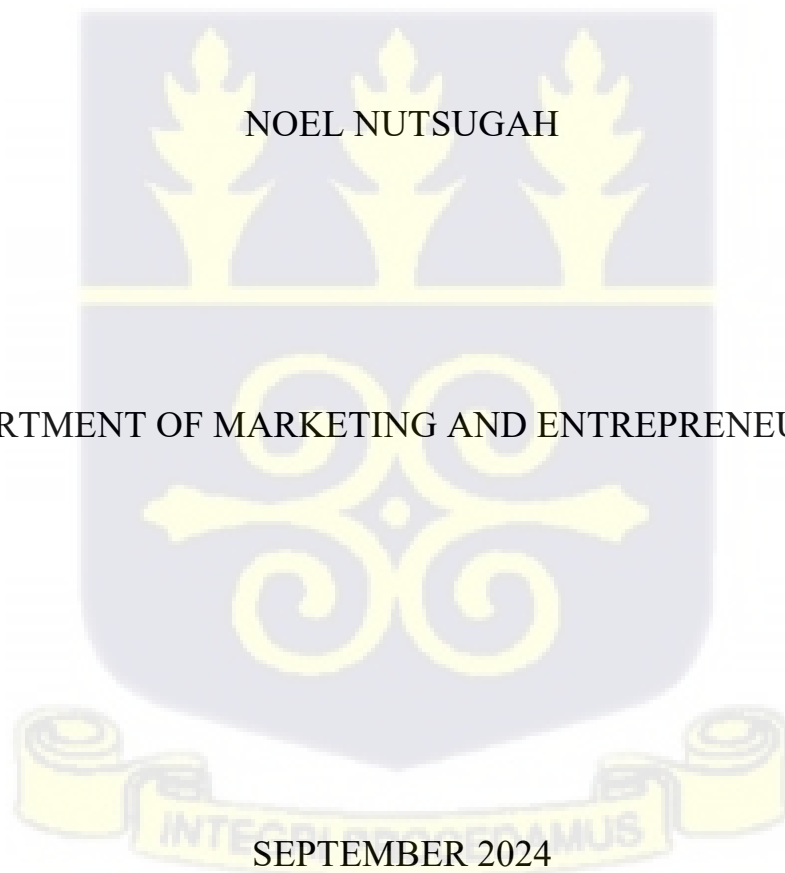


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UNIVERSITY OF GHANA  
COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES

TOWARDS A FORMATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR THE UTILISATION OF  
BRAND COMMUNITIES BY MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS  
PRACTITIONERS IN EMERGING MARKETS: INSIGHTS FROM GHANA



DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

SEPTEMBER 2024

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BY  
NOEL NUTSUGAH  
(10876483)

THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES IN  
PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF DOCTOR  
OF PHILOSOPHY(PhD) IN MARKETING


DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

SEPTEMBER 2024

## DECLARATIONS

### STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, Noel Nutsugah, declare that this dissertation, except quotations and references contained in published works which have all been identified and duly acknowledged, is entirely my original work, and it has not been submitted, either in part or whole, for another degree elsewhere. Therefore, I bear the responsibility for any shortcomings.



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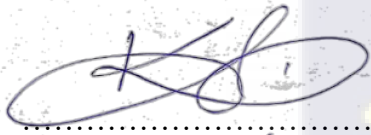
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### SUPERVISORS DECLARATION

We, the undersigned supervisors, declare that we supervised the preparation and presentation of this work in accordance with the guidelines for supervision of PhD theses as laid down by the University of Ghana.

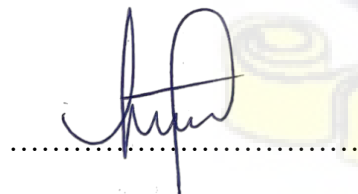


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DATE: 20/12/2024 .....

PROF. KOBBY MENSAH

(Lead Supervisor)



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DATE: December 21, 2024 .....

PROF. RAPHAEL ODOOM

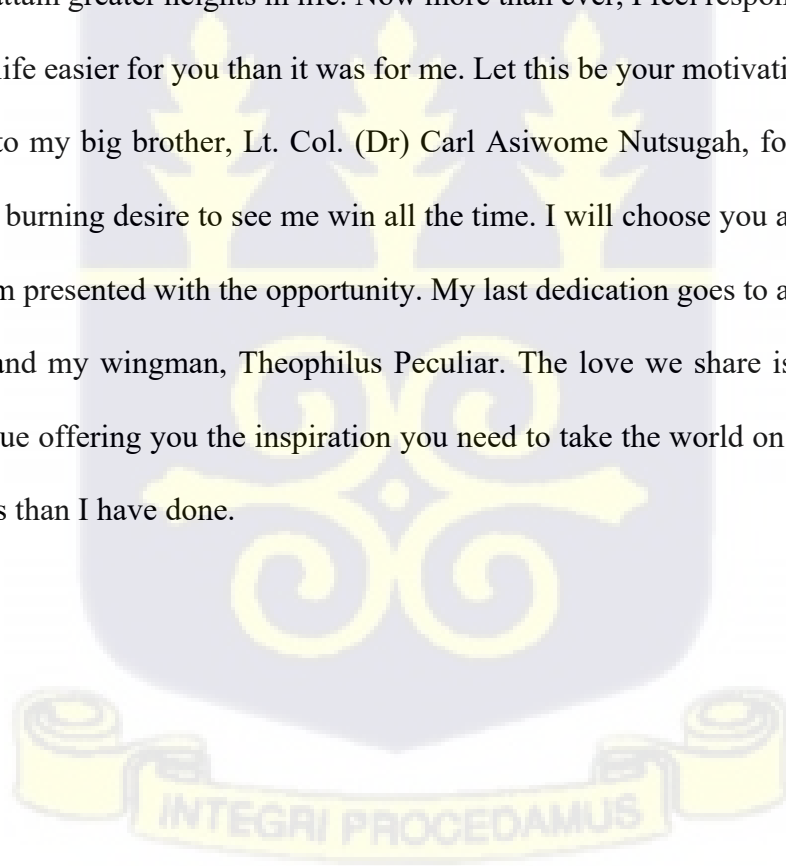
(Co-Supervisor)

## ABSTRACT

Globally, businesses are constantly re-evaluating and restructuring their customer interactions in an effort to cultivate and maintain consumer loyalty in both virtual and in-person environments. To acquire the trust and loyalty of their consumers, businesses implement various schemes, including mileage programmes, discounts, coupons, and co-creation activities, among others. These schemes are introduced to discourage customers from migrating to their competitors. However, these programmes seem to be quite ephemeral and transient; thus, while they might be effective to some degree, they might not be enough to develop and maintain consumer loyalty to the apex. As such, the concept of Brand Community has been touted as a response to businesses attaining sustained and unremitting consumer loyalty. Even though the brand community literature has received enormous scholarly attention, with scholarship mainly concentrating on themes like trust transfer, consumer loyalty, value co-creation, and consumer engagement, there is a dearth of studies on the formative frameworks of brand communities. Based on the aforementioned arguments, this study has been undertaken to resolve these deficits by exploring the formative frameworks of brand communities with insights from Ghana to guide marketing and public relations professionals in their strategic brand relationship-building efforts. Through the qualitative research approach, which is predicated on participant observations, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews, this study discovered nine different motivating factors that push Ghanaian consumers to join and participate in the activities of brand communities. Similarly, the study uncovered nine ritualistic practices that are performed in Ghanaian brand communities. What is more, the study uncovered several benefits that the affiliate brands derive from the brand communities' activities. Based on the findings above, this study makes several practical and theoretical recommendations, leading to the development of a post-study framework named "F-E-B Framework of Brand Communities" to guide the **Formation, Engagement, and Benefits** of brand communities in Ghana and other emerging markets with similar socio-cultural peculiarities. Beyond these achievements, this study also makes substantially novel contributions to the literature by exploring this phenomenon from a multi-disciplinary (marketing and public relations) perspective.

## DEDICATION

On a very emotional note, I dedicate this thesis to my late mother, Mrs. Regina Anthonio-Nutsugah. This is for you, Mama, wherever you are. You wanted me to have these kinds of accomplishments; therefore, I made it for you. Your fervent wish to witness me reach the summit was apparent. Your commitment to my upbringing has shaped me and made me who I am today. Indeed, some memories never fade. You will always hold a special place in my heart. Again, I dedicate this win to my family. A special mention to my wife, Eva Kuupuolo, and my children, Selikem Nutsugah Nutsugah, Sesime Nuornale Nutsugah and Selalorm Wawiema Nutsugah for the emotional support through this journey. I hope this accomplishment inspires you enough to attain greater heights in life. Now more than ever, I feel responsible for plotting a path to make life easier for you than it was for me. Let this be your motivation. This thesis is also dedicated to my big brother, Lt. Col. (Dr) Carl Asiwome Nutsugah, for his unflinching support and the burning desire to see me win all the time. I will choose you as a brother again and again if I am presented with the opportunity. My last dedication goes to a son, a mentee, a junior brother and my wingman, Theophilus Peculiar. The love we share is deep, and I am happy to continue offering you the inspiration you need to take the world on. My hope is you do bigger things than I have done.



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I also acknowledge my colleagues at the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC), who have taken a keen interest in my PhD journey. Let me make a special mention of the Vice Chancellor Prof Eric Opoku Mensah, Dr Lawrencia Agyepong, Prof Modestus Fosu, Dr Mavis Essandoh, Dr Priscilla Teika Odoom, Dr Albert Anani-Bossman, Dr Ike Tandoh, Dr James Asante, Dr Ebo Afful and Edem Cephass Cudjoe who all spurred me on in this programme. I remain grateful to you. A special thanks to you, Dr Grace Dawson-Ahmoah, for the time spent proofreading this thesis. You have made it better, and I am grateful.

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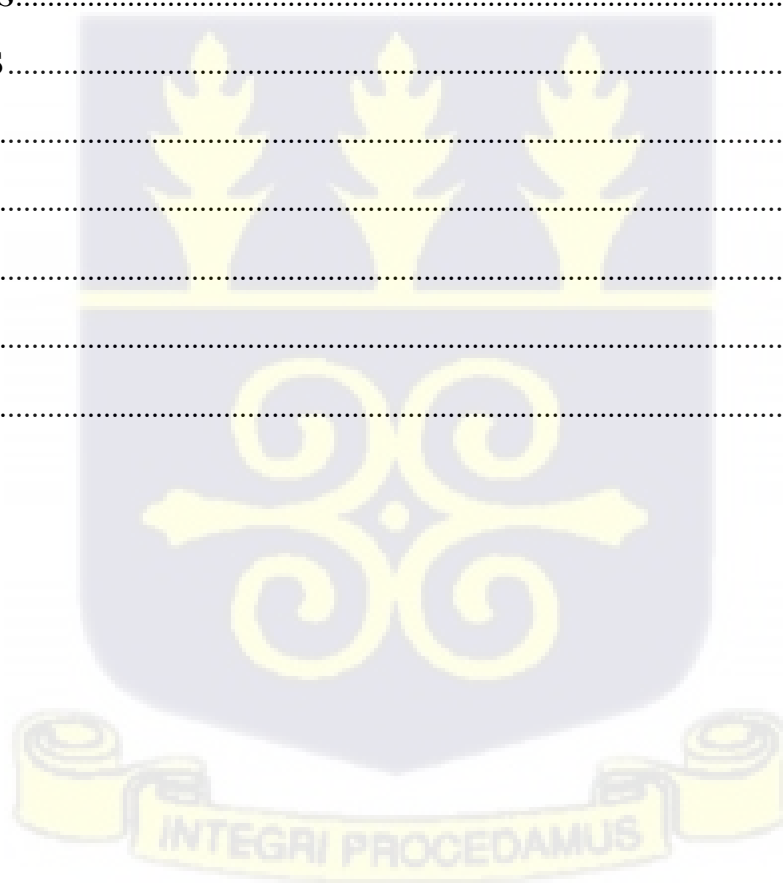
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.0 Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an overview of the entire study as it discusses the opening sub-chapters that have formed the foundation of the project. Key issues such as the background of the study, problem statement, aims and objectives, the research questions, and the significance of the study are presented in this chapter. Again, the chapter focuses attention on the scope of the study and presents how the entire study is structured within subsequent chapters. These discussions are important because they set the basis and tone for the project.

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

Business entities all over the world continue to rethink and reconfigure their relationships with their customers with the intention of building and sustaining customer loyalty, especially in online settings (Boateng, 2019). This business interest has been heightened because of the untold hardship and excessive business competition that has characterised the post-Covid economy. To nudge off competitors and reduce customers' brand-switching behaviour, organisations develop schemes such as mileage programmes, discounts, coupons, and co-creation activities, among others, to gain the trust and loyalty of their customers (Hur et al., 2011). Even though these schemes may prove efficient to an extent, they are not necessarily sufficient for building and sustaining customer loyalty because they appear to be relatively transient (Gustafsson et al., 2005). In response to this ever-changing and complex phenomenon of consumer-brand and consumer-consumer relationships, and in the quest to engender positive word of mouth, repurchase behaviour, build, nurture, and maintain the most sustainable form

of brand loyalty (Algesheimer et al., 2005) and oppositional loyalty towards competing brands, the concept of Brand Community was introduced in the seminal research of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001).

