-innovating products, acting as a sales force and providing a post-purchase technical support team are all benefits to the firm of a strong consumer collective. Consumer collectives are also instrumental in reducing post-purchase dissatisfaction by reinforcing the decision to ‘buy in’ to the product and the culture.

However, consumer collectives also present challenges. Brand hijacking (Shanker et al., 2007) and vigilantism (Muniz & Schau, 2007) are common phenomena. Consumer collectives are based on intense, authentic emotional connections that may not agree with the corporate decision making of the firm and new directions for the brand. As firms attempt to engage and grow their collectives to reap the benefits, there is acknowledgement that there is no control over the double-edged sword of fostering communities. S-D Logic is the best fit to describe brand negativity. No other paradigm can account for the actions of haters. Haters co-create value in their networks through their mission to lighten the clout of their targets.
As with other areas of marketing, other disciplines can hold worthwhile concepts ripe for importing. Religious studies seem the natural choice because consumer collectives exhibit religiosity in their behaviour, and consumer religiosity has been adapted by industry as well.

4.5 Consumer Collectives are Playing the Infinite Game

Consumer religiosity continues to be investigated by researchers in the CCT tradition (E. Arnould & C. Thompson, 2005; Belk & Wallendorf, 1990; Belk et al., 1989; Chalmers & Arthur, 2008; Gamin, 2004; Gilmore & Pine, 2007), as well as marketing industry pundits (Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007). Sociology defines religious spaces and objects as set apart from the profane or mundane part of life. These rituals, myths, objects, people and places are defined as extraordinary. A shared view of the extraordinary is a binding force that brings people together. The sacred inspires commitment and sacrifice, usually expressed through rituals and myth (Belk & Wallendorf, 1990). Although religiosity centres on the sacred, religions are still cultural systems. By mapping religions at a macro level, it can be seen that value networks and religious systems share similarities.

4.5.1 Finite and infinite games.

Carse’s (2008) conceptual model of religious networks, based on the idea of an infinite game, has similar features to the previously discussed value networks. A finite game is one in which the rules are set and players are limited. The object of a finite game is to win. An example is a game of tennis at the Australian Open. A finite game would be a competitive match in which both players play to win. There is no evolution of the rules, no switching of the players—the point of the game is that one party emerges as the winner.
An infinite game is one in which players play simply to play. The point of the game is to sustain the interaction, and to do so requires a constant evolution of the boundaries of the game, the rules and the players. This game of tennis would be among a group of friends who are playing for the pleasure of the game, rather than to win. They would not play by conventional tennis rules, or the game would be over quickly. They do not play to win—they play to play. The interaction is entirely the point of the exercise (Carse, 1986).

Finite games are compared to goods-dominant logic, while infinite games are compared to S-D Logic. If one considers that value creation begins with first hearing about the product, throughout the purchase process, the experience of using the product and beyond, then the marketing game is an infinite one, with many players (Collins & Murphy, 2009a). The infinite game is a way of viewing the value network.

4.5.2 Religions play the infinite game.

Religious communities play an infinite game in a sociocultural context. Religions have been able to sustain their games for thousands of years. According to Carse (2008), at the centre of a religious community is a shared mystery, and through the mystery is a shared transformational experience. Engaging in the mystery is also an infinite game, and is why religions persist for millennia. The shared mystery creates the tension, culture, creativity, transformation and activity at the heart of the community, or communitas (Carse, 2008).

Communitas represents a social togetherness outside of everyday life, in a sacred, liminal space (Collins & Murphy, 2010; Porter & McLaren, 1999; Turner, 1974; Vukonic, 1996). At the centre of communitas is a shared mystery, as in Figure 1. Within the communitas, a new social order arises through the shared rituals and experiences.
(Turner, 1974). *Communitas* is truly grassroots in origin, arising spontaneously out of the desire of a group to experience and re-experience the transcendent.

Carse (2008) called the governing body of a religion the *civitas*. *Civitas* is a Latin word that means ‘governance’, in reference to the government of Ancient Rome. However, in the sense that Carse used it, he was identifying the church/producer as the *civitas*. The *civitas* is constructed from the top downwards. The *civitas* articulates structure or, in a marketing context, brand and market position. The *communitas* receives those messages, reinterprets them and then propagates them among themselves and to others. This *civitas–communitas* interaction co-creates value, and that value is, in itself, the cultural component of the product centre interaction.

For example, Rome first persecuted Christian cults, and then embraced them, creating a mighty *civitas* that would outlive the city itself. The church borrowed traditions from the Romans and other polytheistic cultures, as well as from Judaism. This created a unique culture that affected Christians and non-Christians alike. For example, for Jewish people, the church was a powerful political and cultural force against which they defined themselves. For thousands of years, in geographical locations around the world, Christianity affected how Jewish people practised their religion; where they practised their religion; their culture; and how they saw themselves in the larger, profane community and within their sacred spaces (Carse, 2008; Green, 1970).

Macintosh computer users define themselves and their value network with the Apple *civitas*, and against the Windows *civitas*. When Jobs raised the pirate flag over Apple headquarters, when the iconic Big Brother Apple commercial aired during the Super Bowl, when the ‘Think Different’ campaign was a runaway success, Apple culture was co-created and reinforced—we are Apple users; we are not Windows users.
CONSUMER RELIGIOSITY AND CUSTOMER EVANGELISM

(Belk & Tumbat, 2005). Consumer collectives often define themselves as much in opposition, as in likeness. What constitutes similarity and difference springs from the branding of the *civitas* and the way it articulates markets (E. Arnould & C. Thompson, 2005; Muniz & Schau, 2007).

Carse (2008) pointed out that sheer power, such as market dominance or political dominance, cannot hold a *communitas* in thrall to the *civitas*. In fact, the *communitas* and *civitas* are often themselves on opposing sides. From a consumer collective point of view, the examples are legion where firms had made a change and their consumer collectives were not on board, which destabilised their clout. Some examples are Coca-Cola’s foray into New Coke in the 1980s (Belk et al., 1989), the abandoned Apple Newton community (Muniz & Schau, 2007) and the homosexual community’s reaction to the lack of homosexual characters in the Star Trek cannon and the creation of slash fiction (Scodari, 2007).

How does the *civitas* define and redefine its place as the authoritative voice in the network, without being drowned out by the grassroots interaction? The answer is in maintaining both mystery and knowledge at the centre of the collective (Carse, 2008). By blending the certain with the uncertain, the known with the unknown, the wonder and the belief, the *civitas* evolves a continuing level of competency to engage in the product, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 builds on Figure 1. The *civitas* is added to the figure, and the concentric circles represent clout and culture reverberating throughout the network. The *civitas* sends out messages to the users, fans and followers through their actions in the market, promotional communication and product developments. The *communitas* sends messages back through their consumer collective activity, consumption and co-creation of culture. Even the haters emanate some clout with their activity.
A literal example of the *civitas* evolving and reinventing the mystery is the way each iteration of the online game *World of Warcraft* is developed, with the challenge and mythology of the game designed to maintain user engagement. A less literal example is how Apple redefined itself from a computer company to a telecommunications company with the iPhone, and a publishing company with iTunes. This constant evolution is difficult. The contemporary market is a brand graveyard, full of examples of brands and products that evolved and died. Thus, evolution alone is not enough. The *civitas* must have a vision and must articulate this vision, and must articulate it in a specific way: poetically.

The poet is a propagandist for the *civitas*, communicating on an emotional level, rather than a rational one. When considering religion, poetic messages can be found in the liturgy, rituals, traditions, myths, garb, art, drama and other kinds of symbolic communications from the church to the congregation (Carse, 2008). From the consumer collective perspective, poetry is communicated similarly, through shared lore, rituals, marketing communications, art, drama, traditions and, of course, the product experiences themselves (E. Arnould & C. Thompson, 2005).
Most poetry reinforces the existing culture of the *communitas*. However, some works are reconfiguring. Groups *en masse* see themselves in a new way through the eyes of a poet’s reconfiguring work. New ideas open the door to new worlds and new mysteries—although the actual actions themselves are not necessarily new. It is the way one sees oneself that is new (Dreyfus & Kelly, 2011).

Martin Luther’s protestations against the Catholic Church were a reconfiguring work. The American Declaration of Independence was a reconfiguring work, articulating the non-British-ness sweeping through the colonies. The Apple Macintosh was a reconfiguring work. Jobs did not invent the graphical user interface, but he was the first to apply it in a context that realised its potential to democratise computing. One did not have to be devoid of aesthetic, utilitarian, mathematical or even technical sense to use computers anymore. Technology could be a thing of beauty and wonder, delivering a creative experience to everyone, not just computing hobbyists or engineers (Miller, 2003; Rao, 2002).

The poets of the S-D Logic movement are Vargo and Lusch (2004). Their work built on those who came before them, the way they articulated their vision, and the resulting activity that followed. This constituted a cultural movement within marketing research. This movement may not yet quite have reached marketing education, although one could argue that practitioners have intuitively assimilated the perspective through the focus on experience economies at the turn of the century (Pine & Gilmore, 1999). Poetry and reconfiguring works also stem from the *communitas*. The works of the Apostle Paul invented Christian evangelism before a church/civitas existed (Green, 1970). The American founding fathers were a rebel collective when the Declaration of Independence was drafted.
Reconfiguring works are infrequent and thus celebrated, relived and reworked through cultural activities. These works become part of the group narrative, assimilated into the collective and individual identity. In followers, this identification is embedded into a self-narrative. People are formed, reformed and transformed by their experiences, and product experiences are a major part of that process.

4.6 Value Actor Motives, Roles and Narratives

The meaning imbued in products by consumers goes to the heart of consumption itself. Implicitly or explicitly, consumers are motivated to purchase objects they perceive to be a vehicle for a changed set of social relationships with others or themselves. The constant search for an alternate state of being keeps the cycle of desire moving from object to object. Self-embellished fantasies of the self that the individual wishes to be nurture these desires (Belk et al., 2003). The individual cycle of desire is the basis of a unique infinite game played by each actor in the network. Individuals’ roles, motivations and actions are manifested in different ways, as demonstrated in Figure 2 and Tables 2 and 3.
### Table 2

**Consumer Collective Model Roles and Motivations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Actions</th>
<th>Motivations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Civitas</td>
<td>Increase clout.</td>
<td>Grow market through increased clout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civitas poets</td>
<td>Articulate the civitas’ knowledge, mystery and vision.</td>
<td>Maintain the mystery/focus at the heart of the communitas, while leveraging the communitas to grow clout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communitas</td>
<td>Celebrate the cultural brand experience, and re-experience and reinforce quintessence.</td>
<td>Create joy and reinforcement of TCE.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communitas poets</td>
<td>Articulate the communitas’ vision of self-identity and TCE, and enrol others in that perspective.</td>
<td>Reinforce the communitas views of selfhood and reinforce the joy and mystery of the TCE.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3

**Consumer Collective Model Roles Applied**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Value network</th>
<th>Civitas</th>
<th>Civitas (poet)</th>
<th>Communitas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Christian Church</td>
<td>None: The church grew out of monotheistic cults dotted around the geographical area, with no overriding governing body until 300 AD.</td>
<td>Apostle Paul: Paul’s work developed a framework for Christians generally, and evangelists in particular.</td>
<td>Christians: Christian cults grew out of the social, political and religious environment. Individual Christian cults hosted itinerant evangelists, with each developing their ethos through the evangelists’ influence and cultural norms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple Computer</td>
<td>Apple: Apple Computer established itself with the Apple home computer. Today, it is a computer, telecommunications and publishing company.</td>
<td>Steve Jobs: Jobs articulated the desire for functional, highly designed technology. Jobs’s vision focused more on innovation of existing emerging technologies than on creating technologies.</td>
<td>MacHeads: MacHeads are the Apple communitas. They belong to formal collectives (MUGs) and informal collectives, engaging in brand fests online and offline.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S-D Logic</td>
<td>Marketing academic research community: The marketing community had been discussing consumer co-creation as a movement since the establishment of a service discipline.</td>
<td>Vargo and Lusch: Vargo and Lusch built on the existing co-creation movement to develop a manifesto regarding reframing all marketing activity, and gave the movement a brand (S-D Logic).</td>
<td>S-D Logic followers: A subset of the wider marketing academic community focuses on reframing existing concepts in marketing through an S-D Logic paradigm. They do not yet identify themselves as a formal group or have a group name.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6.1 Outcomes of the consumer collective model.

Configuring a model at the nexus of CCT, S-D Logic and religious studies delivers at least three outcomes. This consumer collective model adds to the growing body of work on consumer co-creation. Since 2004, when Vargo and Lusch’s (2004) reconfiguring work on S-D Logic was published, S-D Logic collectives have been processing and reprocessing the implications of the movement on all aspects of marketing and marketing research. Consumer collectivism comprises a minority of the overall value network and brand experience. The consumer experience resonates more strongly with some people than others. S-D Logic is the only paradigm that accounts for that variation. By incorporating S-D Logic into the model, one can account for the consumer phenomenological perspective in a uniquely marketing-based context.

Although consumer religiosity is an acknowledged marketing research area, models based on religious studies literature seem rare—the authors of this study found none. Developing a model based on religious studies literature creates an authentic and consistent conceptual framework to view consumer religiosity. Moreover, it provides a blueprint for the roles, motives and narratives in consumer collectives, as shown in Table 1.

Finally, this model accounts for the co-creation of culture, as a value. In other words, the value co-creation for the *communitas* is *culture*. The product and product experience is the resource to further developing a unique (sub)culture. By viewing value as culture, the perspective on branding, products and consumer motives shifts significantly. The implications of this shift are a ripe area for further research.

4.6.2 Limitations of the consumer collective model.

This model has limitations, mainly relating to its scope. Others have summarised the quantity of work emerging from CCT on consumer collectives effectively (E.
Arnould & C. Thompson, 2005). Incorporating the total valuable breadth and depth of existing CCT research is a challenge unmet by the authors in this work. Certain aspects of CCT research were intentionally cherry-picked to fit the other frameworks in the paper. Although this cherry-picking entails limitations, it does not preclude the conceptual model from being a valid approach to consumer collectives.

This conceptual model adds to several studies that describe similar behaviour (Schau et al., 2009; Shanker et al., 2007; Von Hippel, 2005). The cacophony of voices on modelling consumer collectives is not necessarily contradictory; however, it can be overwhelming. Adding one more voice only has value if the basis of the concepts brings something unique to the table. This model’s basis in CCT, S-D Logic and religious studies brings something unique and authentic to the analysis of consumer collectives. The model does not rule out other theories and conceptual models.

4.7 Implications and Further Research

4.7.1 Implications for marketing education.

Although the emerging paradigm has its haters, users, fans, followers, geeks, evangelists and fanboys/girls in the academic arena, S-D Logic has gone under-noticed in practitioner circles. This can be attributed to the lack of coverage S-D Logic experiences in a higher education context, and the resistance to considering marketing other than in an economic manner. The disciplines of psychology and communications have acknowledged synergies with marketing. Synergies with cultural studies may be the next frontier.

Cultural literacy is an essential skill for marketers. Interacting with consumer collectives requires an emotional and intellectual understanding of how cultures and societies work generally, and a more intimate knowledge of aspects of culture such as religion and politics. Greater cultural literacy would support practitioners facing civitas
and poet roles. With CCT a growing field, researchers also require more literacy across disciplines, as well as understandings of different methodologies.

This model is one more step towards an interdisciplinary approach in marketing research and practice. With colleagues in the humanities struggling to redefine the role of the arts in higher education and seeking vocational applications, marketing should be vocal in their support for programs focusing on culture. Marketing educational programs at all levels should seek more integration with the humanities.

4.7.2 Implications for marketing research.

This consumer collective model presents a thorough means of conceptualising consumer religiosity and investigating the various roles, motivations and actors in the value network. The S-D Logic component of this model demonstrates how the service-dominant approach delivers an operational perspective to findings in CCT.

This model also moves towards a thorough and authentic approach to consumer religiosity. Further research into consumer religiosity can be based on a model such as this, which encapsulates both marketing and religious studies components. The resulting research should spring from a more consistent basis.

This conceptual model could be applied to a variety of different contexts in marketing, religious studies and even political and social collectives to further test its applications and robustness.

4.7.3 Implications for practitioners.

One key component of this model that practitioners should note is that the firm is not at the centre of the model. The industry literature implying that the firm has the ability to create, manage and direct collectives is belied by the experience of practitioners in the field. A model that acts as a roadmap, or key, to the cultural interaction observed in practice could be welcoming to marketers. Yet convincing
management that marketers are not in possession of as much power as previously believed (or desired) is a tough sell. This model may support the marketer in those endeavours.

Drawing close similarities between religious behaviour and consumer collective behaviour can also create cultural consternation among both religious and secular individuals. Secular individuals in Western culture may not have been exposed to the strange energy of quintessence, and therefore may not understand the behaviours in consumer collectives. Religious individuals may feel that this approach dismisses their religion and compares it to a profane application—marketing.

This model deliberately uses neutral words to help navigate the personal attitudes towards religion of the individual marketers, and brings broad concepts to the fore to support them as envisaging their activities. It is a mechanism to develop competencies in religious studies and culture in a palatable manner, especially for those with a psychology or economics background.

S-D Logic is ready for acceptance and branding in the world of the marketing practitioner. This model is one of many being developed in the academic realm that creates a suite of S-D Logic–based concepts that are ready for application.

4.8 Conclusion

The strange energy Macaulay (1840) discussed in the introduction is powerful. Working with passion from the point of view of a practitioner is challenging, yet it is a powerful emotion that can reap benefits. Working with passion as a researcher also creates challenges, including determining how to identify it, quantify it, measure it and predict it. What does it mean when the passion goes in the wrong direction, and marketers are working with hatred rather than love? What is the role of indifference?
Religious researchers and practitioners have been working with these issues for thousands of years. A hybrid approach towards conceptual modelling of the extreme consumer behaviour of collectives can bring benefits if the work is based on a marketing foundation.

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References


CONSUMER RELIGIOSITY AND CUSTOMER EVANGELISM


A GUIDE TO THE SECTIONS OF THIS THESIS

THE FIRST SECTION is the literature review. It consolidates previous research on consumer religiosity and customer evangelists. It identifies the four unique, essential common traits of religious, and customer, evangelists (A).

THE SECOND SECTION, published in an academic journal in 2010, connects Carse’s Infinite Game with Service-Dominant Logic as a way of describing marketing in the post-industrial economy, providing appropriate theoretical bases for consumer collectivity and the contemporary marketers’ mission to engage customers (B).

THE THIRD SECTION is accepted to an academic journal in 2013, and is under revision for publication. It further develops Carse’s Civitas/Communitas religious collectivity model, applying it to consumer religiosity, consumer collectivity and customer evangelism (C).

THE FOURTH SECTION, published in a peer-reviewed academic book in 2010, explores the role and application of authenticity in collective religious consumption experiences (D).

THE FIFTH SECTION, submitted for publication in 2013, quantitatively tests claims about customer evangelism (A).
5 The Hajj: An Illustration of 360-Degree Authenticity

Chapter 20

THE HAJJ
An Illustration of 360-Degree Authenticity

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Abridgement: The chapter explores authenticity by proposing a 360-degree perspective based on tourism and philosophy literature. The Islamic religious pilgrimage or Hajj serves as an exemplary case for a proposed model. It merges theories of authenticity into a 360-degree multidimensional analysis. The dimensions are objective, constructive, existential, and commercial. Embracing authenticity as a multidimensional concept creates room for varying and valid authenticity perceptions, as well as validating the partnership of participants and producers as cocreators of value within the tourism experience. Keywords: authenticity; Hajj; pilgrimage; communitas; value cocreation

INTRODUCTION

Authenticity in the tourism experience has been a source of debate, starting with the meaning itself. Several definitions of authenticity exist, with much of the discussion about which definition to use or how to integrate them. This chapter explores the concept of authenticity by proposing a 360-degree perspective based on tourism and philosophy literature and using, as an exemplary case, the Islamic religious pilgrimage or Hajj. In this discussion the Hajj is acknowledged as a spiritual and holy experience and that it
cannot be compared to commercial products. However, by contemplating it we may be inspired to better understand qualities of ordinary categories of goods, as discussed below.

Tourism has always dealt with the “theater” of the constructed experience (Vukonić 1996). Although there is consensus that authenticity is important to tourists, how to deliver it or if it is required for a satisfactory experience remains unclear. Yet the literature indicates tourists know authenticity when they see it, and they want to experience more of it (Wang 1999). The paradox of authenticity is that it is often mistaken for an objective truth or scientific fact. A common definition of “authentic” is something that can be objectively confirmed (Burchfield 1987). An object is an original or it is not. The conjecture is in the process of confirmation more than the definition of authenticity.

With experiences, authenticity takes on another quality. Wang (1999) calls this “existential authenticity,” as it arises from a phenomenological perspective first posited by modern philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, who approached it not as an objective position, but as a quality of life, a pattern of behavior, and a personal connection. This approach was a departure from those who came before him in the Western philosophical tradition. It also opened the door to valuing the subjective experience, with all of its complexities and contradictions (Golomb 1995). Kierkegaard departs from the Western notion of separating spiritual and rational thinking. He posits that authenticity is ongoing, an internal struggle not to compartmentalize oneself and to live a whole and complete existence (Golomb 1995). And yet tourism tends to offer an opportunity to get away from the stresses and constraints of everyday life.

Does a tourism perspective take a holistic view of experience, or leave one place to exist authentically in another? Greek philosophers set the stage for the categorization and separation that seems to ring true in a Western context, which is why Kierkegaard’s holistic approach to authenticity seems so radical (Golomb 1995). The Hajj balances these perspectives by being both an experience away from daily life and an experience integrated into the daily life of aspiring pilgrims and those who returned from the journey. The Hajj presents an ideal case in which to examine these experiential issues for several reasons. Islam is unique, with both a rich tradition of travel as well as an imperative to make specific journeys. The religion recognizes the potential for growth with any journey, and travel as both an external and internal transformative experience (Vukonić 1996). The largest single pilgrimage event in the world, the Hajj, is an Islamic one.
The *Hajj* is also an exclusive experience. Non-Muslims cannot participate in it and are forbidden from visiting the sacred sites in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, to examine the *Hajj* experience without addressing the significant spiritual component is problematic from a methodological perspective and carries the risk of approaching the subject matter without the due respect. It is acknowledged here that the profound seriousness of the *Hajj* is the primary reason for its selection in this text. In the context of 360-degree authenticity, it is hard to find an exemplar as effective as this mandatory pilgrimage. The chapter intends to demonstrate that the seriousness of the journey by all participants is precisely why the example of the *Hajj* is so effective, and such effective examples are so rare.

Treating the *Hajj* experience as an exemplary case raises several points. Approaching the concept of tourism from a holistic context, as an interior and exterior transformation, helps reveal a way to understand the essential nature of authentic experiences richly and thoroughly. Examining the experience and its importance in a world context acknowledges the unique and profound nature of the event. Although non-Muslims cannot take part in the journey, they are well placed to learn from it, and in so doing increase their understanding of Islam. It is important to place the *Hajj* in its cultural and religious context. It is not a leisure activity. It is a mandatory journey for every Muslim able to complete it. The effects of the pilgrimage resonate throughout the life of the individuals who have made the journey, as well as their community (Vukonić 1996).

**PILGRIMAGE TOURISM**

As far back as the ancient Greeks, the literature has romanticized religious quests. A pilgrimage was a journey of sacrifice fraught with risk for the pilgrims, but showering spiritual rewards on the brave ones. The word has a looser meaning today, applying to all journeys of significance, whether they apply to conventional religion or not (Turner 1974; Vukonić 1996). An essentialist criticism of the word “pilgrimage” in modern usage is that it can apply to profane settings such as sports tourism and other types of “brand community” tourism (Gamin 2004).

The inner and outer journeys sit at the heart of the pilgrimage experience. Victor Turner’s (1974) view of ritual pilgrimage has three steps: separation from ordinary life and the social/economic structures therein, entrance into the “liminal world” of “communitas,” and then re-entry into the ordinary world with perspectives from the liminal world.
5.2.1 Types of Authenticity

Turner’s liminal world is analogous to a third place (Belk, Ger and Askegaard 2003), where the rules governing society no longer exist. Communitas suspends the traditional hierarchy and division between individuals and imposes a social order based on the essential nature of the activity. Ordinary social structures tend to emphasize differences. Communitas emphasizes sameness or unity (Turner 1974). Signifiers of communitas are the lack of emphasis on material wealth or social standing from secular power constructs, joy, and spiritual connection with a common source or focus (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry 1989).