According to Muniz and O'Guinn (2001, p.412), a brand community is “a specialised, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand”. These communities are specialised because they are built around a branded service or product. This means that at the centre of brand communities are individuals who share common rituals and traditions, communal feelings and deep admiration for a certain branded service or product. Commitment to the brand can lead to positive influence and benefit for the represented brand (Algesheimer et al., 2005). Again, participation in the activities of brand communities has been proven to increase consumers’ identification with the brand (Marzocchi et al., 2011) and also reduce consumer loneliness (Snyder & Newman, 2019) – a phenomenon that tends to encourage repeat purchases.

### ***1.1.1 Formation of Brand Community***

The formation of a brand community is as crucial as the engagement, participation, and success of the community. The responsibility for the formation of a brand community has been a contentious subject within the practice of marketing. Whereas some people believe that the most genuine form of brand community is the one that is initiated by the brand fans (consumers) themselves, the literature has shown that brand-initiated brand communities can equally be effective (Bowden & Mirzaei, 2021), especially if there are no remnants of authoritative control from the brand and community members are allowed the freedom to regulate their affairs.

Since the emergence of the ground-breaking contribution by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), the phenomenon of brand community has generated a plethora of scholarly interests, which can be highly attributable to the importance of brand community research to the theory and practice of marketing. Another reason for the high scholarly interest could be that brand communities have been predicted as cheaper alternatives to marketing products and services (Royo-Vela & Casamassima, 2011). As organisations become more interested in maximising profit, brand communities become a suitable subject of concentration. Despite the mammoth scholarly interest, the perspective of developing contexts like Ghana is largely underrepresented in the literature. Consequently, the formation and utilisation of brand communities by indigenous brands in the bottom-of-the-pyramid economies do not become a point of concentration for the brands themselves and the academe. Therefore, this study is timeous as it sets the basis for developing a brand community manual for marketing and public relations practitioners in Ghana and other emerging contexts.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, there is exponential growth in research on brand communities due to their propensity to build and sustain consumer trust and loyalty. This is thoroughly demonstrated in the review of extant literature (see Chapter Three). However, the general lack of research interest from the perspective of emerging markets is disadvantageous to the practice and theory of marketing and, by extension, public relations. The subsequent paragraphs discuss in detail the gaps in the literature and how this present study fills the lacuna.

### *1.2.1 Issues Gap*

Many scholars have contributed to the brand community literature, mostly within developed contexts where the activities of brand communities are well-advanced and more visible (Haverila et al., 2020a; Martínez-López et al., 2021; Samuel et al., 2018; Sorensen & Drennan, 2017). Due to the developed nature of brand communities in these advanced jurisdictions, the research streams available hardly focus on the formative frameworks of brand communities, such as motivation to join brand communities, the forms of rituals and traditions that are performed within the brand communities, how these rituals and traditions fit with the brands' culture, and the congruity between the brand identity and the identity of the community. Research within the literature has primarily focused on issues such as brand and value co-creation (Acikgoz & Tasci, 2021; Ardley et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2019; Rialti et al., 2018), brand love and brand loyalty (John et al., 2017; Lee & Hsieh, 2021; Ozuem et al., 2021), consumer engagement in brand communities (Marbach et al., 2019; Riley, 2020; Santos et al., 2021), and trust transfer (Liu et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2021) among others.

As indicated above, there is minimal research on consumers' motivation for joining brand communities, the rituals and traditions they perform in the communities, the congruity between their identity and the identity of the represented brand, and the benefits the brands derive from their existence. These claims are also corroborated by (Kumar & Kumar, 2020) as they explored the factors that drive brand community engagement through the lens of the social exchange theory. In a jurisdiction where research on and the practice of brand community is rare, it is important to concentrate scholarly energy on the basics first. This study, therefore, fills this void by exploring the formative frameworks on brand communities.

Again, the review of the extant literature (see, for example, Chapter Three of this study) has revealed an over-concentration of brand community research on online brand communities as opposed to offline ones. Brand community researchers have argued that the choice of data site (offline or online) was consequential to the outcomes of their various studies, and as such, paying particular attention to the data site was critical to the success of their research project (Carlson et al., 2019a; Li et al., 2019; Kumar & Kumar, 2020; Wong & Lee, 2022). Of the 101 studies under review (see Chapter Three), the online studies make up 80, representing 79.2%. The trend could be attributed to the time consumers spend on social media connecting with brands (Tuskej & Podnar, 2018) and the low costs associated with engaging with consumers on these platforms (Habibi, Laroche & Richard, 2014). Morgan-Thomas et al. (2020) posit that because technology provides a plethora of ways consumers can interact with brands online, it is no surprise that studies into online brand communities are gaining traction among scholars. Facebook, in particular, is one of the most prevalent social media channels used for social media-based brand community studies (Dessart & Veloutsou, 2021; Villegas & Marin, 2021).

However, in bottom-of-the-pyramid economies like Ghana, internet penetration remains relatively lower compared to the advanced economies where most of the online studies are emanating from. As such, online activities like the formation of online brand communities, as well as customer-brand and customer-customer online interactions, do not become a priority for consumers and brands alike. Therefore, there is a need to contextualise studies for the developing context, considering the cultural and socioeconomic dynamics. This study has consequently focused attention on offline brand communities and built a framework for the same.

Furthermore, present studies on brand community have been overly concentrated within the technological industry, leaving other industries underexplored. From the review of the extant literature (see Chapter Three), 45 of the 101 studies were either not specific about the industry they collected data from or did not collect data from any particular industry. However, 15 of the 101 studies collected data from the technology industry, making it the most explored single industry within the literature. That was followed by the automobile industry, which saw 11 out of the 101 studies under review. Industries such as energy, banking and finance, sports, media and entertainment, hospitality, politics, and telecommunication have been relatively underexplored within the literature, even though they are equally essential. This study fills this void by largely focusing on some of the underexplored industries like banking and finance, media and entertainment, energy, and telecommunication to beef up the existing literature.

To add to the gaps, it is worth noting that the conversation on the benefits of brand communities is an important one because it speaks to whether the community members and the represented brands will continue to invest time and resources in these communities so that they do not go into extinction (De Wulf et al., 2001; Kumar & Kumar, 2020). Even though this is the case, the multitude of literature discussing brand community benefits has only explored the phenomenon from the perspective of customers (Dessart & Veloutsou, 2021; Kumar & Kumar, 2020; Siuda, 2021). The perspectives of the represented brands have been largely ignored in the literature, leaving a yawning gap that needs scholarly attention.

Last but not least, albeit anecdotal, a cursory search in Ghana shows that brand community as a niche marketing strategy do not seem to form a core part of the marketing strategies of most indigenous Ghanaian brands. Even though a few brand communities exist in the Ghanaian

setting, they are mostly affiliates of Westernised or foreign brands as opposed to local Ghanaian brands. This study and its attendant post-research advocacy are undertaken to trigger the interest of indigenous Ghanaian brands.

### ***1.2.2 Context Gap***

Owing to the numerous challenges associated with research within the developing economy contexts, studies emanating from these contexts go the extra mile to emphasise the origin of the research in the title (Chikweche & Fletcher, 2014; Sharmelly & Ray, 2021; Tanusondjaja et al., 2015). It is common to see phrases such as “evidence from developing economies” or “from the perspective of emerging markets”. This is an indication of the added efforts scholars from emerging markets make to receive some level of acceptance within the literature. This generally affects research output and scholars' motivation to undertake studies in these transitional economies. For example, according to Salager-Meyer (2008), there are several factors that inhibit research progress in emerging market contexts, and these include publishers' attitudes towards researchers from the periphery countries and the general development of science. The study argued that publishers of highly ranked peer-reviewed journals are mainly based in developed economies and are highly driven by quality and profit motives. This makes it almost improbable to focus on publishing studies emanating from developing economies.

The study argues that there are visible inequalities between developed and developing economies regarding the development of science. These inequalities are mostly driven by resource constraints and the general lack of commitment to the growth of science. Therefore, researchers within these deprived contexts must make cognizant efforts to surmount the

challenges and develop context-specific studies that feed into theory development and the growth of the practice. This study becomes one of such cognizant scholarly efforts that contributes to the literature on brand communities from a developing economy context like Ghana.

Again, the marketing phenomenon cannot be practised without thoroughly considering the socio-cultural dynamics of the jurisdiction within which it is practised. Regarding the fact that different contexts have different socio-cultural dynamics, it becomes imperative to explore and analyse data from different social contexts on any given phenomenon. Unfortunately, this is not reflective of the extant literature on brand communities. The review of the extant literature (see Chapter Three) has demonstrated the marginalisation of studies on brand communities from emerging market contexts. For example, the review has shown that only 3 of the 101 studies under review emanated from Africa. These are Cova et al. (2021) from Cameroon, van Heerden and Wiese (2021) as well as Wiese and Akareem (2019) from South Africa. This is partly why scholars such as Steenkamp and Burgess (2002) called for models and theories that have been developed around the behaviour of consumers in developed markets to be tested and validated in transitional economies and emerging consumer markets.

Again, there is a particular interest in the Ghanaian context because it is the jurisdiction within which this study was conducted. Generally, there were several scholarly attempts at deepening the branding literature with data from Ghana. However, the phenomenon of brand communities, a microcosm of the entire branding literature, has not gained any attention per the literature search criteria employed in this study. Studies on branding emanating from Ghana have largely focused on politics, with key contributions from Mensah (2016), who made

attempts at developing a new concept of political branding, and Narteh et al. (2017), who have explored how voter choices are shaped by the extent of political party branding. Other studies on branding have looked at how SMEs' innovativeness and digital capabilities moderate their brand performance and orientation (Odoom & Mensah, 2019) and how SMEs (both high and low-performing ones) are configuring their branding efforts (Odoom, 2016a). Odoom et al. (2017) have also examined how SME performance is influenced by their branding capabilities.

Again, Bhattacharjee et al. (2021) have argued that brand communities are products of social collectivism. This is because societies that dwell on social collectivism are socialised and integrated into cohesive social groupings (Hofstede, 2011), making it easy to form and engage in social clusters like brand communities. This leads to the exhibition of group behaviour as opposed to individualistic behaviour. However, Hofstede's (2011) research on cultural dimensions has shown that most of the countries in Western economies are individualistic, with relatively loose social ties compared to those in developing economies like Ghana. This can be attributed to the level of modernity between the global north and south blocks. Regarding the fact that most of the studies on brand communities emanate from the Western context and are also based on the variation in the cultural dynamics between the Western context and the developing context, it is imperative to populate the literature on the phenomenon in emerging market contexts such as Ghana.

### ***1.2.3 Theoretical Gap***

Theoretical frames are very important for qualitative studies because they provide the lenses through which the studies are problematised, reviewed, and discussed (Anfara & Mertz, 2015).

This not only helps in grounding the studies theoretically, but it also provides a window through which the research phenomena are viewed and understood. The review of the extant literature in Chapter Three has shown a considerable number of studies conducted on brand communities that have either not specifically mentioned any theory or employed one in explaining the phenomena studied; see, for example (Anaya-Sánchez et al., 2020; Burgess & Jones, 2020; Jiao et al., 2018; Valmohammadi et al., 2021). This category of studies makes up 25 of the 101 articles under review, constituting 25%.

However, the remaining 76 articles (85%) have been underpinned by either a concept, a framework, or a theory. The review has revealed that the social identity theory, the uses and gratification theory, the social capital theory, and the social exchange theory are the dominant theories underpinning studies on brand communities. They constitute 32 of the 101 articles under review, constituting 32%. Theories such as the theory of motivation, the consumer culture theory, and the congruity theory, even though they are fundamental theories in exploring and understanding the formative frameworks of brand communities, have been given minimal attention within the literature. Again, studies that have employed multiple theories in explaining the phenomena are non-existent per the scope of the literature review in this study. Owing to the objectives and research questions of this study and the dearth of studies that have employed key theories, this study employs the theory of motivation, the consumer culture theory, and the social exchange theory as the theoretical basis for discussing, analysing, and explaining the phenomena under study.

#### ***1.2.4 Methodological Gap***

Scholars such as Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Powell and Connaway (2004) have emphasised the importance of methodology in any academic study. They argue that methodologies demonstrate the researcher's philosophical leanings as well as the validity and reliability of the research. This means that the choice of methodology correlates with the processes and the outcome of the project. Having combed the literature on brand communities thoroughly, it is apparent that the use of quantitative methodology dominates the literature. As indicated in Chapter Three of this study, the quantitative-based studies account for 76 of the 101 articles under review, representing about 75.2% of the total articles reviewed. The qualitative studies account for 20 of the 101 articles, representing 19.8%, and mixed methods account for 4 out of the 101 studies, representing about 4%.