The liminal world and communitas are key components of tourism marketing (Vukonić 1996). The implication is that communitas and a liminal state are available through the tourism experience, no matter the nature of the activity or the sacredness of it. Similarly, churches advertise the lure of the liminal world. Promising a liminal experience is problematic due to its subjective nature. However, the potential for such an experience is attractive to tourists and a selling point for many tour operators.

This juxtaposition of religious and leisure imagery, and of authenticity and escape, seems to cloud the issue. What is authentic? Can it be measured objectively? Is a subjective perspective of it required to experience its efficacy? The traditional view of authenticity is something that can be independently verified as an objective fact about a place or an object.

Types of Authenticity

When Lionel Trilling (1974) started discussions on authenticity over 40 years ago, he used “To thine own self be true,” a quote from Shakespeare’s Hamlet, to summarize his philosophical view of it. Yet Trilling’s seminal work indicates that a standard definition of authenticity is illusive.

Traditionally, authenticity relates to the physical state of an object. Object-related authenticity also has two distinctions. Objective authenticity relates to the “genuineness” of an object due to its originality. Constructive authenticity relates to the symbolic or constructed value of an object (Wang 1999). In this latter distinction, perception creeps in to an objective concept. This constructive authenticity can exist regardless of the genuineness of the object or place in question.

Recently, scholars added “existential” to concepts of authenticity. This addition is a nod to Kierkegaard, which Wang (1999) uses to draw a distinction between object-related authenticity and activity-related authenticity. Although Wang does not explicitly make this distinction, a close reading of his text in conjunction with Turner (1974) suggests an individual state of
existential authenticity and a communal state that Turner (1974) and others (Belk et al 1989; Carse 2008; Vukonić 1996) call communitas.

Departing from the philosophical perspectives above, another type of authenticity can be in a commercial context. As marketing researchers examine the rising experience economy (Pine and Gilmore 1999), service-dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch 2004), and consumer cocreation of value (Prahalad and Ramaswamy 2000; Vargo and Lusch 2004), authenticity takes center stage. In a matrix categorizing levels of authenticity, the pinnacle is the product that is what it says it is and is true to itself (Gilmore and Pine 2007; Pine 2004). At this pinnacle, products that are what they purport to be and are true to themselves are “real real” (as opposed to a “real fake” or a “fake real”). Although simplistic, the model introduces “fake” and “real” into the discussion—a reference to authenticity and inauthenticity.

In popular culture, the “realness” of an activity makes it powerful. Reality television gets its punch from the claim that people in the shows behave authentically in extreme situations (Gilmore and Pine 2007). Phrases such as “keeping it real” and “being real” are slang terms introduced into common language through music and other cultural products. These terms refer positively to people who represent themselves authentically, ironically claiming to be unswayed by popular culture or fashion (Urban Dictionary: Keeping It Real 2009).

These phrases have made it into mainstream marketing slogans as well, such as Coca Cola’s “The Real Thing.” Tourism advertisements use “real” to discuss both a place and a state of being (Gilmore and Pine 2007). Trilling (1974) discusses “being true to oneself,” but Pine (2004) discusses the importance of being what you say you are (emphasis added). With cultural authenticity it is insufficient to be who you say you are. One must also behave in an authentic manner. In this way, popular culture integrates Kierkegaard’s holistic view of authenticity.

Gilmore and Pine (2007) build a matrix regarding natural authenticity (artificial/natural), original authenticity (imitation/original), exceptional authenticity (disingenuous/genuine), referential authenticity (fake/real), and influential authenticity (insincere/sincere). For this chapter, Pine’s matrix as commercial authenticity refers to commercial products in a cultural context. For clarity, Table 1 reiterates different kinds of authenticity.

Rather than letting these definitions of authenticity be at odds with each other, it is useful to see them as discrete parts of a holistic authentic experience. A model adapted from the discipline of human resources is a shorthand way of analyzing the complex issue of authenticity: 360-degree
Table 1. Types of Authenticity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authenticity Types</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Created by</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>An object is genuine, an original</td>
<td>Producer</td>
<td>Wang (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructive</td>
<td>Something that has constructed, symbolic value</td>
<td>Producer and consumer</td>
<td>Wang (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Existential (others)</td>
<td>The liminal state of a group; communitas</td>
<td>Consumers among themselves</td>
<td>Turner (1974); Wang (1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial</td>
<td>A product is what it says it is and is true to itself</td>
<td>The culture at large, consumers, and producers</td>
<td>Gilmore and Pine (2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

evaluation. Measuring work performance with a 360-degree evaluation helps one understand an employee’s knowledge, leadership, and management skills by surveying individuals throughout their network on their performance. A 360-degree evaluation usually includes supervisors, clients, colleagues, and subordinates. Ideally, this evaluation provides a complete picture of the person and how others regard them (Nowack 1993). Similarly, a 360-degree authenticity model would look at a product or experience from all angles: objective, constructive, existential, and commercial. The model also looks at a product or experience from the point of view of both producers and consumers. Ideally, this multidimensional view creates an accurate analysis of the authenticity in a product experience.

The Hajj as a Prototype of a 360-Degree Authenticity

The Hajj is an annual pilgrimage ritual, mandatory for all Muslims at least once in their lifetime if they are able. The pilgrimage is both intensely personal and intensely public. It is an inner and outer journey, culminating in ancient rites performed in the holiest place in the world. The sheer numbers of pilgrims, almost two million per year, means pilgrims rarely have a moment alone, and all aspects of the journey are performed publicly as part of a community (Saudi Embassy 2009).
The famous *Hajji* (a returned *Hajj* pilgrim) Malcolm X described the experience this way:

I have never before seen sincere and *true* brotherhood practiced by all colors together, irrespective of their color.... During the past eleven days here in the Muslim world, I have eaten from the same plate, drunk from the same glass, and slept on the same rug—while praying to the same God—with fellow Muslims, whose eyes were the bluest of blue, whose hair was the blondest of blond, and whose skin was the whitest of white. And in the words and in the deeds of the white Muslims; I felt the same *sincerity* that I felt among the black African Muslims of Nigeria, Sudan and Ghana (Haley 1965:346; emphasis added).

X is describing existential authenticity, which is explored later in the chapter. If one reads his entire account of the experience, he is clear that it is all aspects of the authentic experience (objective, constructive, existential, and commercial) that impact his internal and external transformation. X’s account is interesting because at the time he was one of the few Americans to make the journey. He also demonstrated a marked change in his rhetoric after the journey, making his transformation public, as he was such an outspoken public figure. As a civil rights activist who spent much of his life seeing European Americans as his enemy and oppressors, X returned from Makkah transformed in many ways. His view toward people of other races was just one aspect of his transformation.

To examine the *Hajj* pilgrimage without acknowledging its central spiritual nature is to discount the key point of the experience. This spiritual significance and its radiance shine brightly in the Muslim world. This genuineness is the very authenticity that this chapter examines, and in the process of examination, the potential of 360-degree authenticity will reveal itself as illusive by discounting the *Hajj*’s significant religiosity. To shed light on this subject, it is necessary to explore the various types of authenticity and how they relate to the *Hajj* experience.

*Object and Constructed Authenticity*

Saudi Arabia is the caretaker of Islam’s holiest sites, Makkah and Medina. The government dictates access to each site and licenses tourism operators to bring pilgrims into the country. They restrict the site to Muslims, and ensure that the
CONSUMER RELIGIOSITY AND CUSTOMER EVANGELISM

328 Tourism in the Muslim World

Hajj logistics are as safe as possible for the pilgrims and the place. The government’s Ministry of the Hajj coordinates the massive effort (Saudi Embassy 2009). That the Hajj takes place on the original site is significant. It gives the journey an objective authenticity. Pilgrims perform all the symbolic actions in the original places where Muhammed performed them. The actions follow a sequence, and each ritual in the sequence has a specific meaning understood by all who participate (Public Broadcasting System 2009; Saudi Embassy 2009). These actions have significant constructed authenticity in Islamic culture.

After the journey, the pilgrim earns the title of Hajji. No specific individual or organization confers the title, but all in the community familiar with the culture of Islam (including non-Muslims) recognize the Hajji title (Public Broadcasting System 2009). Therefore, a Muslim contemplating the Hajj plans for the trip well in advance, as the trip requires preparation on many levels. The religious requirement to embark on the journey is clear: one must have the means, the freedom to travel, the ability to ensure that their dependants are cared for in their absence, and unencumbered and safe passage to what is now known as Saudi Arabia. According to Saudi Embassy (2009), it is unadvisable to make the journey without all of these conditions in place.

It is a religious requirement that the journey be on a secure path, avoiding treacherous passages and ensuring, as far as possible, the safety of pilgrims. Most of them enjoy safe travel, but some do not return from the Hajj. The Ministry of Hajj publishes tips, particularly for dealing with possible medical risks due to the close proximity of large groups of people, carefully controlled and limited resources, and other conditions. Occasionally, people are trampled a stampede while performing the rites (Saudi Embassy 2009).

The Hajj Ministry requires pilgrims to have a Hajj travel visa, which may require a mosque verifying that the pilgrim is a Muslim. Non-Muslims may not participate or visit the sites during the Hajj or at any other times. The Saudi government also licenses external touring companies, familiar with the risks and challenges of Hajj travel, as guides. These travel agents are audited and are the only ones who can facilitate Hajj visas and travel to Makkah and Medina during the key times. The agents are largely responsible for the pilgrims in their care. To that end, mosques, in partnership with the agents, educate and train pilgrims on their forthcoming experience before they depart (Saudi Embassy 2009). These predeparture activities become part of the ritual. Procuring all the necessary documents and training to participate in the trip is part of what Turner (1974) refers to as the ritual of separation from the ordinary world and entry into the liminal world.
These activities also familiarize the pilgrim with the significance of objective authentic experience in the constructed cultural context. Therefore, pilgrims are familiar with the meaning of what they are about to do. By excluding non-Muslims from the experience, the Saudi government ensures that the pilgrims on the Hajj are the ones who will experience the full spiritual impact of the journey. No spaces can be spared for bystanders or spectators—everyone participates in the cultural construct of the place and activities.

Existential Authenticity

When the pilgrims board the plane with their fellow Muslims, they enter the in-between place of the liminal experience and the start of the communitas. The final entry into the liminal world is when the pilgrims consciously leave behind their identity and acknowledge that, upon entrance to Makkah, they leave behind their race, nationality, social class, and other vestiges of the ordinary world and become a person dedicated to God, like the others on the journey (Public Broadcasting System 2009). This falling away of the last vestige of the old identity and the acknowledgment of the new identity is another ritual that underscores the concept of the Hajj as a liminal world for the self and in between all the selves on the journey.

The rites during the trip have profound spiritual meaning to the pilgrims, but the group experience of everyone's reverence for the rites and each other, along with the performance of the rites in concert, exponentially increases their symbolic impact. Although some on the journey are more devout than others, the feeling of community beyond national and social class lines is one of the most powerful aspects of the liminal space. Malcolm X's feelings of sincerity, brotherhood, equality, and spirituality, as well as his changed worldview, appear in other literature from returned Hajjis and reinforce the existential authenticity for both the pilgrims and the community (Public Broadcasting System 2009).

Once the pilgrims return from the experience and re-enter their ordinary life, they will reflect on the journey. This reflection can come in private moments, in communication with other pilgrims, and with the larger community. Reliving the experience in thoughts and discussions, one recreates and reconsumes the experience. The attributes in the imagination—authenticity, meaning, and sincerity—gain momentum upon reflection, and recollecting the experience enhances the transformative experience of the journey (Featherstone 1991).
Commercial Authenticity

The postmodern view of consumer culture suggests that individuals construct their identity through consumption (Featherstone 1991; Lewis and Bridger 2000; Schouten and McAlexander 1995). However, in this case, the pilgrims, as well as those who did not participate in the journey, validate the authenticity and importance of the *Hajj* through their reverence for it. The experience resonates long after it is over for the pilgrim and those who know him or her.

A key point with commercial authenticity is reverence. A commercially successful enterprise that is also respectful and spiritually appropriate is possible in Islam because of how Islamic culture blends the commercial, cultural, and spiritual aspects. The commercial enterprises involved with the *Hajj* must adhere to strict guidelines and are monitored to ensure their compliance. However, these commercial industries participate beyond compliance. Their reverence is, commercially speaking, authentic.

CONCLUSION

This chapter introduced the concept of 360-degree multidimensional authenticity, which comprises its main definitions in the literature. This approach allows for the objective and subjective, as well as the commercial and existential, authenticity. By taking into account the multiple discussions in the literature and binding them into one analysis, a sharp picture emerges of what authenticity can mean overall, and perhaps forms a new measure of it in experiences. The model also allows for the incorporation of more accounts of authenticity should they develop in future.

The chapter draws on themes that resonate when discussing tourism and religion. Anthropological, sociological, philosophical, and religious studies literature all play a role in discovering what makes particular experiences resonate with some individuals. Perhaps, looking back at Kierkegaard, one can posit that the persons most likely to find an experience authentic are those steeped in authenticity themselves. Surely, a pilgrim is an easier fit into that category than a different type of tourist. The most significant and popular pilgrimage in the world, the *Hajj*, helps initiate the exploration of how genuine meaning can be experienced: individually, as a group, and as a culture.
References


CONSUMER RELIGIOSITY AND CUSTOMER EVANGELISM

A GUIDE TO THE SECTIONS OF THIS THESIS

THE FIRST SECTION is the literature review. It consolidates previous research on consumer religiosity and customer evangelists. It identifies the four unique, essential common traits of religious, and customer, evangelists (A).

THE SECOND SECTION, published in an academic journal in 2010, connects Carse’s Infinite Game with Service-Dominant Logic as a way of describing marketing in the post industrial economy, providing appropriate theoretical bases for consumer collectivity and the contemporary marketers’ mission to engage customers (B).

THE THIRD SECTION is accepted to an academic journal in 2013, and is under revision for publication. It further develops Carse’s Civitas/Communitas religious collectivity model, applying it to consumer religiosity, consumer collectivity and customer evangelism (C).

THE FOURTH SECTION, published in a peer-reviewed academic book in 2010, explores the role and application of authenticity in collective religious consumption experiences (D).

THE FIFTH SECTION, submitted for publication in 2013, quantitatively tests claims about customer evangelism (A).

(A) Evangelists have four essential traits, as identified in the literature [SECTION 1] and tested in this thesis’ empirical study [SECTION 5]: they belong to formal or informal CONSUMER COLLECTIVES, have QUINTESSENCE (arising from a TRANSFORMATIVE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE), are AUTHENTICALLY CONNECTED to the brand/product/users and spread EXTREME levels of WORD OF MOUTH.
6 Identifying Customer Evangelists

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Hanna Glaebe, BI Norwegian Business School, Norway
Dick Mizerski, University of Western Australia Business School, Australia
Jamie Murphy, Australian School of Management and Curtin University, Australia

Abstract

Industry publications abound with tips on how to create and nurture customer evangelism. Scholarly publications note the effects of evangelism to firms. Consultants promote evangelism creation as part of their skill set. Yet the existence customer evangelism and its effects remain unsupported by empirical evidence.

This paper takes one of the first steps towards empirical analysis of customer evangelism by using a formative composite latent variable model to identify customer evangelists from a survey population. The authors then compare customer evangelists against non-customer evangelists on key characteristics, as per the claims in the qualitative literature, to verify the accuracy of the selection model.

The analysis demonstrates that key claims in the qualitative literature in regard to customer evangelists are supported by quantitative data in this study, namely that customer evangelists are focused on authenticity, cultishness and sharing knowledge, and have a deep emotional and spiritual connection to the brand. They also have higher intentions to purchase the product in future than do non-customer evangelists. However, other claims in the qualitative literature—such as that customer evangelist are more socially-oriented, knowledge-seeking, experientially-oriented or idealistic than are non-customer evangelists—are not supported by the data in this study, or are inconclusive.
This study is one of the first to attempt to empirically identify customer evangelists, and is part of a movement to study consumer religiosity in an empirical context. This study paves the way for further empirical research into customer evangelism, consumer religiosity and consumer collectivism.

6.1 Introduction

Since the early 1990s, industry pundits have extolled the potential of customer evangelists as an unpaid sales force (Goldfayn, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007). At the turn of the twenty-first century, the scholarly literature began mentioning customer evangelists in the context of WOM and consumer collective research (Foux, 2005; Rao, 2002; Rothschild et al., 2007; Seeberger et al., 2010). For the last 30 years, claims about customer evangelism have been based on case studies or anecdotal evidence. The customer evangelism literature to date has been conceptual (Collins, Jarvis, & Murphy, 2008; Collins & Murphy, 2009b; Collins & Watts, 2009; Foux, 2005; Seeberger et al., 2010), anecdotal (Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007; Rothschild et al., 2007) or reliant on case studies (Goldfayn, 2012; Rao, 2002).

The key contribution of this paper is its move towards empirically testing some of the claims about customer evangelists. Empirical measurement will provide an evidence basis for the phenomenon. Further research will then be able to determine its generalisability and predict related behaviour. The lack of empirical evidence to date prevents researchers and practitioners from developing tools that can predict customer evangelism or quantify its effects (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This study distils claims made in the industry and scholarly literature about customer evangelism, and translates these into a conceptual model that can be used to identify evangelists. The model then forms the basis for empirical identification of customer evangelists. The study then seeks to
verify further claims in the literature about the behaviour of customer evangelists against the customer evangelists identified in the study, as shown in Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current</th>
<th>Process for this study</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990s–2000s: Anecdotal evidence, prescriptive advice (industry publications)</td>
<td>Step 1: Collect claims made in the literature.</td>
<td>Validated formative customer evangelism identification model: customer evangelists (CE+) are members of consumer collectives (CC+) who have a sacred, authentic connection to the product/brand (Q+) and use their own resources (AU+) to spread higher than average levels of WOM (WOM+).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000s–today: Anecdotal evidence, case studies, advice (industry and scholarly) pubs</td>
<td>Step 2: Distinguish whether claims from the literature can be used for model formulation or validation.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 3: Formulate a model based on Jarvis et al. (2003).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 4: Identify customer evangelists from a population using the model.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 5: Select a randomised group of non-customer evangelists from the same survey with similar demographics in order to formulate a stratified sample for testing the model.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 6: Measure the likelihood of the identified customer evangelists to engage in the validation behaviours identified in Step 2.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Step 7: Analyse and discuss results of the study, resulting in a validated model that can be applied for further research.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 3.** Formative model development and verification in this study.

### 6.2 The Rise of Customer Evangelism

Kawasaki is widely regarded as the father of customer evangelism (Huba & McConnel; McConnel & Huba, 2007). While at Apple in the 1980s, even though he was in a sales role, his business card listed his job title as ‘evangelist’. Kawasaki noted the religious fervour at Apple. When he left, he wrote *Selling the Dream*, which introduced the idea of customer evangelism. Kawasaki used religious language as a metaphor and described what he saw as growing religiosity in consumers (Kawasaki, 1991).

Kawasaki defined customer evangelists as customers who are intrinsically motivated to zealously spread WOM. Customer evangelists use their own resources to
fuel enthusiasm for the brand among existing and new users. Kawasaki’s definition holds true with all the business consultants who have written best-selling industry books about the topic. They refer to Kawasaki’s work as the basis for their own (Goldfayn, 2012; McConnel & Huba, 2007). In the industry literature, groups such as Apple, Amazon, Krispy Kreme, Harley-Davidson and the Grateful Dead are credited with creating and leveraging customer evangelism.

The purpose of books about customer evangelists is to provide advice about creating customer evangelists, and reaping the rewards of an unpaid sales force. Each book, blog, webinar and consulting pitch by these industry pundits promotes their advice relating to customer evangelism. Unfortunately, the industry literature does not provide any theoretical or evidentiary basis for their claims, beyond the anecdotal. They also do not cite or engage in scholarly quality fieldwork, qualitative research or empirical testing (Goldfayn, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007).

Scholarly literature mentions customer evangelism in the context of larger discussions about WOM marketing, consumer culture, consumer collectivism and the rise of social media (Collins & Murphy, 2010; Foux, 2005; Rao, 2002; Rothschild et al., 2007; Seeberger et al., 2010). Customer evangelism has also been the subject of theoretical explorations of brand enthusiasm (Collins et al., 2008; Collins & Murphy, 2009b). Except for one recent paper attempting to create a customer evangelism scale (Collins & Murphy, 2013a), this study is the first to explore customer evangelism quantitatively.

6.3 Theoretical Bases for Customer Evangelism

An essential aspect of customer evangelism is the elevation of the product in the evangelist’s eyes as transcending the profane into the sacred (Belk, 2012; Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Goldfayn, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007; Schouten &
McAlexander, 1995). As in religious evangelism (Coleman, 1963; Green, 1970),
customer evangelism is a transformative experience that affects a minority of product
users. From a marketing perspective, S-D Logic has been proposed as one of the
theoretical bases for customer evangelism because it accounts for why some customers
become evangelists, but many do not (Collins et al., 2008; Collins & Murphy, 2009b).

6.3.1 SD Logic.

S-D Logic focuses on the product experience, embracing the subjective
perspective of every product encounter (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The claim is that
variance in customer perceptions in the product experience is a natural phenomenon,
and should be expected. Examples of this variance can be observed at the extremes of
product enthusiasm. For example, millions of viewers have enjoyed Star Trek television
shows and movies. However, only a minority develop such an attachment to the Star
Trek cannon that they attend conventions, dress as the characters and engage in other
kinds of religious behaviour (Kozinets, 2001; Porter & McLaren, 1999).

Attachments to products/brands such as the Star Trek example have been
explored in the marketing scholarly literature, as well as the social science literature.
Fans (Gray et al., 2007), mavens (Walsh et al., 2004), opinion leaders (Rogers, 1983),
fanboy/girls (Newman, 2008; Pustz, 1999) and so forth are all manifestations of
product/brand enthusiasm with a strong WOM component (Collins & Murphy, 2013b).
S-D Logic, with its focus on the product experience, provides a basis for understanding
why customer-constructed feelings towards products/brands can vary so widely within
one mass-produced product’s consumer population.

6.3.2 Quintessence and Transcendent Customer Experiences. (TCEs)

Russell Belk (1989) coined the term ‘quintessence’ to describe an authentic,
customer-constructed sacred feeling towards an object. Quintessence can arise in
several ways. For example, a bride-to-be may have quintessence for her engagement ring because its symbolism elevates its significance beyond its market value. Quintessence may be linked to nostalgia, such as family heirlooms or antiques. Objects that complete a collection or are rare may also be the subject of quintessence—a rare baseball card, for example.

Belk posited that some products inspire quintessence through the customer’s perception of *rightness*, or perfection in form and function. Quintessence spurs the customer to act out their feeling towards the product/brand in a religious manner, as they now perceive the product as a sacred object (Belk et al., 1989). Examples of quintessence abound in the customer evangelism literature. Although the sacred connection to the product/brand is not mentioned explicitly as quintessence in the literature, the connection has been made in the scholarly literature (Collins & Murphy, 2009b; Collins, Murphy, et al., 2011).

A Transcendent Customer Experience (TCE) (Schouten et al., 2007) has been proposed as a precursor to the development of a deep emotional connection with a product/brand. TCEs were first observed in a fieldwork study on consumer collectivism at a producer-sponsored brand event. A TCE is a peak and/or flow experience that gives the subject emotional highs that they attribute to the product experience. The subject can be marked by emotional intensity, ecstasy, oneness and testing of personal limits. The result is that the TCE elevates the importance of the stimulus that creates the feeling. This lasting elevation has the same observed effect as quintessence. Several studies have connected TCE and quintessence, with the former leading to the latter (Collins et al., 2012; Collins, Murphy, et al., 2011).

These studies on quintessence and subsequent correlative behaviour have demonstrated that consumers who were identified as having quintessence for a product
were also more likely to have higher perceptions of value for the product, to purchase the product in future, to shun competitor products and to spread WOM about the product than were those without quintessence (Collins et al., 2012; Collins & Murphy, 2013a; Collins, Murphy, et al., 2011). In these studies, the measure of whether a respondent experienced quintessence was their response to the question ‘My life wouldn’t be the same without [product]’. This current study used the same measure to quantify quintessence.

6.4 Formative Indicators of Customer Evangelism

The industry and scholarly literature on religious and customer evangelism to date is mainly qualitative. Conceptual models, anecdotes and case studies abound. These observations, in both the scholarly and industry literature, have developed a consensus on the formative indicators of customer evangelism.