The evidence above demonstrates an obvious methodological gap in the literature. Even though quantitative methods may be sufficient to a large extent in determining the causal relationships among constructs in a manner that echoes the positivists' philosophical postulations, they have some shortcomings. Quantitative methods cannot answer questions that border on individuals' lived experiences and socially constructed realities, which are mostly cultural and can only be best explored within a social constructionist setting (Brennen, 2022; Creswell, 2013). Again, the quantitative methods cannot bring forth in-depth and interpretive discussions that are hinged on participants' social relationships and interactions as well as group behaviour (Brennen, 2022). This study fills the void in the literature by employing the qualitative methodology to explore brand community members' motivations for joining brand communities, their rituals and traditions within these communities, and the actual and

perceived benefit-congruity between these brand communities and the brands they represent in a manner that is interpretive and theoretical.

### **1.3 Research Aim and Objectives**

The main aim of this research is to develop a formative framework to guide marketing and public relations practitioners on the formation and engagement of brand communities from an emerging market context. The study aims to explore the individual meanings brand community members attach to their various community activities and examine how these activities can boost and maximise marketing and public relations strategies for businesses in Ghana and other emerging markets. The following objectives are set to achieve this overarching aim.

1. To explore the various motivations for joining brand communities in Ghana.
2. To examine the rituals and traditions that are performed in brand communities in Ghana.
3. To determine the benefits affiliate brands derive from the existence and activities of brand communities in Ghana.

### **1.4 Research Questions**

To attain the specific objectives set above, the following research questions guide the study.

1. What are the various motivations behind brand community members' interest in joining and participating in brand community activities?
2. What are the rituals and traditions performed in these brand communities?
3. What benefits do the affiliate brands derive from the existence and activities of the brand communities?

### **1.5 Significance of the Research**

It has been established in the preceding paragraphs that incorporating alternative marketing strategies, such as brand community, into traditional marketing strategies has proven useful and advantageous to businesses across the globe because of the enormous brand-consumer relationship benefits it can generate (Snyder & Newman, 2019). It is also evident in the literature that brand community activities do not only have the propensity of strengthening brand-consumer bonds but also consumer-consumer bonds, which can degenerate into positive purchase behaviour, brand loyalty and positive brand evangelism, which is also known as positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Anaya-Sánchez et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2018). Even though this is the case, very minimal research efforts exist to feed the business environment in emerging markets. Therefore, this study becomes significant to businesses in emerging markets as its recommendations will help shape their overall marketing and public relations strategies. In the long run, incorporating brand community strategy into their traditional business strategies will help reduce the marketing budget because brand communities have been proven to be cheaper ways of increasing brand loyalty.

Again, this study makes a significant contribution to the marketing syllabus of many academic institutions within emerging markets. This is because, currently, lessons in brand community activities and their implications for the practice and theory development in marketing are not a core part of the teaching of marketing in institutions of higher learning in Ghana and many other emerging markets. This trend can also be identified in the stream of marketing research that emanates from the emerging market context, as well as the lack of scholarly interest in the subject area.

Finally, but not least, this research makes a significant contribution to future research on branding and brand communities, especially within the bottom-of-the-pyramid contexts. The findings and recommendations in this study will prove significant for future theory development and general academic research because they provide useful empirical, methodological, conceptual, and theoretical foundations needed for prospective scholarly efforts.

### **1.6 Scope of the Research**

The scope of this study was limited to offline brand communities that are affiliated with brands that are operational in Ghana. Specifically, the study's scope was limited to the Ecobank Top Depositors Club (banking and finance sector), the Tecno Fans Gh (tech sector), Rainbow Radio Listeners Fan Club (media sector), and the Shell Club (oil and gas sector).

### **1.7 Organisation of the Study**

The study is organised into eight (8) different interconnected and interdependent chapters duly titled as such. The first chapter (Chapter One), which is the introductory chapter, provides the opening and background of the study. Key components such as the problem statement, the objectives of the study as well as the research questions and the significance of the study are all discussed. The second chapter details the context within which the study is conducted. Key issues, such as the marketing industry in Ghana and the general business environment, are discussed in the second chapter. The third chapter is the literature review chapter. It reviews the extant literature on brand community using the systematic literature review approach. Key research gaps, as well as opportunities for future studies, are discussed in that chapter. The fourth chapter is the theoretical framework chapter. The theories that underpin the study, as

well as how those theories are relevant to the present study, are discussed. Chapter Five focuses on the methodology of the study. Here, issues such as the research paradigm, the research design that underpins the work as well as the data collection processes were all discussed. The validity and reliability, as well as the key ethical considerations, are discussed in chapter five. Chapter Six focuses on the analysis of the data collected and the results thereof. Again, the results are treated and presented in chapter six. The discussions of the results and the findings are all done in the seventh chapter. Finally, the post-study framework, as well as the study recommendations and conclusions, are all treated in the eighth chapter.

### **1.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has generally provided an introductory overview of the entire project. Key areas such as the background of the study and the research aims and objectives have all been discussed in the chapter. Most importantly, the problem the research is seeking to solve has been discussed. Specifically, the issues, methodological, theoretical, and contextual gaps have been dealt with. These gaps give justifications for why this present study is important and urgent. Again, the relevance of the study to the marketing industry and academia has been examined. Moreover, the structure and the organisation of the entire project have been discussed in Table 1.0 above. The next chapter provides the dynamics of the context within which the study is conducted – Ghana.



## CHAPTER TWO

### CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

#### 2.0 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter was dedicated to providing an overview and background of the study. This is essential for establishing the rationale for the study. It also provides readers with an understanding of the circumstances in which the study is positioned, thereby facilitating the assessment of its significance. The key objectives and research questions driving the thesis have also been discussed to provide a comprehensive guide that will streamline the study. Even though the previous chapter provides the background to the study, it is devoid of statements about the geographical context within which this study is conducted. As such, it is important to detail the geographical peculiarities of Ghana, where the phenomenon of brand communities is studied. This provides an overview of the factors that may influence the applicability and outcome of the study.

As such, the present chapter examines the contextual issues that are important for understanding the phenomenon of brand communities in Ghana and their consequences for the marketing and public relations praxis. To achieve this, the chapter has provided a detailed historical, political, economic, and cultural environment of Ghana and the different factors that shape consumer behaviour and brand preferences in the Ghanaian market. This means that significant events, political growth, and sociological transformations that have shaped the current Ghanaian economy have been thoroughly discussed. The examination of these aspects is crucial for situating the study within its appropriate context, given the importance of the area's economic dynamism and the wider political atmosphere.

## 2.1 Marketing in Ghana

Marketing in Ghana has undergone a significant transition over time. The shift from conventional marketing strategies to the use of modern tactics, particularly digital marketing, has been observed (Yawson & Yamoah, 2022; Preko et al., 2023). The emergence of the digital era and the widespread availability of internet connectivity and mobile devices have significantly transformed marketing approaches within the nation (Kpahambang & Majeed, 2019). The marketing field has seen significant changes, transitioning from conventional practices such as print media, billboards, and radio commercials to a more comprehensive range of channels. This evolution includes strategies such as social media marketing, email marketing, and search engine optimisation (SEO), among others.

The transition towards digital marketing is in accordance with worldwide patterns while also catering to the unique dynamics of the Ghanaian market due to the proliferation of mobile devices powered by the internet (Brobbeey et al., 2021). The advent of digital marketing has not only facilitated more effective methods of reaching a wider range of individuals but has also enabled precise targeting, customisation, and immediate interaction (Mkwizu, 2019). It has also revolutionised customer-to-customer engagements in social media communities, thereby propelling businesses to troop these spaces (Nutsugah et al., 2024). This has also facilitated the emergence of a marketing environment in Ghana that is characterised by increased interactivity and engagement (Boakye et al., 2022).

Again, the role of marketing agencies, advertising firms, and public relations corporations in an emerging market like Ghana cannot be overstated. These entities are the creators of marketing tactics brands utilise to engage consumers effectively. They possess specialised

knowledge in understanding customer behaviour, formulating persuasive communication pieces, and determining the optimal marketing channels for effectively reaching certain target demographics (Schauster & Neill, 2017). Advertising agencies, such as the ones mentioned by Boateng et al. (2022), have a significant impact on the development and distribution of brand communication across diverse media platforms. They bear the responsibility of developing compelling and captivating commercials that effectively connect with the intended target audience. The primary purpose of these is twofold: to provide consumers with information and to establish an emotional bond with the brand, cultivating loyalty and engendering confidence.

Many organisations, especially multinational companies, have relied heavily on the agencies' creative workforce to generate campaigns. These agencies in Ghana typically adopt a more comprehensive approach, assuming responsibility for the overall marketing strategy of businesses in Ghana. They conduct market research, identify target demographics, and formulate complete marketing strategies. Their area of expertise lies in comprehending customer behaviour and market trends, thereby enabling brands to adjust and flourish in Ghana. Many of the public relations agencies in Ghana also prioritise the establishment and sustenance of a favourable public perception of various brands. They manage interactions with numerous stakeholders, including consumers, the media, and the government (Nutsugah et al., 2022).

## **2.2 Consumer Behaviour in Ghana**

The influence of cultural values, customs, and societal conventions on consumer behaviour in Ghana is significant (Nassè, 2021). The shopping habits of individuals are influenced by the rich and diversified cultural fabric of the nation, which includes many ethnic groups, traditions, and customs. Ghanaian society exhibits a strong adherence to cultural values such as

communalism, the extended family system, and reverence for elders (Neequaye, 2020). The aforementioned principles frequently manifest in the form of communal decision-making procedures pertaining to substantial purchases or brand selections (Neequaye, 2020). The thoughts and acceptance of family and community members bear great weight, influencing which products or brands customers choose to embrace (Neequaye, 2020).

Furthermore, the notion of "ubuntu," which is widely observed in diverse African societies, underscores the interdependence of individuals and their shared obligation towards one another. Within the realm of consumer behaviour, this value can be observed through the inclination towards companies that are perceived to make a beneficial contribution to the community or society as a whole (Makwara et al., 2023). Ghanaian customers tend to show a preference for brands that are in line with their cultural values and demonstrate a strong commitment to social responsibility (Bonsu, 2008). Social variables are important in shaping customer preferences and brand selections. The phenomenon of urbanisation, along with the transformation of family structures and the dynamic evolution of roles within the family unit, has led to notable changes in consumer behaviour (Roberts et al., 2004). The process of urbanisation, facilitated by the migration of individuals from rural to urban areas, has resulted in heightened levels of exposure to a broader array of products and brands. According to Bannor et al. (2022), urban consumers exhibit a wider range of preferences and enjoy enhanced accessibility to products offered by both local and international businesses.

The comprehension of consumer behaviour in Ghana necessitates a thorough examination of economic aspects, including income levels and employment status (Naatu et al., 2024). The purchasing power and affordability characteristics are closely interconnected with consumers'

ability to make purchases and the range of products or brands they may access (Asante-Addo & Weible, 2020). Ghana has experienced a notable expansion of its middle class, resulting in a corresponding rise in the purchasing power of a specific portion of its populace (Boafo, Appiah, & Tindan, 2019). As a consequence, there has been a notable change in consumer preferences, with a growing inclination towards aspirational and high-end products. On the other hand, those with lesser earnings may select businesses that offer affordable options and make value-driven purchasing decisions.

The purchasing habits of individuals are influenced by their employment level, which serves as a crucial factor. Individuals who are currently employed, particularly those who hold secure and consistent positions, tend to own a greater amount of discretionary cash. This financial advantage allows them to have the means to engage with a broader selection of brands (Taale & Kyeremeh, 2019). The impact of job status extends beyond individual consumers, as a region or community's economic stability can also affect the brands' performance in that locality.

The introduction of international brands into the Ghanaian market has brought forth a novel aspect of customer behaviour. These brands possess distinct cultural influences and frequently embody a perception of status and worldwide attractiveness (Asante-Addo & Weible, 2020; Ofori-Boateng, 2020). Consumers are potentially drawn to foreign products due to their perceived attributes of superior quality and elevated social standing. According to Simpson (2022), the Ghanaian market is characterised by a notable presence of foreign fashion brands, technology enterprises, and fast-food chains. Consumer purchase patterns are influenced by foreign brands through the implementation of advertising and marketing initiatives. The extensive global presence of major businesses frequently results in significant marketing

expenditures, which empower them to establish brand recognition and influence customer inclinations Simpson (2022).

### **2.3 Brand Communities in Ghana**

According to Coelho et al. (2019), brand communities are self-generated and spontaneous collectives that emerge based on common interests, experiences, or associations with a certain brand. Consumer passion and loyalty serve as the driving forces behind the success of brands, as individuals connect with and share a mutual admiration for the values, products, or mission of these brands (Kaur et al., 2020). In Ghana, certain communities have become centres where individuals with the same interests gather in virtual and physical spaces to demonstrate their fervour for particular brands. The emergence of brand communities in Ghana can be ascribed to a multitude of variables. The proliferation of internet connectivity and the widespread adoption of social media platforms have facilitated the creation of a virtual environment wherein consumers may establish connections and actively interact with one another (Jibril et al., 2019). According to Ozuem and Willis (2022), contemporary brand fans congregate in virtual spaces such as online forums, social media groups, and brand-specific websites to interact and share experiences.