6.4.1 Customer evangelists produce more WOM about a product than the average consumer, even though they are not incentivised to do so.

Evangelists wish to improve the lives of others by telling them about the product, or helping them use the product. Their dedication to spreading WOM is at the heart of what makes customer evangelists of interest to producers (Collins et al., 2008; Collins & Murphy, 2009b; Foux, 2005; Goldfayn, 2010, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007; Rao, 2002; Rothschild et al., 2007; Seeberger et al., 2010).

6.4.2 Customer evangelists have a sacred connection (quintessence) with the product/brand.

This sacred connection is the wellspring for the evangelist’s WOM activity. Quintessence is an essential aspect of customer evangelism and is lacking in other high-WOM brand enthusiasts, such as mavens (Walsh et al., 2004), opinion leaders (Rogers, 1983), fanboys/girls (Newman, 2008; Pustz, 1999) and so forth. A TCE is the catalyst
for quintessence (Collins et al., 2012; Collins, Murphy, et al., 2011; Schouten et al., 2007).

6.4.3 Customer evangelists are authentically connected to the product/brand.

Whether discussing religion or marketing, evangelism and authenticity are connected. The sacred connection to a product can only arise from an authentic connection to the brand experience. A 360-degree framework to define authenticity has been proposed (Collins & Murphy, 2010; Collins, Watts, et al., 2011) in order to clarify what is meant by authenticity. A few dimensions of the 360da model are used in this customer evangelism model in order to identify individuals with an intrinsic, authentic connection to the product.

6.4.4 Customer evangelists identify themselves as part of consumer collectives.

‘Consumer collectives’ (Schouten et al., 2007) is an umbrella term for groups of customers who share their (usually positive) product/brand experiences in communities. A collective may be formal or informal—they may be set up officially by the producer or unofficially by users. Variously referred to as ‘brand communities’ (Cova et al., 2007; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001), ‘subcultures of consumption’ (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), ‘brand cults’ (Belk & Tumbat, 2005) or ‘consumer tribes’ (Shanker et al., 2007), customer evangelists act as recruiters for the collective, attempting to attract more users to the collective. The formative indicators of a customer evangelist, and how they can be measured in a survey, are indicated in Table 5.
### Table 5

*Formative Indicators of Customer Evangelism*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Hypothesised response</th>
<th>References</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WOM+</td>
<td>Subject spreads higher than average WOM.</td>
<td>Customer evangelists will spread more WOM than the average user.</td>
<td>(Coleman, 1963; Collins et al., 2008; Collins &amp; Murphy, 2009b; Goldfayn, 2012; Green, 1970; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel &amp; Huba, 2007; Rao, 2002; Rothschild et al., 2007; Seeberger et al., 2010).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q+</td>
<td>Subject has a perception of sacredness for the product.</td>
<td>Customer evangelists will indicate that their life would not be the same without the product experience.</td>
<td>(Belk et al., 1989; Collins et al., 2008; Collins &amp; Murphy, 2009b; Hill &amp; Rifkin, 1999; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel &amp; Huba, 2007; Schouten &amp; McAlexander, 1995; Schouten et al., 2007).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CC+</td>
<td>Subject will perceive themselves as part of collectives.</td>
<td>Customer evangelists will engage in collective behaviour in identifying themselves as part of a discrete group of users.</td>
<td>(Goldfayn, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel &amp; Huba, 2007; Schau et al., 2009; Schouten &amp; McAlexander, 1995).</td>
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<tr>
<td>AU+</td>
<td>Subject will have an authentic motivation for their behaviour.</td>
<td>Customer evangelists are not motivated by compensation for their product/brand-related behaviour (WOM or contributions to the consumer collective).</td>
<td>(Beverland, 2005; Goldfayn, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel &amp; Huba, 2007; Seeberger et al., 2010).</td>
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Synthesising the above, the following is a definition of customer evangelism:

*customer evangelists are members of consumer collectives who have a sacred, authentic connection to the product/brand and use their own resources to spread higher than average levels of WOM about the product/brand.*

### 6.5 Methodology

#### 6.5.1 Sample.

The data in this study were sourced from an Australasian online video entertainment rental service, which will be named ‘OVERS’ for the purposes of this study. OVERS members pay a monthly fee to order video or gaming titles. When they are finished with the title, the customer sends the title back to OVERS in a prepaid
envelope through the post (although, more recently, streaming options have been offered). The customer selects from a variety of plans on a subscription basis that they can cancel at any time—it is thus essential to OVERS that they keep their members engaged.

Members use a log on to access the OVERS website, select from thousands of titles to rent and place them in a queue. OVERS selects the highest-ranking available title and posts it to the member through surface mail. The member keeps the title as long as they like—there are no late fees or return dates. Once the video is returned (via prepaid post), the company dispatches the next highest-ranking available title in the member’s queue. OVERS uses several methods to foster a feeling of community among its users. OVERS makes recommendations to its members regarding titles they might like, based on their previous selections. OVERS has newsletters and genre-specific communication that subscribers can opt into. OVERS encourages its members to rate and comment on titles on the OVERS website, as well as engages its members through Facebook and other social media. Through all of these activities, OVERS facilitates a consumer collective of its customers.

At the time the survey was taken, OVERS had approximately 60,000 members. Members who responded to the survey were offered an opportunity to win a one-year free membership to OVERS. The survey was designed by the OVERS membership team and hosted on an external survey website. The link to the survey was delivered to all current subscribers by email, promoting the prize. The survey had 60 to 70 questions (depending on the answers the respondent chose). All survey questions were optional.

The survey asked demographic, psychographic and behavioural questions. Questions relating to the respondents’ purchasing and consumption habits and
preferences were also included. The answer formats varied, with most measured on a multi-point scale.

6.5.2 Method.

The decision to use a formative model was primarily based on three observations. First, when identifying customer evangelists, the direction of causality flows from measure to construct (Jarvis, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2003). Identification of customer evangelists in this study arose from an analysis of their responses to questions in the survey about themselves. These questions were grouped into categories, as shown in Table 5. Those who responded positively to all four categories were identified as customer evangelists. Therefore, the measures informed the construct, rather than the reverse. The reverse would require a reflective model.

Another aspect of the decision to use a formative model was the assumption that dropping an indicator from the measurement alters the meaning of the construct. In this model, all the measures shown in Table 5 (quintessence [Q+], extreme WOM [WOM+], authentic [AU+], consumer collectivism [C+]) affected the construct (customer evangelism). Dropping one of the constructs would alter the meaning of the phenomenon being identified. For example, someone who has only AU+, CC+ and WOM may suit the definition of a maven (Walsh et al., 2004) or opinion leader (Rogers, 1983; Walsh et al., 2004), rather than a customer evangelist (Collins & Murphy, 2013b).

A formative model also accounts for errors differently than does a reflective model. Reliability for formative models is achieved through a holistic approach, by evaluating all of the items together, rather than at an individual level (Jarvis et al., 2003). In this study, customer evangelists were identified. Following this, the responses from customer evangelists were tested against those from non-customer evangelists in
order to evaluate whether the identified group was largely consistent with the observations in the literature. The verification process tested the hypotheses’ expected responses from the identified group.

If a majority of the hypotheses were correct, then a claim could be made that the identification process for customer evangelists was successful, and the possible error in the formative model was low. This gestalt-type approach, rather than a reductive, calculated tally of expected results, is consistent with formative modelling: ‘The error [in a composite latent variable model] is represented at the construct level rather than at the individual item level … as the error is associated with the set of items rather than with the individual items themselves’ (Jarvis et al., 2003, p. 202).

The requirements in Jarvis et al. (2003) for latent variable modelling were met as follows. First, the indicators were viewed as defining characteristics of the construct. In this case, customer evangelism was defined by the four characteristics of CC+, WOM+, AU+ and Q+. Second, changes in the indicators mean a change to the construct. This was the case with the model proposed in this paper. Someone who was CC+, AU+ and Q+ would not be an evangelist, but would perhaps be considered a geek. Each construct in the model was required to define customer evangelism specifically. The indicators did not share a common theme—consumer collectivism was different from quintessence, and so forth. Each of the four indicators was unique. Jarvis et al. (2003) also made the following observations, which aligned with the model choice in the current study—namely, that a change in the indicators is not necessarily expected to be associated with a change in the other indicators, and that the indicators do not have the same antecedents and consequences. The authors selected questions from the survey that were congruent with the definition of customer evangelism in the literature, as shown in Figure 4.
Respondents were identified as customer evangelists if they all answered questions in the following way:

- **WOM+** = I have recommended OVERS to more than five people in the last 12 months
- **Q+** = My life would not be the same without OVERS (respondents agreed)
- **AU+** = If OVERS offered me incentives, I would be more likely to tell people about them (respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed)
- **CC+** = All OVERS survey participants were considered members of a consumer collective

**Figure 4.** Identifying customer evangelists (n = 3,995).

The number of customer evangelists identified was large enough to execute a series of tests in order to discover whether the identified group would share the types of beliefs and behaviour reflected in the literature, as shown in Table 3.

### 6.5.3 The demographics of customer evangelists.

As this is one of the first quantitative studies of customer evangelism, the OVERS data provide an opportunity to analyse whether customer evangelists differ from non-customer evangelists in the areas of gender, age, locale and income.

#### Table 6

*Gender of Customer Evangelists and Non-customer Evangelists (n = 3,995) (p = 0.28)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not a customer evangelist</td>
<td>Customer evangelist</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>1,485</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1,522</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38.3%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>38.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,397</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2,473</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>61.7%</td>
<td>67.3%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3,882</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The overall survey had more female respondents than male. There was no meaningful difference between males and females; thus, this study does not demonstrate that one gender is more likely to be a customer evangelist than another.

Table 7

*Ages of Customer Evangelists and Non-customer Evangelists* \( (n = 3,995) \) \( (p = 0.001) \)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Not a customer evangelist</th>
<th>Customer evangelist</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18–24</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–29</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–34</td>
<td>565</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>6.2%</td>
<td>14.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35–39</td>
<td>630</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–44</td>
<td>558</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45–49</td>
<td>415</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50–54</td>
<td>389</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>747</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,882</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The OVERS product skews towards an older audience. Unsurprisingly, customer evangelism does as well.
Table 8

*Home Locale of Customer Evangelists and Non-customer Evangelists (n = 3,995) (p = 0.057)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Locale</th>
<th>Regional</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>% within customer evangelist</th>
<th>Not a customer evangelist</th>
<th>Customer evangelist</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1,341</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
<td>34.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metro</td>
<td></td>
<td>2,541</td>
<td>65.5%</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>56.6%</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,882</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Australia, rural and regional areas are defined as locations that are not in the population centre of Australia, such as capital cities and larger population centres.

Regional areas are defined as places with populations under 500,000. Some regional areas in Australia can be quite remote, with a limited supply of services. The fact that there are proportionally more customer evangelists in regional areas, rather than metro areas, may have something to do with the nature of the product experience. Regional areas are less likely to have the variety of entertainment options available in metro areas, and thus the product may resonate more strongly with audiences in less densely populated areas.
Table 9

*Income of Customer Evangelists and Non-customer Evangelists (n = 3,995) (p = 0.198)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Not a customer evangelist</th>
<th>Customer evangelist</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than $20,000</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>205</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,000–$40,000</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>459</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$40,000–$60,000</td>
<td>574</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>597</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$60,000–$80,000</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>554</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,000–$100,000</td>
<td>576</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>591</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100,000–$120,000</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>407</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$120,000–$150,000</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>305</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$150,000 +</td>
<td>318</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>327</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>534</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>550</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3,882</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>3,995</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The OVERS survey requested information on household income. The results of this question did not show any statistical significance or meaningfulness.

### 6.6 Analysis and Findings

The ratio of customer evangelists to non-customer evangelists was uneven. Therefore, in order to reduce the instance of type I errors, a stratified sample was selected for analysis in the following way. All identified customer evangelists were placed in one group (*customer evangelists*). This group was then analysed for three key factors: gender, age and locale. Locale was selected because the overall sample had an overrepresentation of regional respondents, in comparison to the Australian population.

Following this, respondents from the group not identified as customer evangelists (*non-customer evangelists*) were selected at random, once they met the required gender, age and locale to create a stratified sample, as shown in Table 10.
A series of hypotheses were developed to anticipate the beliefs and behaviours that, according to the literature, would be more pronounced in customer evangelists than in non-customer evangelists. The purpose of this analysis was twofold. First, it was anticipated that the results could lend weight to the formative model if the quantitative results were consistent with the observed data in the qualitative and anecdotal literature. Second, the results could indicate which behaviours and beliefs are essential to customer evangelism, as opposed to the beliefs and behaviours that may be observed in some contexts, but not in others.

The purpose of the quantitative analysis in this paper was to verify whether the group identified as customer evangelists in the OVERS survey displayed a higher propensity towards the behaviours identified in the qualitative literature.
6.6.1 Customer satisfaction.

As customer evangelists have quintessence, it is expected that they would be more satisfied with the product/brand than would non-customer evangelists (Goldfayn, 2010, 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007).

6.6.1.1 \textit{H}^1: \textit{Customer evangelists demonstrate higher levels of customer satisfaction than do non-customer evangelists.}

Respondents were asked whether their household was satisfied with their OVERS membership. Responses were collected on a four-point Likert scale, with the extreme ‘top box’ score used for comparison. The top box score (‘extremely satisfied’) was selected in greater proportions by customer evangelists (84\%) than by non-customer evangelists (46\%), (p < 0.001).

An independent sample t-test was conducted across all responses to confirm the results between customer evangelists and non-customer evangelists. The results met the threshold for significance (p < 0.005). The means for customer evangelists were \(M = 1.47\) (SD = 0.973) and for non-customer evangelists were \(M = 1.17\) (SD = 0.4): t(224) = 3.0.

As multiple (two) tests were performed on these data, a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of 0.025 was calculated to reduce the probability of a type I error. Both of the above tests met the adjusted threshold. Therefore, \(H^1\) was supported, thereby demonstrating that customer evangelists have a higher customer satisfaction level than do non-customer evangelists.

6.6.2 Perception of value.

The OVERS survey did not ask questions regarding perception of value at one moment in time; however, it did ask questions regarding changes in the perception of value over time. As customer evangelists have quintessence, an assumption was made
that their perception of value was more likely to increase over time (Belk et al., 1989; Collins et al., 2012; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007).

6.6.2.1 H2: Perceptions of product value will increase more among customer evangelists than among non-customer evangelists.

Respondents were asked whether their perception of value of their membership had changed during the previous six months. The responses were on a five-point scale. The mean for customer evangelists (M = 2.03, SD = 0.69) was higher than for non-customer evangelists (M = 1.9, SD = 0.96), indicating that customer evangelists were more likely to perceive growth in the value of the product during the previous six months. A second test was used and this indicated that a relationship was found: $X^2 = (4, n = 226) = 285.5, p = < 0.001$. When the Bonferroni-adjusted significance level was applied for multiple tests, the results confirmed the hypothesis. Therefore, H2 was supported, thereby demonstrating that customer evangelists have a higher perception of value over time than do non-customer evangelists.

6.6.3 Intention to purchase.

As a feature of customer evangelists is the attempt to convince others to purchase the product, it is likely customer evangelists will intend to purchase the product in future themselves (Goldfayn, 2010; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007; Rothschild et al., 2007). The OVERS survey asked respondents about their intention to remain an OVERS member.

6.6.3.1 H3: Customer evangelists have stronger future intention to purchase than do non-customer evangelists.

Customer evangelists were more likely to select ‘yes’ (97.3%) than were non-customer evangelists. A chi-square analysis confirmed that a relationship was found for the intent to purchase being higher in customer evangelists: $X^2 = (2, n = 211) = 2.46, p$
Even with a Bonferroni-adjusted significance level of 0.025, both of the above tests met the adjusted threshold. The data support H³, thereby indicating that customer evangelists have a stronger intention to purchase the product in future than do non-customer evangelists.

6.6.4 Shunning the competition.

Customer evangelists are more likely to use the limited resources they have in the product category to purchase the product with which they have quintessence. Therefore, they are less likely to purchase from the competition (Collins & Murphy, 2009b; Goldfayn, 2010; Kawasaki, 1991, 2006; McConnel & Huba, 2007). They are also more likely to dissuade others to purchase from the competition, seeing them as a threat to the health of the product/brand with which they have a connection (Goldfayn, 2012; Green, 1970; Martin, 2011).

6.6.4.1 H⁴: Customer evangelists are less likely to consider purchasing from a competitor than are non-customer evangelists.

An extreme top box score was used for comparison on a response relating to the last time the respondent had purchased the product from the competition, if at all. A greater number of customer evangelists (62.8%) indicated that they had not visited a bricks-and-mortar DVD rental store during the last 12 months, than did non-customer evangelists (35.4%), (p < 0.001).

An extreme top box comparison of another survey question asking about intention to purchase from a competitor also indicated that a greater number of customer evangelists (72.6%) would not visit a bricks-and-mortar DVD rental store in the future, than would non-customer evangelists (40.7%), (p < 0.001).

OVERS asked their customers whether they thought their local DVD store had a great range of titles. It would be expected that customer evangelists would disagree with
this statement, and this may be part of their rationale behind preferring OVERS to their local bricks-and-mortar DVD store. However, this analysis demonstrated no difference between customer evangelists disagreeing with that statement (M = 2.9, SD = 0.99) and non-customer evangelists disagreeing with that statement (M = 2.9, SD = 1.38). The results also did not meet the proposed threshold of significance: t(224) = 0.111, p = 0.91. Therefore, H4 was supported, thereby indicating that customer evangelists are less likely to shop at bricks-and-mortar stores; however, the reasons for this were not apparent from this study.

6.6.5 Dimensions of authenticity within the consumer collective.

OVERS asked the respondents a series of questions relating to their perceptions of the honesty of other OVERS members. Although honesty is only one dimension of authenticity, these questions could be used to explore perceptions of authenticity within the collective among customer evangelists.

6.6.5.1 H5: Customer evangelists perceive people within the consumer collective as being more honest than those outside the consumer collective.

The responses to the questions were all on the same five-point Likert scale, after recoding responses to one of the questions that was originally used as a reverse coded question. The lower numbers indicated agreement, while the higher numbers indicated disagreement. The three questions demonstrated a correlation with each other (p < 0.001), as shown in Table 11.
Table 11

Correlations between Questions Relating to $H^5$

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>OVERS members are honest about what they think</th>
<th>OVERS members are no more or less honest about what they think than anyone else</th>
<th>There is more honesty in the OVERS community than in general</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OVERS members are honest about what they think</td>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.670***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERS members are no more or less honest about what they think than anyone else*</td>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>0.670**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is more honesty in the OVERS community than in general</td>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>0.630**</td>
<td>0.325**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The five-point Likert scale responses for each question were added together and then subject to an independent samples t-test. The data showed no difference between customer evangelists’ responses (M = 8.0, SD = 1.30) and non-customer evangelists responses (M = 8.0, SD = 1.19) to the statements, and the statistical significance of the results did not meet the proposed threshold: $t(195) = -0.06$, $p = 0.951$.

Therefore, $H^5$ was not supported in this study, which indicated that either honesty is not considered a valid measure of authenticity, or that perceptions of authenticity between members of consumer collectives are no different between customer evangelists and non-customer evangelists. Therefore, the results of $H^5$ were inconclusive.

6.6.6 Engaging in a cultish perspective.

Customer evangelists are part of consumer collectives. These collectives can inspire feelings of tribalism (Shanker et al., 2007) and a sense of commonality within
the group (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Collectively, these feelings have been identified in the customer evangelism literature as ‘cultish’ (Collins et al., 2008) and should be more pronounced in customer evangelists than in non-customer evangelists.

6.6.6.1 $H^6$: Customer evangelists would feel a stronger connection to other members of OVERS than would non-customer evangelists.

The survey asked whether the respondents felt a connection to the other members of OVERS. The responses supported the claim that customer evangelists felt more connected to other members of the consumer collective ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 0.795$) than did non-customer evangelists ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 0.546$). The results met the threshold for statistical significance: $t(209) = 4.935$, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, $H^6$ was supported, thereby indicating that customer evangelists demonstrate a stronger feeling of connection to other members of the consumer collective than do non-customer evangelists.

6.6.7 Social orientation, online and offline.

A key aspect of the customer evangelist is their desire to convert others to using the product/brand. This could indicate that customer evangelists are likely to be more social than are non-customer evangelists.

6.6.7.1 $H^7$: Customer evangelists are more socially-oriented than are non-customer evangelists.

The OVERS survey included three questions relating to the respondents’ view on engaging in social behaviour. The questions met the threshold for correlation ($p < 0.001$), as demonstrated in Table 12.
Table 12

Correlations between Questions Relating to Social Orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>I enjoy activities more when they are shared with other people</th>
<th>I enjoy activities more when I am alone*</th>
<th>I prefer to spend my leisure activities with other people</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy activities more when they are shared with other people</td>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-0.561**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy activities more when I am alone*</td>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>-0.561**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I prefer to spend my leisure activities with other people</td>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>0.784**</td>
<td>-0.584**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

One of the questions was a reverse coded question. This response was recoded so that the responses were on the same scale as the other two questions, then the responses were combined. An independent samples t-test indicated that both customer evangelists and non-customer evangelists had the same mean and standard deviation (M = 7.8, SD = 1.3). The t-test results did not meet the threshold for significance: t(224) = -0.201, p = 0.841. Therefore, in this case, H^7 was not supported, thereby indicating that customer evangelists are no more or less social than are non-customer evangelists.

6.6.7.2 H^8: Customer evangelists are more engaged in social media than are non-customer evangelists.

Customer evangelists may be more socially active online, as OVERS itself is an online product, and OVERS encourages customer engagement on its website through the rating of films, user reviews, and so forth. The OVERS questionnaire asked whether the members were involved with Facebook, Twitter or OVERS social media (engaged in their forums).
Each respondent was given a score of one for each social media service in use. The lowest possible score was zero (for no social media engagement) and the highest was three (if using Facebook, Twitter and the OVERS forum). It was found that the customer evangelists were marginally more engaged in social media ($M = 2.58$, $SD = 0.638$) than were the non-customer evangelists ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 0.632$). However, the independent samples t-test results indicated that this difference did not meet the threshold for significance: $t(224) = -0.503$, $p = 0.615$. Therefore, this study did not support $H^8$, thereby indicating that customer evangelists are not any more or less engaged in social media than are non-customer evangelists.

6.6.8 Customer evangelists are experientially driven.

This paper proposes that a TCE is a precursor to quintessence. Therefore, customer evangelists may be more experientially-oriented than non-customer evangelists (Belk et al., 1989; Goldfayn, 2010; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

6.6.8.1 $H^9$: Customer evangelists are more experientially-oriented than are non-customer evangelists.

The OVERS survey asked several questions regarding how the customers connected to experiences. The questions correlated to each other, as shown in Table 13.
Table 13

Correlations between Questions Relating to Experiential Aspects of Products

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Material things are more important to me than experiences (+)</th>
<th>I enjoy spending money on experiences and travel</th>
<th>Shopping is fun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Material things are more important to me than experiences (+)</td>
<td>Pearson correlation 1</td>
<td>0.599**</td>
<td>0.336</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy spending money on experiences and travel</td>
<td>Pearson correlation 0.599**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.543**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping is fun</td>
<td>Pearson correlation 0.336**</td>
<td>0.543**</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The data demonstrated that customer evangelists were slightly more interested in experiential products (M = 2.58, SD = 0.638) than were non-customer evangelists (M = 7.46, SD = 1.809). However, the independent samples t-test results indicated that these data did not meet the threshold for significance: t(224) = -0.503, p = 0.615. Therefore, H9 was not supported in this case, thereby indicating that customer evangelists are not more experientially driven than are non-customer evangelists.

6.6.9 Customer evangelists are more likely to be knowledge-oriented.

Research into consumer collectives has indicated that these groups follow a hierarchy that is different to the everyday world. Usually the hierarchy is based around knowledge of the product—the greater knowledge of the product, the higher status of the member (Chalmers & Arthur, 2008; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The OVERS survey included a question asking respondents if they regularly sought information from people more knowledgeable than themselves. This question was used to test H10.
6.6.9.1 H\textsuperscript{10}: Customer evangelists are more likely to seek knowledge from others than are non-customer evangelists.

The data demonstrated that customer evangelists (M = 2.57, SD = 1.329) are slightly more interested in the opinions of those they consider more knowledgeable than themselves, than are non-customer evangelists (M = 2.72, SD = 1.366). However, the independent samples t-test results indicated that these data did not meet the threshold for significance: t(224) = -0.839, p = 0.90. Therefore, H\textsuperscript{10} was not supported in this case, thereby indicating that customer evangelists are not more knowledge-oriented than are non-customer evangelists.