Furthermore, the distinctive attributes of specific brands, particularly those that align with Ghanaian culture and values, substantially impact the establishment of communities. Brands that integrate aspects of Ghanaian culture, history, or identity have a propensity to garner a fervent and dedicated following. Brands that focus on traditional clothes or local cuisines foster a sense of cultural connection among consumers who possess a shared cultural affinity. Moreover, the establishment of a community is significantly influenced by the emotional bond

that exists between consumers and businesses. According to Boateng et al. (2020), brands that effectively align themselves with the aspirations, beliefs, and lifestyles of their intended audience are more likely to cultivate a passionate and dedicated following than those that do not. According to Adam et al. (2018), when consumers perceive that a brand possesses an understanding of and appreciation for their needs and preferences, they are more inclined to establish and engage in brand communities.

#### **2.4 Cultural Factors That May Influence Brand Communities in Ghana**

The establishment, sustainability, and behaviour of brand communities in Ghana, just as in any other jurisdiction, are significantly influenced by cultural variables. The cultural milieu of Ghana, characterised by its abundant traditions, values, and emphasis on communalism, exerts a significant influence on the dynamics of these brand communities (Hofstede, 2011). Ghana is a country renowned for its rich and varied cultural values and customs. The aforementioned values frequently function as the foundational principles of brand communities, influencing the shared identity and conduct of community participants. Communalism, as seen in Ghana, is a fundamental cultural principle that is manifested through the establishment of an extended family structure, wherein the collective well-being of the society is prioritised (Kemeh, 2018).

Within the realm of brand communities, this particular value would frequently manifest as a group sense of ownership and shared responsibility (Gong, 2017). Due to these cultural observations, it is likely that individuals who are part of brand communities in Ghana would tend to perceive themselves as members of a broader collective that possesses shared interests. The presence of a communal spirit inside a community cultivates a collective sense of cohesion and shared objectives.

Ghanaians exhibit a profound reverence for tradition, customs, and cultural history. Consequently, brands that demonstrate homage and integration of Ghanaian cultural components inside their products are likely to evoke a powerful response from consumers (Blankson et al., 2020). These particular brands have a higher probability of garnering a committed and loyal following within the context of brand communities. Consumers are inclined towards brands that demonstrate reverence and appreciation for the cultural traditions and values of their own countries.

As previously said, the notion of "ubuntu," which is prominent in diverse African traditions, underscores the interdependence of individuals and their shared obligation towards one another (Makwara et al., 2023). Within the domain of brand communities, this particular value can be observed through the inclination towards brands that are perceived as socially responsible and actively contribute to the betterment of the community or society as a whole. According to Ansu-Mensah et al. (2021), companies that actively participate in corporate social responsibility (CSR) endeavours, such as providing assistance to local causes or engaging in environmental projects, often receive increased support from the respective communities.

Ghana is a country characterised by a rich tapestry of cultural traditions and ceremonial practices, encompassing a diverse range of festivities and rituals, including festivals and rites of passage. Numerous brand communities in Ghana actively associate themselves with these traditional festivities, so cultivating a collective feeling of cultural identity and developing a sentiment of pride. Brands that engage in active participation or sponsorship of traditional festivals have the potential to cultivate favourable perceptions and garner support within these communities. As an illustration, a brand that is affiliated with a regional festival has the

potential to become an essential component of the community's festivities, so enhancing the brand's connection with its constituents.

Cultural variables exert a significant impact on the dynamics of social interaction among brand communities. In the context of Ghana, where the extended family structure is widely observed, the influence of word-of-mouth recommendations and referrals is of considerable importance. Individuals who are part of brand communities frequently exert influence over their family, friends, and social networks with regard to brand-related issues. The phenomenon of social influence has the potential to enhance the influence of brand communities, as recommendations from trusted members of these communities are held in high esteem.

Furthermore, the presence of communalism, a deeply rooted aspect of Ghanaian culture, serves as a significant catalyst in the advancement of brand communities. It cultivates a communal feeling of identity and purpose within these communities. Individuals frequently perceive themselves as integral components of a broader familial or communal entity, united by common interests and principles. The establishment of a shared sense of belonging and collective duty fosters an exceptional atmosphere conducive to the flourishing of brand advocacy and loyalty.

## 2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter delved into the essential contextual factors that are relevant to the examination of brand communities in Ghana. The factors encompassed in this analysis are the historical progression that has influenced consumer behaviours and marketing practices, the current

geopolitical and economic context of the country, the development of marketing tactics over time, and the dynamics of customer preferences. In addition, the researcher conducted an investigation of the development, attributes, and associations of brand communities within the specific context of Ghana. An understanding of the Ghanaian context is of utmost importance in the examination of brand communities. The next chapter focuses on reviewing relevant literature to explore the gaps that would eventually underpin this present study.



## CHAPTER THREE

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.0 Chapter Overview

In Chapter One, the general background of the study was provided with a particular focus on introducing and defining the concept of brand communities. The chapter demonstrates that businesses all around the world continue to find innovative ways of reconfiguring their relationships with their customers in a manner that creates long-lasting levels of loyalty. This includes building consumer fan bases and communities, which are referred to as brand communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). However, the main argument was that although researchers' interest in brand communities continues to grow, not much of that growth is experienced within the emerging market contexts. This argument calls for a thorough review of the extant literature to unravel current research trends on the subject matter and detailed gaps and limitations within the brand community literature. As such, this chapter focuses on reviewing existing literature on branding with a special focus on brand communities.

The literature review plays a critical role in the entire research process as it helps the researcher to establish what already exists in knowledge. It helps establish the gaps in issues, methodology, and theories, as well as appreciating the scope and framework within which previous researchers have undertaken their scholarship. This position is consistent with the postulations of Leedy (1985, p. 32), who states that a "literature review can show a researcher how the collateral researcher handled various situations, and it assists the researcher in evaluating his or her efforts by comparing them with related efforts made by others." Again, this will help prevent the total duplication of existing scholarly works because it provides a clear synthesis of previous evidence and builds incrementally on them (Lame, 2019).

The systematic review approach is employed in this research. The systematic review approach helps in appraising and synthesising existing literature in a manner that is organised, transparent, and reproducible, and it has the propensity to reduce the researcher's biases (Lame, 2019). This is because the search methodology is extensively reported and discussed with a focus on the inclusion and exclusion criteria used. Since this research aims at increasing the transparency in the processes leading to the review, which will, in turn, enhance the replicability, validity, and reliability of the review process, the systematic review becomes more appropriate and befitting. This is also consistent with previous studies on Branding and Brand Communities that have adopted this approach (Bhattacharjee et al., 2021; Brogi, 2014; Odoom et al., 2017). The next section discusses brand community research and the processes of literature search for this review.

### **3.1 Brand Community Research**

Generally, research on brand communities continues to sprawl within the marketing literature because of the enormous benefits they bring to brands. As posited by Thompson and Sinha (2008), when coordinated well, brand community activities have higher possibilities of deepening brand loyalty and degenerating into oppositional loyalty towards competing brands.

Even though research in the area keeps sprawling at a fast pace, not many of them have focused on synthesising studies to give a pictorial overview of the discipline and tease out gaps for future research. To respond to this yawning gap in the literature, this review is proposed to unravel the major thematic areas that scholars are publishing on, the dominant research methodologies, and the major geographical jurisdictions the studies are emanating from. The review has also explored the dominant theories that have characterised research in the

discipline and the platforms (online or offline) from which data is gathered. All of these are attempts at establishing study gaps that are hinged on extensive review with rigorous methodology.

### **3.2 Literature Search Methodology**

As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, one of the advantages of employing the systematic review approach is that it shows methodological rigour, which is important for replicability, validity, and reliability (Lame, 2019). This section will, therefore, discuss the scope within which the review was conducted. It will also focus on the processes that led to the review. Attention will be given to the inclusion and exclusion criteria and the keywords employed in the literature search.

#### ***3.2.1 Scope of the Review***

The scope of this review was limited to peer-reviewed and earlycite articles published in academic journals that are English-language focused. According to Lee et al. (2012), the depth of peer review ensures that research is of sufficient quality. Thus, peer-reviewed articles communicate high-quality findings because experts in the field review and critique them to ensure standards are met. Because of the guaranteed quality of research in peer-reviewed articles, they were the most preferred for this review. Earlycite articles were also considered because they are completely peer-reviewed and made available in high-quality journals before going through the full sub-editing and page-proofing stages where they will be assigned a volume and an issue. The final copy of the article replaces the earlycite version once it is ready for publication (Conn & Waite, 2010). Given that grey literature is hardly ever subjected to

any rigorous peer review processes (Adams et al., 2017), characterising their lack of publication in scientific journals (Lawrence et al., 2015) as well as having less clearly defined standards deterring some researchers from using them (Conn et al., 2003), unpublished working papers, conference proceedings, conference posters, conference papers, essays, and other types of writeups were excluded from this review. Similarly, published books, book parts, case studies, expert briefings, and executive summaries, although they contain a wealth of content and information, were left out of this evaluation, and only peer-reviewed and early cite articles were employed because they provide higher forms of valid knowledge (Podsakoff et al., 2005).

Additionally, the scope of this study was limited to papers published between 10 years, 2013 to 2023. Thomson (2013) posits that even though there is no hard and fast rule for how much old or new literature must be incorporated in a review, examiners often regard materials over 10 years old as an ossified viewpoint. To broaden the scope of the review, the study sourced articles from six (6) different databases, namely Emerald, Jstore, Science Direct, Scopus, Taylor and Francis, and Wiley. These databases were selected because they form part of the most outstanding databases (Mansour, 2016) in terms of the quality of the journals in which very high-standard articles and other research materials are published (Jones & Roberts, 2005).

### ***3.2.2 Approach to Literature Search***

According to Rao and Moon (2021), a detailed literature search is required in systematic reviews since it can have a significant impact on the review's findings and conclusions. In synchrony with Fatehi et al. (2013), who posit that databases can be searched using fundamental search methods of typing in terms and keywords in the search box and clicking

the 'search' icon, this review searched for articles on the databases of Emerald, J store, Science Direct, Scopus, Taylor and Francis, and Wiley with the keywords "Brand Communit\* OR Online Brand Communit\* OR Word of Mouth and Brand Communit\* OR Brand Community Loyalt\* OR, Customer Engagement in Communit\*". This search style is consistent with previous studies on systematic reviews (Flaherty et al., 2021; Odoom et al., 2017; Pang et al., 2017). The asterisk symbol was used to help unravel the varied endings of the key search words as employed by Flaherty et al. (2021).

Articles selected for the review were those published in the last 10 years. In the search for literature using the keywords stated above, over six thousand (6,000) search results popped up across all the databases employed. These included books, articles, executive summaries, and case studies, among other content types. The researcher applied inclusion criteria such as year range (2013 to 2023), articles, earlycite articles, and subject area (Marketing and Advertising). After applying these inclusion criteria, the search results dropped to below one thousand (1,000) contents across all databases. From this point, the researcher excluded content that did not identify with any of the keywords. Contents that mentioned the keywords but did not make them the primary focus of the study were also excluded. Because the contents were sourced from different databases, several duplications were detected and deleted. Thereafter, the researcher started selecting relevant articles by thoroughly scrutinising the abstracts of these publications to avoid redundancy and irrelevance to the work. The entire document of articles that seemed confusing during the selection process had to be read before a decision was taken to omit or include them. After the rigorous process of inclusion and exclusion, a total of one hundred and one (101) articles were identified as meeting the focus and scope of this study and, as a result, constituted the basis for the review.