6.6.9.2 H\textsuperscript{11}: Customer evangelists are more likely to use communications from OVERS than are non-customer evangelists.

As per their enthusiasm for the product/brand, customer evangelists may be more likely to read official OVERS communications than may non-customer evangelists. The survey asked a series of yes/no questions regarding whether the respondent read the various communications OVERS sent out (DVD reviews, industry gossip and so forth). There were eight categories of OVERS-generated material about which the respondents were questioned. If a respondent read none, his or her score was zero; if a respondent read them all, his or her score was eight. The combined responses were then subject to a chi-square analysis. The results met the threshold for significance: X\textsuperscript{2} = (8, n = 226) = 129.54, p < 0.001, with the mean for customer evangelists being higher (more corporate communications read) (M = 2.45, SD = 1.8) than for non-customer evangelists (M = 2.26, SD = 1.7). Therefore, H\textsuperscript{11} was supported, thereby indicating that customer evangelists are more likely to read corporate communications than are non-customer evangelists.
6.6.9.3 $H^{12}$: Customer evangelists are more likely to share knowledge than are non-customer evangelists.

A key aspect of evangelists is their desire to share knowledge, which they believe enriches their own experience, as well as that of others. The OVERS survey asked a few questions regarding this quality. These questions were combined to test for correlation, as shown in Table 14.

Table 14

Correlations between Questions Relating to the Inclination to Share Knowledge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Showing others how QF works is important to me</th>
<th>I enjoy sharing knowledge</th>
<th>I am not compelled to share knowledge even if I know others will benefit (+)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Showing others how QF works is important to me</td>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.669**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>0.669**</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I enjoy sharing knowledge</td>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.696**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am not compelled to share knowledge even if I know others will benefit (+)</td>
<td>Pearson correlation</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.669**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>N</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The questions met the threshold of significance ($p = 0.02$) for correlation. Once the results were combined, an independent samples t-test was performed. The customer evangelists demonstrated a stronger drive to share knowledge ($M = 5.75$, $SD = 1.5$) than did the non-customer evangelists ($SD = 6.6$, $SD = 1.9$) The t-test results met the threshold for significance: $t(210) = 3.6$, $p < 0.001$. Therefore, the evidence
demonstrated that $H^{12}$ was upheld in this case, thereby customer evangelists are more compelled to share knowledge than are non-customer evangelists.

6.7 Discussion and Conclusion

6.7.1 Analysis.

As stated by Jarvis et al. (2003), latent construct formative models do not require internal validity. Validity may be measured nominologically by examining variables outside the construct. The hypotheses and their analysis in this paper serve to verify that the individuals identified in the OVERS study as customer evangelists generally exhibited perspectives that were consistent with those one would expect from customer evangelists. Out of eight constructs that could be tested in this data set, five constructs were supported, one was inconclusive and two were not supported, as shown in Table 15.

Table 15

Hypotheses and Conclusions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Hypothesis</th>
<th>Supported/unsupported</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Customer satisfaction</td>
<td>Customer evangelists demonstrate higher levels of customer satisfaction than do non-customer evangelists.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceptions of value</td>
<td>Perceptions of product value increase more among customer evangelists than among non-customer evangelists.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intention to purchase</td>
<td>Customer evangelists have stronger intention to purchase the product than do non-customer evangelists.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Customer evangelists are less likely to consider purchasing from a competitor than are non-customer evangelists.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity</td>
<td>Customer evangelists perceive people within the consumer</td>
<td>Inconclusive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
collective as being more authentic than people outside the consumer collective.

**Cultishness** 6  
*Customer evangelists are more likely to engage in cultish perceptions of other members of the consumer collective than are non-customer evangelists.*  
*Supported*

**Social orientation** 7  
*Customer evangelists are more socially-oriented than are non-customer evangelists.*  
*Unsupported*

8  
*Customer evangelists are more engaged in social media than are non-customer evangelists.*  
*Unsupported*

**Experientially-oriented** 9  
*Customer evangelists are more experientially-oriented than are non-customer evangelists.*  
*Unsupported*

**Knowledge-oriented** 10  
*Customer evangelists are more knowledge-oriented than are non-customer evangelists.*  
*Unsupported*

11  
*Customer evangelists are more likely to consume communications from OVERS than are non-customer evangelists.*  
*Supported*

12  
*Customer evangelists are more likely to share knowledge than are non-customer evangelists.*

Therefore, the model presented in Table 5 was supported by the data analysed in this survey.

**6.7.2 Limitations of this study.**

This study had some limitations. The data from the OVERS survey were designed for rudimentary market analysis, and thus the survey and data were lacking in some respects. The survey was long; answers may have been more accurate with a shorter survey. In addition, the respondents’ measurement scales were not uniform.

Cases were discarded when the respondent took less than one minute to respond to all the questions, when the demographic data were not provided, and/or when at least
two of the four reverse coded questions were invalid. This left 3,995 valid cases out of an original set of over 6,000.

Some key survey questions relied on self-reports of behaviour, which can be unreliable. There was no external verification of the data given in the survey. Some of the questions were awkwardly worded for the purposes of the research. For example, some of the questions were double-barrelled.

However, these data did lend themselves to exploratory analysis for customer evangelism. First, many questions in the survey aligned well with the literature. Second, the sample size was large. This was advantageous because it was expected that the number of customer evangelists in any sample would be low. Finally, the nature of this product provided data from a range of demographic backgrounds; thus, it could be investigated whether customer evangelism was more prevalent in specific demographics.

6.7.3 Contributions and conclusion.

This study is one of the first to start quantitatively testing some of the claims about customer evangelism in the qualitative literature. The first claims tested were the accuracy of the four essential traits of a customer evangelist: consumer collectivism (CC+), quintessence (Q+), authenticity (AU+) and extreme WOM (WOM+). These traits appear in the literature as the consistent primary traits of customer evangelists. Consequently, when respondents to the OVERS survey were selected based on these traits, theoretically they may have exhibited other qualities that the literature claims is common to customer evangelists.

A key claim supported in this study was the perception of value being higher in customer evangelists. Customer evangelists were also more inclined to share knowledge and to feel connected to other users of the product. They were less likely to visit the
competition, they had a higher intention to purchase in the future, and they had higher levels of customer satisfaction.

There are two claims in the literature relating to authenticity. One is the intrinsic motivation of generating WOM activity. In other words, customer evangelists share knowledge about the product because they are intrinsically motivated to do so. This is considered an essential trait, and was built into the identification model. There are other aspects to authenticity relating to the product experience. The data from the survey were inconclusive on this point, as the questions may not have been phrased in a way that could elicit an accurate response regarding this quality.

Claims that were unsupported in this study related to the social orientation and experiential orientation of customer evangelists. The spiritual evangelism literature did not indicate that evangelists would be any stronger in these two areas than non-customer evangelists. However, the industry literature posits that people who are more socially-oriented might spread extreme WOM. The industry literature also claims that people who are more experientially-oriented may be in a position to be more affected by the product experience. Neither of these claims held true in this study.

The research literature claims that customer evangelists can have a profound effect on innovation, marketing and sales through their dedication to the brand. The industry literature claims that marketers—to further promote their product/brand—can leverage customer evangelists. To date, the supporting evidence for these claims has been a series of anecdotes, case studies and conceptual ideas. Some of the claims made in the research and industry literature cannot be supported without empirical testing. The first step towards that testing is to identify customer evangelists by using empirical measurements, as in this study. The next step is to measure their causes and effects.
Consumer religiosity is a rising area of interest among researchers. The qualitative investigations into consumer religiosity, consumer collectives and strong affiliations to brands have been published for the past 30 years. Empirical studies into consumer religiosity and customer evangelism have yet to be published, and thus the existence of the phenomenon and the effects cannot be determined in an empirical manner, and the research possible in this area is limited to the types of knowledge that qualitative analysis can offer. Quantitative analysis delivers the opportunity to measure, universalise and predict; it also provides an opportunity to support, or refute, some of the assumptions that have been made to date on qualitative analysis alone.

This research contributes to marketing practitioners as well. By developing and testing a method of identifying customer evangelists, practitioners can identify their own customer evangelists, and commence engaging them in a manner that is appropriate for their product/brand experience. Motivating and leveraging customer evangelists can increase the bottom line, but only if the customer evangelists can be separated from other customers and product users.
References


One indicator (authentic) was previously considered a reflective indicator. However, since the publication of further research on authenticity (Collins & Murphy, 2010; Collins, Watts, et al., 2011), this position has been reconsidered. Similarly, the position of quintessence has been reconsidered in light of further studies on quintessence (Collins et al., 2012; Collins, Murphy, et al., 2011) and is now a bedrock of the identification process. Finally, participation in a consumer collective was previously not mentioned in the model at all, yet it has emerged from the literature as a necessary part of customer evangelism (Foux, 2005; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007; Rothschild et al., 2007; Seeberger et al., 2010).
7 Conclusion

Based on existing scholarly literature from consumer culture theory, religious studies and philosophy of religion, this thesis ties together existing scholarship about different areas of the human experience, and then relates them to a marketing phenomenon that is becoming more commonplace in the postmodern world.

This thesis supports the claim that consumption is not a compartmentalised experience. Rather, it is a major part of human existence (Featherstone, 1991), and a way in which consumers define themselves personally, develop their own identity and their view of the world. The following few paragraphs illustrate the overarching story of this thesis, and how each of the articles presents a part of the larger story.

Consumers co-create value with both present and absent “others”: producers, other consumers and even non-consumers. By doing so, they are engaging in self-rewarding behaviour. Those who continually co-create value through collectives of consumption around one product or brand experience are taking part in a game they hope do not end: an infinite game (PAPER 1). The following paper (PAPER 2) builds on the individual’s attraction to the repeated co-creation of value with one product or brand. It discusses the phenomenon from the perspective of a collective experience.

Based on the work of James Carse, and using religion as a model, the second paper develops a fuller picture of the producer’s role, how they interact with the consumer collective, and the tensions within the collective that arise in this specific situation (when product/brands are treated as spiritual objects).

The third paper hones in on one essential aspect of consumer religiosity and customer evangelism: authenticity. Looking at authenticity from a collective perspective, building on research from philosophy and tourism studies, the third paper
examines the different ways in which authenticity is perceived and consumed by people at various points within the collective experience.

The final paper (PAPER S) departs from the previous three in several ways. First, it attempts to classify and categorise customer evangelism, separating it out from collective religious activity. This paper attempts to answer several questions. The first of which is whether customer evangelists can be segmented out from a larger group. The second is to determine if they can be segmented, do their behaviours match the claims about their behaviours in previous quantitative studies?

A conscious decision has been made to approach the phenomenon of consumer religiosity and customer evangelism in a particular way in this thesis. The journey was always intended to go from the conceptual to the quantitative, via qualitative analysis. Although those methodologies are common in consumer behaviour based research, the author is aware of all the roads not taken in the journey. Although she would hesitate to say that the way she has defined and crafted the discussion is the best solution, she is confident that this work, taken collectively, contributes a holistic, quality approach to further analysis of the phenomenon.

Among the requirements of a thesis by publication is that the articles within the thesis collectively deliver an original contribution to the literature. The following section will discuss the contributions of the thesis, the limitations of the work completed in the thesis and any future directions for research that have arisen from this series of articles.

7.1 Contributions of this Thesis

7.1.1 First scholarly examination of customer evangelism.

This thesis contributes to the area of consumer religiosity and customer evangelism in several ways. This thesis is the first comprehensive scholarly
investigation of customer evangelism. Although the term ‘customer evangelism’ has been in use in industry and scholarly circles for over 20 years, to date there has been little scholarly investigation into the phenomenon (PAPER 1). The marketing literature pertaining to consumer religiosity springs from work relating to CCT, and thus the methodologies and literature are usually derived from anthropology and sociology. All work in this field to date appears to be qualitative. Evidence relating to customer evangelism is primarily anecdotal, and is not rooted in any theoretical basis or field of study. This thesis draws on philosophy, sociology, anthropology religious studies and consumer culture literature to develop a comprehensive evaluation of, and direction for, consumer religiosity and customer evangelism (PAPER 1, PAPER 5).

This thesis looks to religious studies literature to form a basis for consumer religiosity and customer evangelism. Religious studies literature, historic accounts of religious evangelism and the rise of the early Christian Church support the perspectives proposed in this thesis. First, they support that customer evangelism is indeed a form of evangelism that is distinct from other kinds of brand enthusiasm (such as mavens) (PAPER 1, PAPER 5). Second, they support that incorporating theory from religion enriches the existing scholarly perspectives on consumer religiosity, which are also rooted in anthropology and sociology studies (PAPER 2, 3, 4).

Finally, this thesis examines the existing literature and develops four consistent, existing views on what constitutes customer evangelism. These views were then tested empirically. The result is a specific definition of customer evangelism that can be tested. Evangelists are comprised of four key elements: they are part of formal or informal consumer collectives, they instigate higher than average volume of WOM marketing, they are authentic (intrinsically motivated) to engage in the brand and the WOM
activity, and they have a sacred regard for the product/brand (quintessence) (PAPER 1, PAPER 5).

The industry literature on customer evangelism attributes specific behaviours to customer evangelists. The industry literature claims that evangelists are more cultish, experience-driven, knowledge-driven, idealistic, giving (subscribing to the perspective of a gift economist) and socially-driven than are average consumers. The empirical analysis in the final paper of this thesis supports that customer evangelists are strongly more cultish (most likely because of their participation in the consumer collective) and more giving (hence their desire to spread higher volumes of WOM). However, the other claims were not supported theoretically, conceptually or empirically by the work completed in this thesis, or in other work arising from it (PAPER 5).

This contribution to the literature on customer evangelism is not only the first of its kind—it also describes customer evangelism in a way that enables it to be further subject to empirical testing. Therefore, a body of knowledge about the creation, development, leveraging and effects of customer evangelism can be examined.

7.1.2 Distinctive, coherent, theoretical basis for consumer religiosity and customer evangelism.

The second contribution of this thesis is to develop a distinct theoretical basis for consumer religiosity and customer evangelism. As indicated earlier, no theoretical basis for customer evangelism was ever previously proposed in the scholarly or industry literature. As for consumer religiosity, to date anthropological models have been used, as well as theories arising from sociology, combined with marketing data and sometimes theory.

This thesis demonstrates that the conceptual work of religious studies scholar James Carse can be applied to a marketing context. By doing so, a richer understanding
of the way consumer collectives and their members interact with producers and each other is revealed. In his *Religious Case Against Belief*, Carse (2008) indicated the difference between a behaviour imbued with religiosity (such as Christianity) versus a belief system (such as Scientology). Part of the purpose of his book is to differentiate between political and religious zealotry, particularly as it pertains to political movements, terrorism and extreme ‘religious’ behaviour.

However, this thesis does not just add to the existing theoretical discussions in the area of consumer religiosity. This thesis also delivers what is lacking in the theoretical literature. The description of sacredness in consumer religiosity from an anthropological perspective within the consumer culture literature is, spiritually speaking, antiseptic. Belk (2012) visited and revisited sacredness in consumption. However, he did not detail the sacred perception of the object as though in a religious context in the same way that Carse discussed the mystery and poetry inherent in religious spaces. This mystery and poetry, when brought into a marketing space, encapsulates the connection between the product/brand as a vehicle for greater human connection and thus spiritual connection. This demonstrates that consumer religiosity is not just a cultural phenomenon; it is also a deeply spiritual and social one as well.

Hearing Carse’s voice in concert with other great scholars of consumer religiosity such as Belk, Schouten, Muniz, O’Guinn, Tumbat and Schau lends an extra dimension to current scholarly discussions (PAPER 2, 3).

This thesis also provides a theoretical basis for customer evangelism where none previously existed. The purpose of having a theoretical basis is to enable scholars and practitioners to conceptualise, investigate and generalise a phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The theoretical basis for customer evangelism arises directly from the theoretical work regarding consumer collectives (PAPER 2). This gives customer evangelism an
authentic basis, rooted in the kind of religious behaviour unique to evangelists. It also provides the basis for further empirical work in evangelism (PAPER 5).

7.1.3 **Explores consumer religiosity and customer evangelism in empirical context.**

The literature to date in these areas mainly consists of anecdotes, conceptual papers and case studies. However, both scholars and industry pundits are drawing conclusions from these anecdotes and case studies—conclusions that have yet to be proven. The claims put forward are predictive (customer evangelists will do $x$), are generalisable (customer evangelists always do $x$), describe causation (if you do $x$, you can create customer evangelists, or do $x$ and your evangelists will do $y$) or are reductive (customer evangelists have $x$ quality). Sound methods to investigate these claims are empirical and quantitative (Flyvbjerg, 2001)—not the qualitative studies currently in the literature. Therefore, conceptual propositions by scholars cannot be investigated without a quantitative way forward, and claims by industry authors cannot be investigated without a quantitative methodology. The theoretical basis for consumer religiosity and customer evangelism (PAPER 2, 3, 4) sets the foundation for the empirical study in this thesis (PAPER 5).

7.1.4 **Coherent authenticity through 360da.**

The final contribution of this thesis is developing a coherent perspective of authenticity. Authenticity is touted in evangelism as being an essential part of evangelists’ make-up. However, the definition of authenticity is still debated in the field of marketing and beyond. Is authenticity simply an intrinsic motivation to do something? Is it a consistency between the inner self and outer self? Is it a natural state of being? Who is the authenticator of authenticity, and who is authenticating the authenticator? What role does authenticity have in spiritual/commercial spaces? When
this investigation into evangelism began, the issue of authenticity was mentioned repeatedly in the literature, yet useful definitions were not offered. This required a further investigation into the concept of authenticity to discover the meaning of the concept, how it related to evangelism and how it could be measured for empirical analysis at a later date.

360da is a framework incorporating different perspectives on authenticity: objective, constructive, commercial and existential. Incorporated within each of these categories of authenticity are definitions of authenticity taken from philosophy, religious studies, psychology, anthropology, sociology, tourism and, of course, marketing. 360da acts as a framework upon which to examine a case to develop a qualitative perspective on the level of authenticity inherent in the case. Although scales of authenticity have been developed, the definitions and applications of authenticity in the literature lend the concept to a more holistic, gestalt analysis, rather than a reductive one. The examination of the Hajj pilgrimage as an example of 360da demonstrates how one of the largest tourism events in the world is also a deeply authentic one, meeting definitions of authenticity found in the literature from various disciplines.

The other contribution of this analysis is to use a marketing concept (360da) to examine religious activity. In other parts of the thesis—such as in the examination of customer evangelism—ideas from religion were borrowed to apply to marketing contexts. In the section in which 360da was developed, a religious activity was viewed through a marketing filter. By demonstrating that both can be done with similar ideas, one can have added confidence in the claims put forward in this thesis.

7.2 Limitations of this Thesis

The data sets and methodologies employed in this thesis had their own limitations, and each were noted in the respective articles. However, as a coherent work,
a key limitation of this thesis was exploring a particular perspective of consumer religiosity and customer evangelism. Although alternative hypotheses for consumer religiosity were considered, they were amalgamated into the work in this thesis. No theoretical foundations were offered for customer evangelism, as none were found in the literature.

As such, consumer religiosity and customer evangelism were regarded from a specific perspective in this thesis: one with a basis in religious studies and S-D Logic. These paradigms and theoretical foundations were selected due to their fit with the observed phenomena and their ability to amalgamate interdisciplinary perspectives already found within the literature. This thesis did not include comparative studies or replicate existing studies because such endeavours were considered too broad for this thesis, which intentionally maintained a narrow focus.

As such, the generalisability and predictive value of the work in this thesis is not as strong as a series of empirical papers with comparative data, or longitudinal studies that track the behaviour of firms and customers over an extended period. Rather, the purpose of this thesis was to create a foundation and direction for further research in the area of customer evangelism. Therefore, the topic of consumer religiosity and customer evangelism were delved into more deeply and less broadly than perhaps would have been the case in the hands of another researcher.

7.3 Areas for Further Research

The work in this thesis addresses some significant questions. However, it also brings questions to the fore that were not within the scope of this thesis to answer. Therefore, a rich vein of further research opportunities have been identified.

First, more qualitative and quantitative work on the link between marketing and missionary work should be explored. Do the techniques used by missionaries and
evangelists in spiritual contexts work in marketing contexts, and vice versa? Although some industry books have been published on this topic, these were simply forays into idea-making. No scholarly work has seriously considered this question with outcomes for both industry and religious organisations. There is an active and healthy mission and faith-based culture of evangelism, especially in the West. Comparative studies will not only help those in commercial industry, but also the outreach of religions in reaching a wider audience. Such studies should include religions outside of Christianity, such as Islam, and belief systems, such as Scientology and the New Age movement. James Carse addresses these in his works, and therefore the systems in these thesis can be further explored using his work as a basis for that exploration.

Second, the 360da framework developed in ‘The Hajj: An Illustration of 360da’ has generated interest in the marketing community. Research of ways to use the framework as a tool for analysis in scholarly and industry contexts has been embarked upon, with several conference papers presented to audiences internationally with the intent of further refining the tool. The response from scholarly and industry circles seems to be that a solution to the authenticity debate may lie in a holistic, all-encompassing response, not a reductive one. However, the framework exists as a thought experiment in the first instance and lacks the depth of a useful conceptual tool on its own. Further research into authenticity, especially in different contexts and different cultures, would clarify those issues for researchers and practitioners. This would include studies that built on or modified the quantitative work done in psychology around authenticity, while also accepting that some areas of authenticity will always be quantitative. Kozinet’s netnographic approach is currently being explored by the author of this thesis as a methodology that can be used to further
develop an understanding of how authenticity works with consumer religiosity and customer evangelism in digital spaces.

Third, the subject of consumer religiosity and the customer evangelism arising from this has not yet been resolved. Can any brand/product inspire evangelism? Do some brand/products inspire more activity than do others? Work in the area of consumer collectives suggests that there are several aspects to brands/product that inspire tribalism; for example, brands/products have to have a rich history/legend/myth to draw upon, must be heavily symbolic in their brand identity and so forth (E. Arnould & C. Thompson, 2005; Chalmers & Arthur, 2008; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz & Schau, 2005, 2007; Schau et al., 2009). Is this the case with customer evangelism? As being part of a formal or informal collective is a necessary condition of customer evangelism, it would seem that only certain brands/products inspire evangelism.

Customer evangelists spread higher than average WOM as a necessary condition of being an evangelist. However, there is little understanding of whether this WOM is effective, and whether it adds value to the brand/product, or detracts from it. In addition, while extreme WOM generators can be effective in some contexts (for example, posting positive reviews online, supporting new brand/product users, and encouraging consumption of the product in their personal networks), there are contexts in which people with extreme WOM, who identify strongly with a brand/product, can be considered extreme, zealous, annoying and even unstable. Certainly religious fundamentalists who are also evangelists are not necessarily considered by the general public in a positive light, and their efforts to gain converts are not as successful as they would like. Are the same rules in place for brands/products?

Finally, further examination of the theoretical bases of S-D Logic and Carse’s work in this thesis is warranted. S-D Logic is becoming a more established scholarly
field. However, many of the applied contexts of the paradigm have yet to be formalised and studied. The work in this thesis contributed to that developing body of knowledge, but there is still more that can be done, especially in relation to consumer religiosity and customer evangelism. However, the further development of applied research in the area of S-D Logic will be required before specific research agendas can be outlined.

Guy Kawasaki still lectures on customer evangelism, using his platform as the evangelism guru to promote his latest venture—an aggregating news website called Alltop. Since Selling the Dream, he has written about customer enchantment, project management, venture capitalism and innovation. However, customer evangelism remains his calling card. When he was contacted to be interviewed for this thesis, he was generous enough to spend over an hour discussing customer evangelism and, of course, his latest venture (Kawasaki, 2009). For Kawasaki, the benefits of evangelism were real—he experienced them firsthand both times he worked for Apple. For Kawasaki, they are an essential part of every marketing plan. When speaking to Kawasaki, it is a challenge to remain unswayed; his evangelism skills are not only well-honed by his marketing experience, but his successful business track record is hard to discount. However, the role of the scholar is to consider, doubt, examine, critique and submit claims to ongoing analysis of the highest standard. This thesis is the first step towards that examination. It is hoped that, in time, with repeated evidence supporting the claims made in this thesis and elsewhere, customer evangelism will be something everyone can discuss with the same conviction.
References