The review has led to the generation of a systematic classification scheme, a classification style consistent with Odoom et al. (2017). They are;

- a. Major themes under consideration
- b. Geography of data
- c. Dominant industries explored
- d. Publication distribution per year
- e. Paper type and year distribution
- f. Distribution of data site across ears
- g. Dominant journals in the discipline
- h. Methodological distribution
- i. Major theories

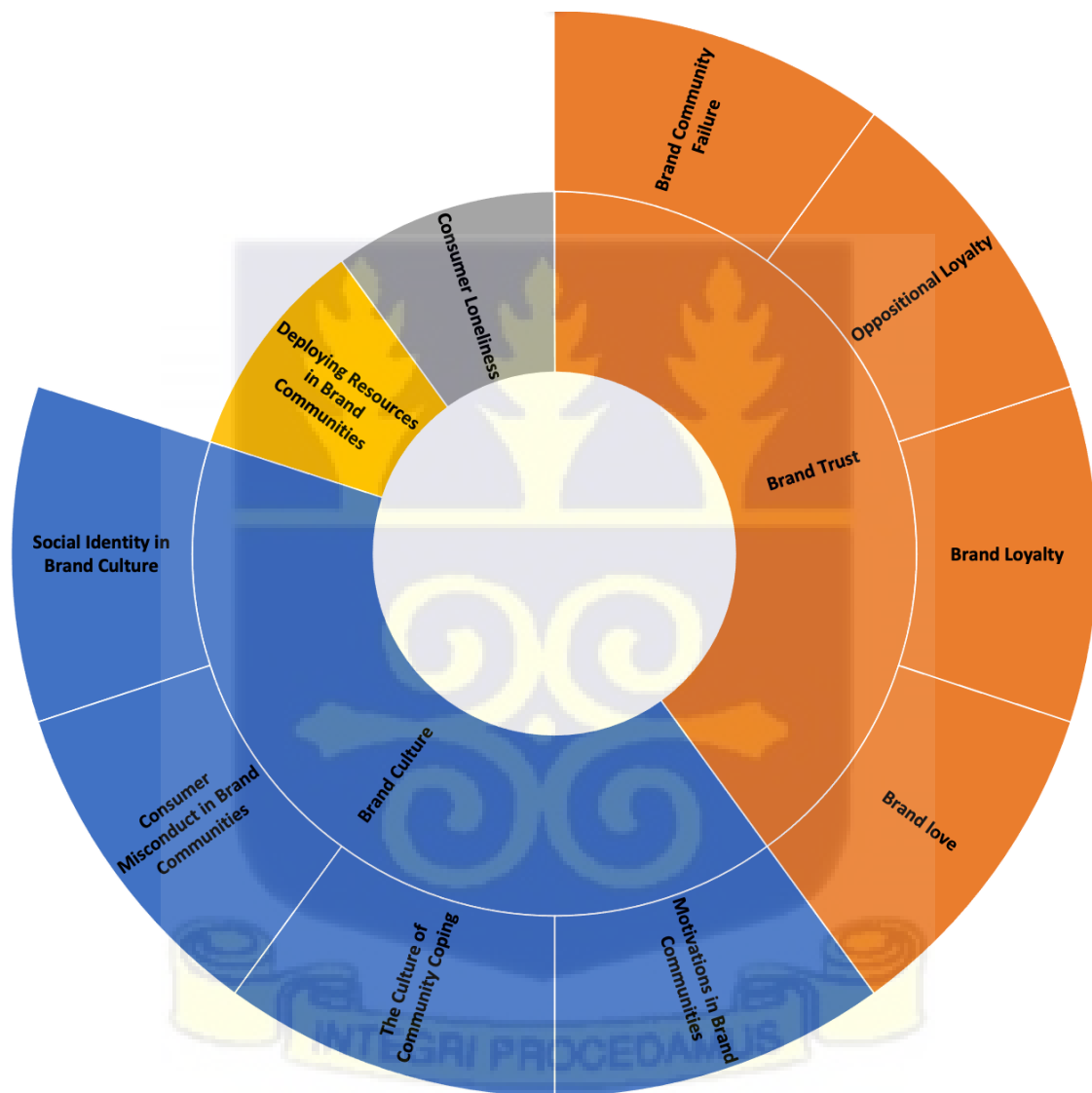
### 3.3 Major Themes Under Consideration

The crux of this systematic review is the dominant themes that have characterised research in the brand community discipline. Discussions on themes are important because they form the underlying purpose and focus on which the studies were built (Odoom et al., 2016).

The major themes that have characterised research in the brand community literature are illustrated in **Figure 1.0** below. The Figure shows an innermost circle that hosts the major themes that have been identified as reoccurring throughout the evaluation (Brand Culture, Brand Trust, Consumer Loneliness, and Deploying Resources in Brand Communities). The bigger the shape of the slice of the theme in the figure below, the more times it has occurred and vice versa. This means that the most explored theme in the literature on brand communities is Brand Culture. The second layer of the circle from the innermost one hosts the sub-themes

that were identified under the major themes. These sub-themes immediately follow the major themes under which they were identified, and they carry the same colour as demonstrated in the figure below.

The ensuing paragraphs are dedicated to discussing the dominant themes deduced from the literature under evaluation to identify key gaps that may underpin this research.



▪ Brand Culture ▪ Brand Trust ▪ Consumer Loneliness ▪ Deploying Resources in Brand Communities

*Figure 1.0 Major (Themes Evaluated) Source: Author's Creation*

### **3.3.1 Brand Culture**

As captured above, one of the dominant themes in the literature evaluated is brand culture. As marketing strategies have evolved into targeting networks, social groupings, and many-to-many marketing approaches (Gummesson, 2015), scholars must begin to explore the cultural dynamics of these groupings to inform strategic managerial decisions.

For example, Schembri and Latimer (2016) conducted a study to unravel how consumers collectively curate, construct and co-construct cultures in online brand communities. The overarching aim of their study was to provide insights for marketers to appreciate how they can engineer brand community participation in a manner that fosters preconceived brand cultures. Schembri and Latimer (2016) focused on the cultural dynamics of the Behance Network ([www.behance.net](http://www.behance.net)), which is an online brand community of the Behance brand. Behance is part of the Adobe organisation, which is tasked with the responsibility of emboldening professionals in the creative industry to take control of technological advancements. The study employed netnography to gather data from members of the Behance Network and found that several community activities such as the display of key achievements, awards, and client portfolios, contributed a great deal to the construction of the members' self.

Again, it was also observed that the sharing of personal stories and biographies led to the construction of members' selves in the online brand community. There was also evidence to show a display of brand love and affection by members of the community, and that led to members' ability to tell positive stories about the brand. In identifying the rituals in the community, the study posited that members shared acronyms and jargon that are unique to them as part of their ritualistic behaviour. Members also embarked on daily visitations to

Behance, which they argued formed indelible experiences and memories in their minds. Their study was consistent with the foundational postulations of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), who argued that brand communities have a demonstrable reputation for strong brand culture, and this is manifested in their traditions, rituals, and complex behaviours.

Moreso, the study is in tandem with the thesis of the social identity theory as it postulates that as individuals, we crave certain social identities, and to satisfy this innate desire, we join and participate in social groupings where these identities are created and negotiated (Tajfel, 2010). The concept of social identity has been extensively discussed in the brand community literature because it gives deeper insights into the psychological effects of how a brand community member identifies with the larger community and how this identification affects their community participation and, eventually, their attitude towards the brand (Dholakia et al., 2009; Mousavi et al., 2017). As argued by previous researchers (Islam & Rahman, 2016; Kim et al., 2008), brand communities are social groupings that attract members with varied motives and levels of participation. As such, it is important to study the cultural practices that persist in these communities.

In response to this call, Mousavi et al. (2017) have undertaken a study to interpret the phenomenon of social identity in internet-based brand communities. In the study, the researchers sought to understand how the psychology of social identity impacts those members who post frequently in the online brand communities (posters) and those who do not post at all (lurkers). The study employed the quantitative approach and collected data through an online survey from users of various online brand communities. The study found that an individual's

self-identity as a brand community member is highly influenced by the prestige and distinctiveness of the brand in question. This was referred to in the study as self-categorisation.

However, they argued that community-based self-esteem and self-categorisation form grounds for members to be committed to a brand, which will, in turn, lead to positive word-of-mouth recommendations. Even though the study explored the cultural dynamics of online brand communities, conversations on key cultural practices, such as motivations for joining brand communities, as well as the significant and insignificant ritualistic practices found in brand communities, have not been given attention in the study. This study fills that gap by exploring various components of the cultural practices of brand communities in an emerging market, with a key focus on the rituals and motivations within brand communities.

Similarly, Kelley and Alden (2016) undertook a study to understand the extent to which brand engagement activities, like interactivity with the brand website, are moderated by an individual's self-identification and categorisation. The study employed the positivist approach and used an online survey to solicit responses from middle-aged adults in America, and through structural equation modelling, the study found that consumers are increasingly seeking out brands that demonstrate their self-concept, leading to higher interactivity with the brand and subsequent word-of-mouth recommendation. Even though their findings are significant to the brand community literature, the perspectives of online brand community activities in emerging economies have been largely neglected. This could be attributable to issues of low internet penetration in these contexts. Again, methodologically, the study was underpinned by the positivist paradigm, making it difficult to appreciate the brand community members' lived experiences in very natural settings (Creswell, 2013). This study fills the void methodologically

and theoretically by unravelling brand community culture within the context of emerging markets through a more social constructionist approach.

### *3.3.1.1 Consumer Misconduct and Coping in Brand Communities*

For the purposes of this review, consumer misconduct in brand communities has been conceptualised as a sub-theme under brand culture. As demonstrated in the preceding paragraphs, at the heart of the phenomenon of brand community is customer-to-customer relations and interactions because these customers converge because of their admiration for a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and as such, begin to communicate within the same environment (Albrecht, 2016). Having noted this, it is important to predict that customer-to-customer interaction can influence the community members' experiences with the brand because those interactions serve as the primary form of engagement for members. In line with these thoughts, the question of what happens if a customer misconducts themselves in the brand community arises. Again, the question of how customers are affected by the negative attitude or the misconduct of other members also arises. Last but not least, how the customers cope when these conflicts or misconducts occur becomes worthy of study.

To answer these questions, Sweiss et al. (2021) conducted a study in Jordan to explore the role of the perceived efforts of a company in moderating customer misconduct in online brand communities. In this context, customer misbehaviour is referred to as attitudes that are variant with the norms, customs, and standard practices of the community (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). Sweiss et al.'s (2021) work was primarily to understand how customers react or behave when they observe some of these misconducts from other customers. Sweiss et al. (2021) argued that the study was important because much of the research that focused on customer-brand

experiences in brand communities only focused on factors that are positively valenced. The study was conducted using the quantitative research paradigm and gathered responses through a survey from a section of Jordanian students. The study found that customers are faced with negative brand experiences when other customers misconduct themselves. This, in the long run, negatively affects their overall experiences with the brand, which can lead to negative behaviours towards the brand. The study has also found that where the company is perceived to be making efforts to mitigate the misbehaviour circumstances, the negative effect on brand experience is reduced. The study, therefore, concluded by admonishing companies to make efforts to mitigate those misconducts other customers put up to enhance the overall brand engagement and experience of the customers.

As significant as these findings may be, they are limited in the sense that the study only focused on online brand communities, leaving the communities that operate in the offline setting highly marginalised. Again, different cultures have different conflict resolution mechanisms. As such, one wonders if the findings on the conflict resolution style adopted in brand communities in Jordan will be effective in other jurisdictions. It is also unclear what the findings would have been if the qualitative or mixed-method approaches had been used. It is, therefore, inquisitive to explore the phenomenon from the perspective of the qualitative or mixed-method approaches.

As broad as the concept of culture is, this study is not in a position to discuss all its facets. It is, however, important to discuss the core components as presented in the literature. One of such important and dominant components is brand community coping (Weijo et al., 2019).

There are several scholarly works on the phenomenon of coping (Hobfoll, 2001; Jones et al., 2010; Weijo et al., 2019) and in an attempt to situate it within the literature, they described it as an individual's ability to control and manage their emotions as a result of trauma. In a community that is built on the principles of interpersonal relationships and exchange, it is of significant value to explore how individuals cope and how other individuals are affected by the traumatic experiences of others within brand communities.

Three different mechanisms have been widely discussed by Weijo et al. (2019) on how individuals cope: 1. to cope by toppling the traumatic experience, 2. to cope by isolating themselves from the traumatic experience, and 3. to cope by moderating or mitigating the traumatic experience through support from other community members. The importance of this phenomenon to brand marketers cannot be overemphasised because a brand community member's inability to cope will have adverse effects on their overall brand experience, which will, in turn, disrupt other community members and derail brand-building efforts. In consumer-brand relations, the need to cope can set in as a result of the brand failing to fulfil consumers' expectations, failing to go by brand standards, leading to brand betrayal, or even breaching consumer data privacy (Labrecque et al., 2021).

To gain deeper scholarly insights into the phenomenon, Weijo et al. (2019) conducted a study that sought to explore how members cope in brand communities. The study was underpinned by a netnography design, and data was gathered from members of a gaming brand community. Specifically, the study explored brand community members' confusion and disappointment that characterised the release of Bioware's video game, known as the Mass Effect. The study found four major mechanisms which the brand community members employed to control or

mitigate their frustrations and trauma. These are *Instigation*, *Distillation*, *Mobilisation*, and *Remembrance*.

- i. *Instigation* – Weijo et al. (2019) described this mechanism as the brand community members' ability to build communal consensus in the face of difficulties or relationship transgression. Coping is said to be at its best when the majority of brand community members perceive the relationship transgression as a collective problem rather than an individual's problem. This means that communal feeling, or the feeling of belonging, is at the heart of brand community coping such that when a member notices that their frustrations are felt and validated by other members, their ability to cope increases and vice versa.
- ii. *Distillation* – Again, the study described this mechanism as the brand community members' interest in expressing their feelings on how the transgression is affecting their relationship with the brand. This is, therefore, the brand community members' attempt at making sense of the transgression, and according to Weijo et al. (2019, p. 130), "these meanings are further explored, contested and ultimately distilled into new points of consensus for future action".
- iii. *Mobilisation* – This mechanism, as found by the study, deals with the brand community members' ability to use the sense made from the distillation to remobilise and rebalance the relationship they have with the brand. This is to say that even though brand fandom is highly threatened by the relationship transgression, members cope by analysing the situation and attempting to cool the relationship, thereby signifying a

drift from coping by managing emotions to coping by taking vivid actions that could compel the brand to remedy its mistake (Duhachek, 2005; Weijo et al., 2019).

- iv. *Remembrance* – The study placed this mechanism as “passing the transgression into collective memory” (Weijo et al., 2019, p. 132). This means that the relationship transgression has now become a part of the brand community members’ emotional history, and if nothing is done about it or if this emotional past does not evolve over the period, it will constitute a negative brand experience and is likely to degenerate into negative recommendations and negative trust transfer about the brand.

It is, however, unclear if these findings may be moderated by the nature of the society (individualistic and collective) in which the brand community is situated. Again, as important as these findings are in the study, issues on other coping and conflict resolution mechanisms that may exist in other brand communities have been marginalised. Again, in online brand communities, the transgressions are kept online either through archives or hashtags and could pop up occasionally. This will remind community members of their traumatic experiences with the brand. The case is not the same in an offline brand community setting and, as such, may require further investigation into the uniqueness of brand community coping in offline brand communities.

#### 3.3.1.2 Motivations in Brand Communities

Another very important sub-theme identified in the brand community literature under brand culture is the concept of motivation. According to Avery and Mittal (2017), the concept of motivation explains the desire in humans to attain a certain end goal. This means that brand

community members may have certain motivations for engaging and participating in the activities of the community, and these motivations are to help reach a certain outcome. The reason why this phenomenon is important to discuss is that brands, in their attempt to increase love and satisfaction, would have to, first of all, understand the motives of the members and potential members and strive to satisfy those motives.

Indeed, in the consumer behaviour literature, motives play a very significant role in predicting brand-customer relational outcomes and as argued by Haverila et al. (2020c), they are better predictors of engagement in brand communities than personal identity. Haverila et al. (2020c) argued that some of the motives that drive brand community members to engage, especially in online settings, could be finding new friends, commenting on posts, seeking new information, or simply seeking help. Previous researchers, such as Chan (2017), have broadly categorised motivations in brand communities into two different classifications – intrinsic and extrinsic motives. As the phrases connote, intrinsic motives are those that are inherently gratifying and extrinsic motives are those motives that bring tangible rewards or outcomes.

In responding to understanding the motives of consumers to engage in online brand communities, van Heerden and Wiese (2021) conducted an empirical study in South Africa and the study was aimed at influencing managerial decisions on why marketers should care about consumers' motives. The study classified motives into two major categories.

- i. *Utilitarian Motives* – consisting of rational and logical behaviours such as convenience, information seeking, and remuneration.

- ii. *Hedonic Motives* – consisting of emotional behaviours that are targeted at seeking pleasure, such as entertainment, interpersonal utility, and brand likability.

The study was underpinned by the quantitative approach, with data gathered through a questionnaire survey. After analysing the data, the study found that the tentative statement that all three hedonic motives (entertainment, interpersonal utility, and brand likability) are significant predictors of brand community engagement is true, with brand likability being the highest motivator of all. On the other hand, the statement that all three utilitarian motives (convenience, information seeking, and remuneration) are significant predictors of brand community engagement was not true. Again, the study discovered that brand engagement was a significant positive predictor of purchase intention, brand loyalty and word-of-mouth recommendation.

Haverila et al. (2020c) conducted a similar study to unravel the various motives that moderate brand community members' brand engagement and community participation. The justification for the study was that in each brand community, different groupings could have different motives for joining and participating in the activities of the community and as such, it was important to study how these different motives influence their engagement levels in the community. The study was underpinned by the quantitative research approach, and data was gathered from two distinctive sample groups from North America – the student population and the general population sample, which the scholars argued was to be able to draw comparative analysis between the two sampling groups. The study found that in both the student and the general population sample, there was a positive correlation between the entertainment motive and engagement within brand communities. What this means is that the higher the

entertainment motive, the more engaged the brand community members will become and vice versa.

Again, the study found that the motive to seek information was one of the biggest priorities for brand community members in the two sample groups, and this positively influenced the members' engagement levels. Interestingly, the study showed that the general North American population were more motivated and influenced positively by self-discovery motive in brand communities than the student population, whereas the students were also more motivated by the quest to socially integrate into the brand community than the general population.

What is more, Kumar and Nayak (2019a) also sought to understand the psychological motivations that undergird brand community members' participation and engagement. The study was underpinned by psychological concepts such as Brand Psychological Ownership and Value Congruity. As argued by Pierce et al. (2001), psychological ownership is the mental state of believing that you own a part of or the whole of something. In the case of brand communities, the assumption is that once you become a member of the community, you feel you own the brand (in whole or part) psychologically, and that triggers certain behaviours just like you would put up to protect what is physically yours. Value congruity, on the other hand, implies the consumer's state of perceiving the brand values to conform or be similar to their values.

Therefore, the study theorised that psychological motivations such as psychological ownership and value congruity have positive influences on brand community engagements and participation. The data for the study was collected through a survey in India from brand community members who were present at weeks-long riding events. The data was analysed

through structural equation modelling, and some of the key findings were that there is a positive and direct relationship between brand psychological ownership and brand engagement, as well as value congruity and brand engagement. The study has also confirmed the argument that brand engagement leads to consumer brand loyalty and cohesive brand attachment.

The similarities between the three studies (Haverila et al., 2020c; Kumar & Nayak, 2019a; van Heerden & Wiese, 2021) are striking in the sense that all three studies were hinged on unravelling brand community members' motives driving people to engage in the activities of the community. All three studies have also been underpinned by the positivist paradigm, and data were gathered through surveys. The studies have demonstrated that brand community engagement which is an investment of resources by the members, is highly driven by their motives. Even though there are similarities, there are also differences. The studies were conducted in different geographical locations, and whereas Haverila et al.'s (2020c) work focused on multiple sample groups, Kumar and Nayak (2019a), as well as van Heerden and Wiese (2021), focused only on one sample group. Again, whereas Kumar and Nayak's (2019a) study was underpinned by psychological motives only, Haverila et al.'s (2020c) study, as well as van Heerden and Wiese's (2021) study, were underpinned by both extrinsic and intrinsic motives. Again, whereas van Heerden and Wiese's (2021) study found no significant relationship between extrinsic motives and brand community engagement, Haverila et al.'s (2020c) study found a significant relation between extrinsic motives and brand community engagement.

As postulated in the qualitative research literature, people construct their realities, and these could only be known through a social constructionist approach. To wit, quantitative research

approaches are rigorous but may not be enough to answer critical, in-depth questions about people's experiences and how those experiences influence their motives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This means that the brand community members' motives from their lived experiences have been marginalised in the studies above. Again, in societies with robust social support systems and abundant social goods such as good roads, good healthcare systems, and high employment rates, to mention but few, as found in North America where Haverila et al. (2020c) gathered data, one would expect that the motivational factors for engagement and participation in brand communities will differ from emerging economies like Ghana who are still struggling to meet basic social demands. This is to say that the studies above may not be enough to explain what pertains to emerging markets, an angle this research has resolved by exploring brand community members' motives in Ghana. It is also unclear in the studies above whether the gender, age, income levels and other key demographics of the brand community members have any moderating effect on their motives.

### **3.3.2 Brand Trust**

Another major and recurring theme in the brand community literature under review is brand trust. Brands have, over the period, been conceptualised as real humans, a phenomenon referred to in the branding literature as brand anthropomorphism (Guido & Peluso, 2015), and this conceptualisation has been proven to help consumers relate better to brands because they begin to perceive them as their fellow humans. As argued by Anaya-Sánchez et al. (2020), brand anthropomorphism is at the centre of brand community activities because the community members do not only relate to each other but also relate to the brands they represent. This conceptualisation implies, therefore, that the concept of brand trust will be of utmost

importance in brand communities because the members see the brands as their fellow humans and must trust them to foster a long-lasting relationship.

In an attempt to gain further scholarly insights into the phenomenon, Anaya-Sánchez et al. (2020) have undertaken a study that sought to comprehend how a consumer's intention to purchase a product and recommend the same to another consumer is influenced by their trust for a brand and their brand community trust. The study utilised the quantitative methodology and solicited 628 responses through a self-administered online survey in Spain. These respondents belonged to various online brand communities.

The data were analysed using the partial least squares structural equation modelling, and it found that the claim that online brand community trust is positively influenced by brand trust is significant. This implies that when brand community members do not trust the brand that is represented by the community, there is no way they would build trust within the brand community. Again, the study found that there was a positive relationship between brand trust and purchase intention and that when community members build trust and consensus within the community, they are highly likely to repurchase the products of the brand. The study concluded that trust is of utmost importance to any successful brand community, and as such, community members are more prone to engage in positive word-of-mouth recommendations if the brand trust and brand community trust are intact.

Another interesting angle to explore in the brand trust conversation is trust transfer. The concept of trust transfer, according to Stewart (2003), implies that when individuals build

associations, they can transfer their trust in something to another individual within those associations, especially if the source of the transfer is trusted. Stewart (2003) argued that trust transfer can be triggered by two major processes – a communication process and a cognitive process. The communication process is where the trusted source influences the trustor by communicating reasons for their trust in a product or a brand, and the cognitive process is purely an emotional investment by the trustor in the trusted source because of the trusted source's knowledge or expertise on the subject matter. What this means to the brand community discourse is that when members congregate to interact and share meanings, customs, and values, they will transfer their trust in the brand to each other through communication and cognitive processes. As such, it is important to understand how trust transfer works in brand communities and its impact on brand community engagement and participation.

In light of this, Liu et al. (2018) have conducted a study to understand the effect of customer-to-customer trust and customer-to-marketer trust on brand engagement within online brand communities. The study also sought to unravel the relationship between consumer engagement in online brand communities and brand trust. Data were gathered using a survey from online brand community participants in the Weibo brand community in China, and the study confirmed the statement that customer-to-customer trust, as well as customer-to-marketer trust, positively impacted online brand community engagement. This means that once there is shared trust among the brand community members and between the community members and the brand they represent, consumers are more likely to engage in the activities of the community. Again, the study found that there was a positive correlation between brand community engagement and brand trust, which is to say that when trust is built between the community

members and the brand they represent, they develop trust that transcends the community to the brand itself.

From the review of the literature on brand trust, it is evident that trust plays an important role in brand community engagement and participation, as postulated by Anaya-Sánchez et al. (2020) and Liu et al. (2018). The two studies have also largely demonstrated that where brand trust exists, brand community members are highly likely to build long-term relationships with the brand and become brand evangelists who will proclaim the positive messages of the brand. Even though these findings are significant enough for managerial and practical decisions, a common phenomenon that neglects the perspective of emerging economies has reoccurred in the literature. Again, the two studies have predominantly been underpinned by the positivist research paradigm, making it quite instructive for a qualitative study that will go beyond the manifest and unravel the latent reasons for how brand community members transfer trust and how that affects their lived experiences within the communities.

### 3.3.2.1 Brand Love

A sub-theme identified under the literature on brand trust is brand love. The conceptualisation here is that if consumers perceive brands to be humans like them (Guido & Peluso, 2015) and are building trust; as a result, they may as well develop some love for the brand if the trust is maintained. Indeed, brand love, as defined by Carroll and Ahuvia (2006, p.81), is “the passionate emotional attachment a satisfied individual exhibits towards a certain trade name”. With this definition, marketers need to understand the extent to which brand community engagement and participation can trigger this high level of emotional investment in a brand, referred to as brand love.

Lee and Hsieh (2021) undertook a study to understand how an individual's identification with a brand and their group-level engagements and interaction in brand communities can promote brand love. The study was based on social media brand communities of companies such as Starbucks, Coca-Cola, BMW and so on, and was underpinned by the social identity and social capital theories. Through a survey, 360 responses were solicited and analysed, and the findings were that when people identify with a certain brand (brand identification), they become interested in engaging with the brand, which could be one of the motivations for joining brand communities in the first place. Another finding is that these engagements form group-level connections, which, in turn, lead to a deep love for the brand. The study has also posited that brand love leads to the community members' intention to continue using the brand, positively referring it to others and their willingness to give feedback on the brand.

As noteworthy as these findings may be, conversations on brand loyalty have largely been sidelined in the study. It is unclear whether the brand love developed by these brand community members can lead to their unflinching loyalty to the brand or not. Again, the question of whether brand love was enough to mitigate community members' coping behaviour in the event of brand relationship transgression or not also remains largely unattended in the study.

Furthermore, when consumers feel emotionally attached to a brand, they begin to develop deep-seated loyalty to it, and this loyalty can degenerate into brand benefits such as positive recommendations and positive purchase behaviour (Aaker, 1991). As discussed in the preceding paragraphs, brand communities have become breeding grounds for consumers to exhibit such loyalties through brand community engagement and participation.

In consonance with these thoughts, Lin et al. (2019) conducted a study that sought to understand how brand loyalty can be developed within brand communities. The study employed the quantitative research method and gathered data through surveys from members of selected Taiwanese automobile brand communities. The study's findings confirmed the knowledge that when community members connect well in brand communities, it leads them to enjoy a high level of psychological experience which eventually translates into brand loyalty and all the other brand benefits that come with entrenched loyalty. This suggests, therefore, that brand owners must endeavour to foster cohesion and interconnectedness within their brand communities.

In a similar study, Guimaraes et al. (2016) sought to understand how brand loyalty is influenced and moderated by the quality of exchange relationships between the brand and the brand community, as well as marketing promises. Marketing promises refer to the promises made by the marketers whose brands are represented in the brand communities. The study was situated within the sports marketing context as data was gathered from the members of myfootballclub.co.uk through a questionnaire survey. The researchers argued that their choice of sports brand community was influenced by the level of enthusiasm and allegiance exhibited by sports fanatics. The study found that there was a significant positive relationship between meeting the expectations of brand community members and their loyalty to the brand. This means that when their expectations are met, which includes promises that are made to them by the brands, they are highly likely to become emotionally attached to the brand. The study also found that the aforementioned relationship is highly moderated by the motivations for which brand community members have joined the communities.

Another study that examined brand loyalty is Ozuem et al. (2021), this time from the fashion industry. The study sought to understand how motivations to join online brand communities and community participation can influence millennials' brand loyalty. The study was underpinned by the social influence theory, which explains how community members influence other community members to kowtow to existing rules and behaviours within the community. The study employed the social constructionist paradigm and gathered data through interviews from about forty-five (45) participants who were members of various fashion-based online brand communities.

The study found a link between motivational factors such as information quality, information believability, and interactive valence on the community members' loyalty intention. Again, the study, based on their thematisation, found different categories of loyalists in the brand communities. These are ambassadorial loyalists, public-voting loyalists, loveless loyalists, and mercenary loyalists. The ambassadorial loyalists are highly attached to the brand emotionally and are unlikely to be persuaded by negative statements about the brand or factors external to the brand community. They are also highly likely to recommend the brand to others in a positive manner. Public-voting loyalists are highly concerned with other members' perceptions or information about the brand. In other words, their loyalty is dependent on what people say about the brand, and, as such, they invest a lot of resources in seeking information about the brand. Again, loveless loyalists have undisclosed intentions toward the brand. They do not openly show their affection towards a brand and will only stick to a brand because of historical purchase experiences or perhaps future benefits they may derive from the brand. Last, but not least, mercenary loyalists pose fleeting loyalty towards brands. Their loyalty is conditional and

highly dependent on the transient benefits from a brand, and they are highly likely to switch brands if they do not perceive those benefits any longer.

The above studies reviewed on brand loyalty have demonstrated, to a very significant extent, the propensity of brand communities to deepen consumers' loyalty towards a brand. The three studies have also confirmed that there is a significant relationship between the quality of engagements in the brand community and brand loyalty. Whereas Lin et al. (2019) and Guimaraes et al. (2016) situated their studies within the positivist paradigm, Ozuem et al. (2021) situated theirs within the social constructionist paradigm, even though they all largely confirmed a similar phenomenon. However, the perspectives of brand loyalty within emerging economies have been given very little attention in the literature. The question of whether a factor like the gender of a community member plays a significant role in how loyal they can be to a brand in their engagement within brand communities also remains largely unanswered.

Having discussed brand loyalty extensively in the preceding paragraphs, it is important to know that gross engagement in brand communities can develop into oppositional loyalty towards competing brands (Liao et al., 2020). According to Kuo and Hou (2017), oppositional loyalty is when loyalists of one brand exhibit hatred and contrasting opinions about a competing brand and, in some extreme cases, are even willing to be hostile towards the competing brands and their offerings. This means that when people attain higher levels of emotional attachment towards a brand through their brand community engagements, they are likely to show opposing emotions towards their competitors. Therefore, this phenomenon becomes a point of scholarly attraction to be able to explain the nuances to brand managers.

Liao et al. (2020) have embarked on an empirical study to expand scholarly conversations on the phenomenon of oppositional loyalty. The study sought to understand how identity congruity between brand community members and the represented brand can lead to community members developing oppositional loyalty towards competing brands. Through an online survey questionnaire, data were gathered from smartphone online brand communities in China. The data was analysed using the structural equation modelling and found that elements such as self-brand similarity, brand prestige and brand uniqueness significantly influenced consumer-brand identity, and this consumer-brand identity has a significant positive influence on oppositional loyalty.

In an analogous study, Dessart et al. (2020) sought to understand how negative energy and broken relationships within brand communities can degenerate into community members' hatred and oppositional loyalty toward a brand they once loved. Similar to Liao et al. (2020), the study was underpinned by the quantitative method, where data was gathered through an online survey from respondents who were predominantly members of Facebook communities. The study found that oppositional loyalty is triggered when community members experience a negative relationship with the brand.

The studies reviewed on oppositional loyalty have shown an important conversation to brand managers who are constantly looking for innovative ways to outplay their competitors. The two studies (Dessart et al., 2020; Liao et al., 2020) have both employed the quantitative methodology leaving a methodological gap that needs scholarly attention. It is, however, unclear if there is any relation between brand community members' motivation to join the

community and their level of disloyalty towards competing brands. The studies have also largely ignored conversations on whether there are different forms of disloyalty towards competing brands and at what point these exhibitions of disloyalty can result in hostility towards the offerings of the competing brands. These questions call for future research.

### ***3.3.3 Brand Community Failure***

A closely related construct to the previously discussed themes (brand loyalty and oppositional loyalty) is brand community failure. They are closely related in the sense that if loyalty fails, it will be safe to say brand community and its benefits have backfired. It is, therefore, important to the literature review on brand communities to unravel factors that could account for brand community failure.

In Liao and Wang's (2020) work on the subject matter, they sought to understand what factors can lead to the failure of online brand communities. They used the survey method and gathered responses from 498 users of various online brand communities. The study found that the heterogeneity of consumers within online brand communities poses an adverse effect on brand commitment and brand community participation. This means that when consumers within brand communities begin to assort themselves into smaller groupings, they begin to reduce their community cohesiveness, and community stratification, if not checked, can lead to low brand community commitment levels. This relationship is even stronger in highly symbolic brands. What these findings mean to brand managers is that they have to invest resources in making sure that there is homogeneity rather than heterogeneity within the brand community members to increase community participation.

In a comparable study, Kumar and Nayak (2019b) explored the factors that account for brand community members' passive participation within the community. The study was underpinned by the psychological ownership theory, and data was gathered through an online survey questionnaire from 221 passive online brand community members in India. The study found that consumers become passive members of online brand communities when their individual and group psychological ownership shrinks. This means that when consumers do not get to that psychological state where they perceive themselves as partial or full owners of the brand, either as a group or as individuals, they are highly likely to become inactive within the brand communities. This inactivity can lead to negative word of mouth and general brand community failure.

The review of both studies (Kumar & Nayak, 2019b; Liao & Wang, 2020) has shown that since brand communities pose a lot of advantageous outcomes to brands, things can go wrong if the community faces some transgressions. However, both studies were carried out within the domain of online brand communities, leaving the offline brand communities somewhat marginalised. Again, the studies have been carried out using the positivist paradigm, and as such, it becomes unclear whether the qualitative methodology will lead to different outcomes and, as such, calls for research consideration.

#### **3.3.4 Consumer Loneliness**

The issue of loneliness has been dominating social conversations for some time now because of its effect on an individual's well-being, which is connected to their behaviour and efficiency as social animals. As argued by Snyder and Newman (2019), loneliness may pose dangerous

social consequences. The study by Pieters (2013) attempted to conceptualise consumer loneliness and demonstrated that consumption patterns could lead to a rise or decrease in consumer loneliness. Again, as argued by Forman and Sriram (1991), consumers are more likely to reduce consumer loneliness through social contacts in their line of purchase. This conceptualisation makes it important to discuss a theme like consumer loneliness in the review of the brand community literature because, as shown in earlier paragraphs, brand communities are sources of social support and social contact.

In response to this conceptualisation, Snyder and Newman (2019) have conducted a study to explore how brand community engagements and participation can reduce the phenomenon of consumer loneliness. Specifically, the study examined the influence of loneliness on a consumer's intention to join brand communities and the social benefits of joining communities that are more socially oriented in nature. The study has been underpinned by the attachment theory, which explains that individuals seek social support from others in times of despair and loneliness to be able to cope and restore their well-being (Bowlby & Ainsworth, 2013). From an online experiment, the study was carried out on 221 United States of America residents who are mainly adults and found that the intention to join and participate in brand community activities was higher among consumers who were lonely and yearned to socially belong. This was even more profound in brand communities that were perceived to be socially oriented.

Again, the study found that consumers who joined brand communities were more likely to benefit from relatedness satisfaction, thereby improving their social ties, reducing consumer loneliness, and positively influencing their evaluation of the brand.

The study makes an important managerial and research contribution to the brand community discipline in the sense that it reinforces the enormous benefits of brand community engagement to both the community members and the brands they represent. Again, this indicates that brand community managers and marketers should continue to build and manage communities in ways that make them socially oriented rather than being too focused on brand communities. It is, however, important to note that the study has not taken care of issues of consumer loneliness in brands that are too product-oriented and, as such, may call for future research. Again, the study was carried out in a developed country, leaving the perspective of emerging markets within the literature. Last but not least, the study did not focus on the gender variable to explore whether female consumers were more likely to join brand communities on the grounds of loneliness than male consumers.

### ***3.3.5 Resource Deployment in Brand Communities***

Deploying resources in brand communities, especially in company-initiated communities rather than consumer-initiated ones (Gummerus et al., 2012), is an important concept within the brand community literature. This is because, as conceived by Grönroos and Gummerus (2014), brand community members rely on these resources to create value in their quest to interact with the brand and other consumers within the community, and these forms of interactions have proven useful for brand benefits such as consumer loyalty and trust.

Sorensen (2021) studied how brands deploy resources within social media brand communities based on preconceived themes that were appropriated from Grönroos' (2012) model on value

creation in service, which categorises resources into four major groups – Physical Resources, Contact Employees, Focal Customers, and Fellow Customers. The study collected data through interviews and found that in two different cause organisations in Australia, three of the four resources in the conceptual model of value creation (Grönroos, 2012) were supported. These were Contact Employees, Focal Customers, and Fellow Customers. The study found that the contact employees were deployed in the two caused organisations to respond to customer queries promptly. These contact employees were reported to have been supplied with more resources to help them discharge their duties efficiently. Again, the study found that focal customers were deployed to help share information about the organisation within the brand communities. For fellow customers, the organisation is reported to have nurtured interactive peer-to-peer communication among brand community members without necessarily being intrusive.

The study has shown enormous reinforcement for resource deployment in brand communities and their relevance to creating value for both community members and the brand. The study has, however, focused on online brand communities, which makes the conversation on resource deployment in offline brand communities marginalised within the literature. Again, the study makes up for brand-initiated brand communities, and as such, it is unclear whether consumer-initiated brand communities deploy resources in the same manner for value creation. Future research attention is needed to address these identified shortcomings.

### 3.4 Geography of Data

This section gives insights into the geographical locations from which data were gathered in the discipline. This gives a good amount of explanation of cultural and behavioural traits as well as the context from which data is gathered. The gaps are also discussed.

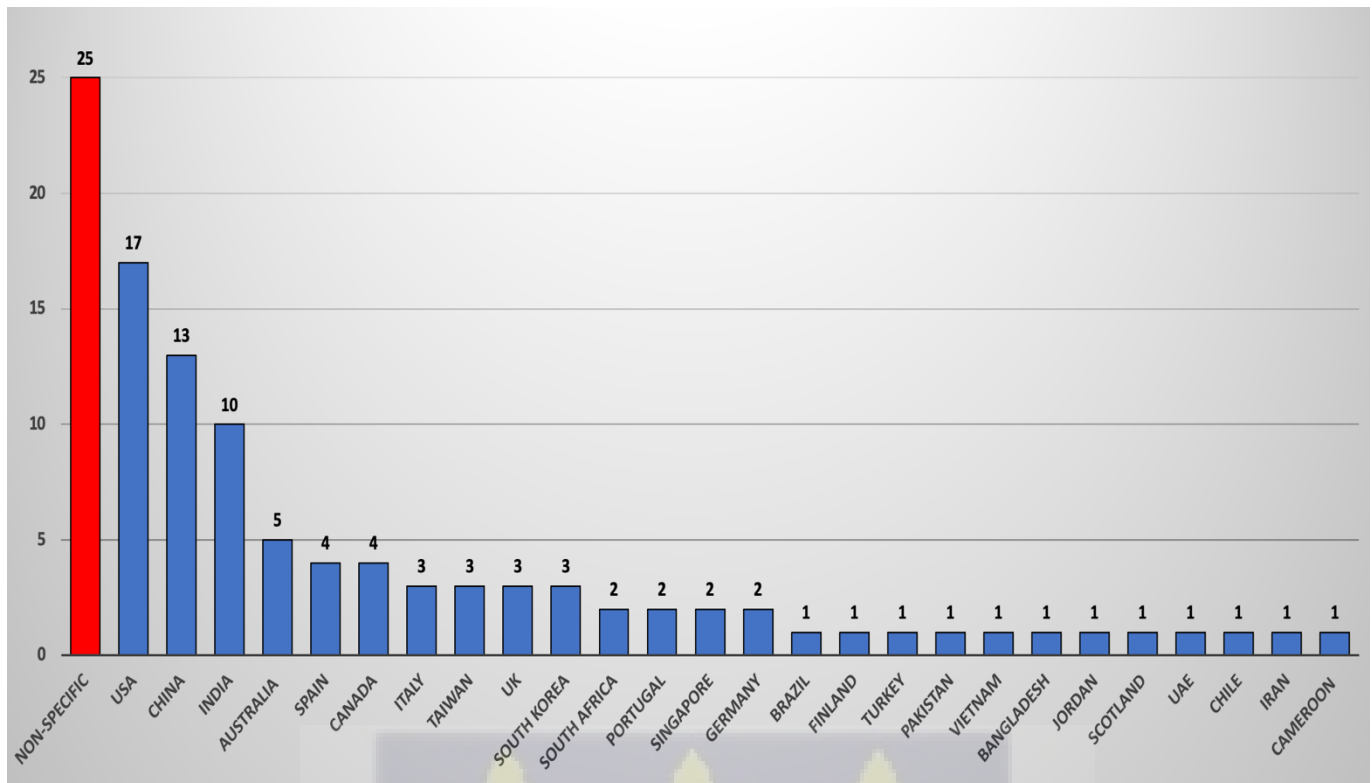
**Figure 2.0** below presents a pictorial overview of the dominant geographical locations from which data are gathered in the discipline. As indicated in the figure, a whopping 25 of the 101 articles under review, representing 24.8%, were not specific about the locations from which evidence was gathered, *see Appendix 1.0* For example, Dessart and Veloutsou (2021) gathered data by administering an online survey to users of Facebook brand communities. These respondents used Facebook brand communities belonging to a wide range of products and industries. According to the authors, they “sought to have a good balance between global pages (using a listing of the biggest and most performing Facebook pages from Social Bakers and Facebook’s statistics), as well as local brands” (Dessart & Veloutsou, 2021, p. 372). So clearly, studies like this did not specifically gather data from a single or known geographical location. This makes it quite difficult for the cultural and behavioural traits that undergird their findings to be known and discussed in the literature.

It is also clear from the figure below that the dominant geographical locations from which data have been gathered and interpreted in the discipline are the United States of America and China. In terms of regional breakdown, it can be gleaned from the figure that Asians are more interested in research on brand communities than any other region. They carry about 36 out of the 85 geographical locations from which data have been gathered per the review, representing 42.4%. This phenomenon is highly attributable to the dawn of heavily liberalised markets that

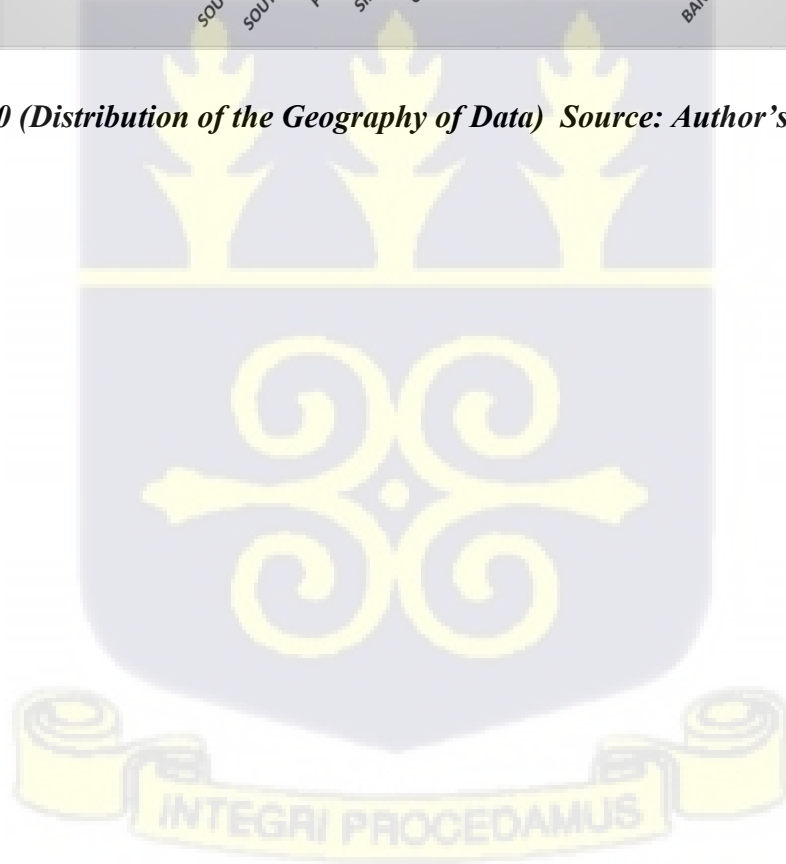
the Asian economies have been experiencing in the recent past (Tan & Lui, 2002). This meant the growth of academic research, especially in the field of marketing, to feed these mass markets.

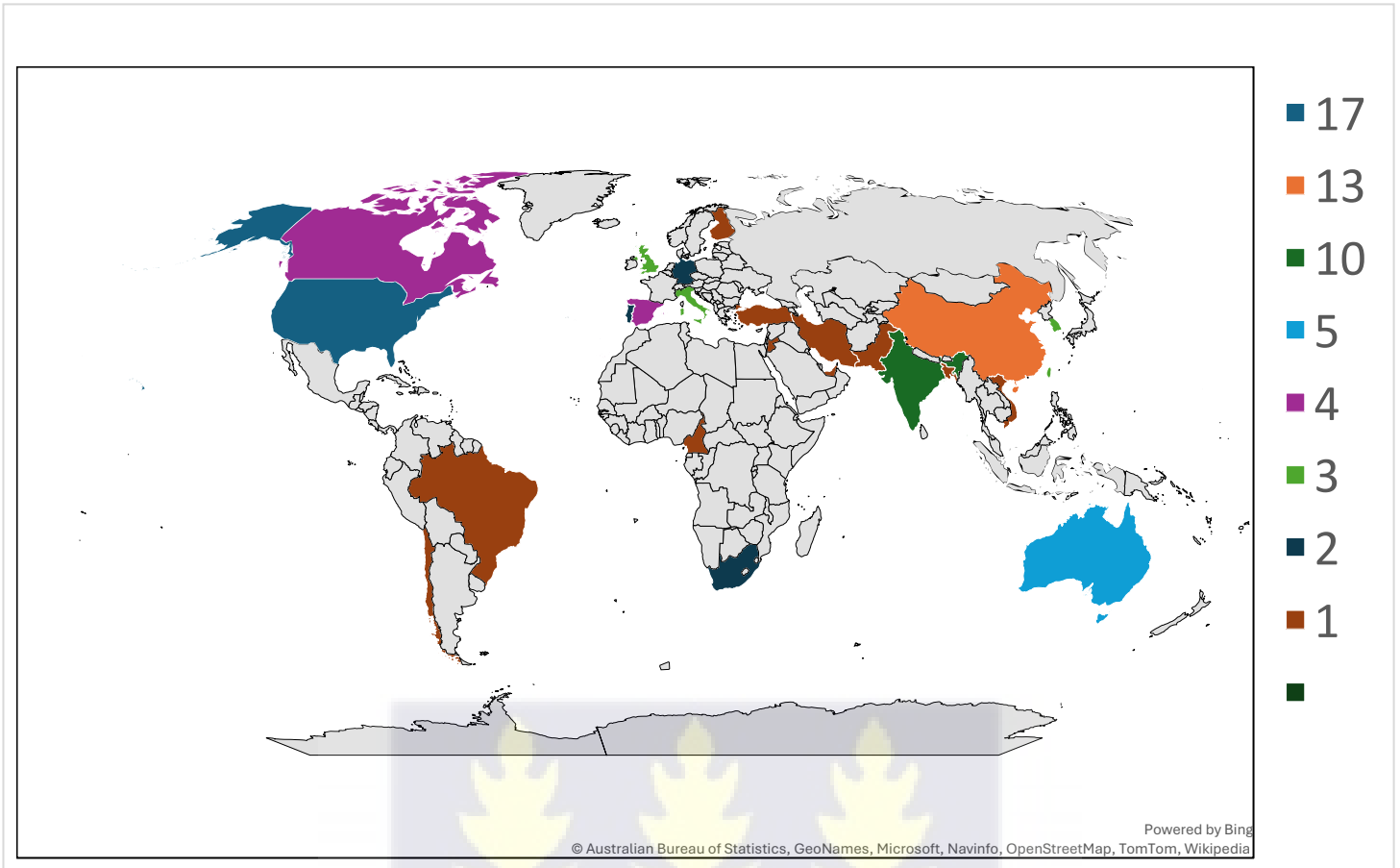
Africa, on the other hand, is the region with the least share of the geographical distribution. To be more specific, Cameroon and South Africa are the only two African countries to be featured in all the studies under review. For the 85 times that the geography of the data has been explicitly mentioned in the studies under review, Cameroon and South Africa put together constitute only three mentions, representing 3.5%. This may be attributable to the high economic uncertainty and inadequate resources available to boost the development of the theory and practice of the marketing discipline in emerging markets (Kumar & Srivastava, 2019). These findings are consistent with that of Bhattacharjee et al. (2021), who discovered a similar trend in scanty studies on Africa. They argued that brand communities are products of social collectivism, and as such, researchers must concentrate some more efforts on studying brand communities in emerging markets like Africa, where social collectivism strives. This is one of the voids in the literature this very study seeks to fill by researching brand communities in an emerging economy context like Ghana. To give a clearer overview of the geographical distribution, Figure 3.0 below is created to show the share across the world map.





*Figure 2.0 (Distribution of the Geography of Data) Source: Author's Creation*





*Figure 3.0 (Geographical Distribution on World Map) Source: Author's Creation*

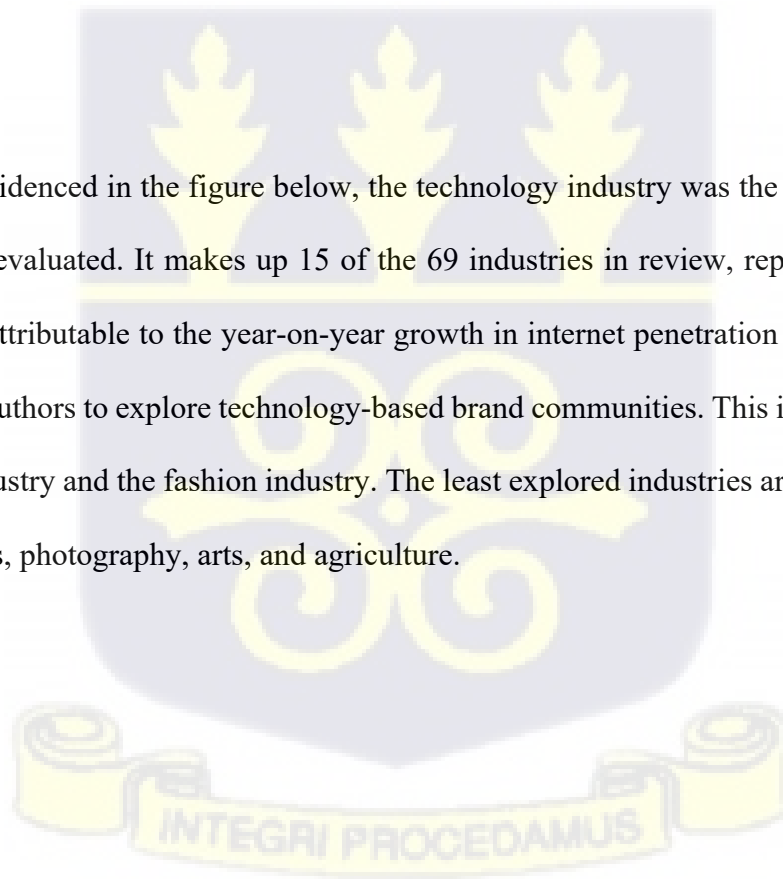
### 3.5 Dominant Industries Explored

One of the very important issues to discuss in such an extensive review of the literature is the industries within which studies on brand community have been conducted. This will help establish gaps in knowledge by disentangling the industries that have received less attention from those that have been most explored.

**Figure 4.0** below shows the distribution of industries that were of key focus for the studies under review. There was a total of 69 industries from which data were gathered for all the 101 articles under review. As evident in the figure, about 45 of the 101 articles under evaluation did not either gather data from one specific industry or did not mention the specific industries

from which data was gathered, *see Appendix 2.0*. This constitutes about 44.6% of the articles evaluated. A typical example is Carvalho and Fernandes (2018), who gathered data using a questionnaire design that they administered through emails. In that questionnaire, the authors asked respondents to name their favourite brands they felt strongly engaged with and followed, and that became the basis on which other questions were answered. This question implied that different individuals would state different industries from which their favourite brands operated, thereby rendering the study industry non-specific. Similarly, Ferreira and Zambaldi (2019) surveyed respondents who follow the social media pages of brands across multiple industries by relying on the Vidi Shoppers database, which is an online consumer database in Brazil. This also implied that data is not collected from any specific industry.

However, as evidenced in the figure below, the technology industry was the most explored in all the articles evaluated. It makes up 15 of the 69 industries in review, representing 21.7%. This could be attributable to the year-on-year growth in internet penetration across the globe, causing many authors to explore technology-based brand communities. This is followed by the automobile industry and the fashion industry. The least explored industries are microblogging, hospitality, toys, photography, arts, and agriculture.



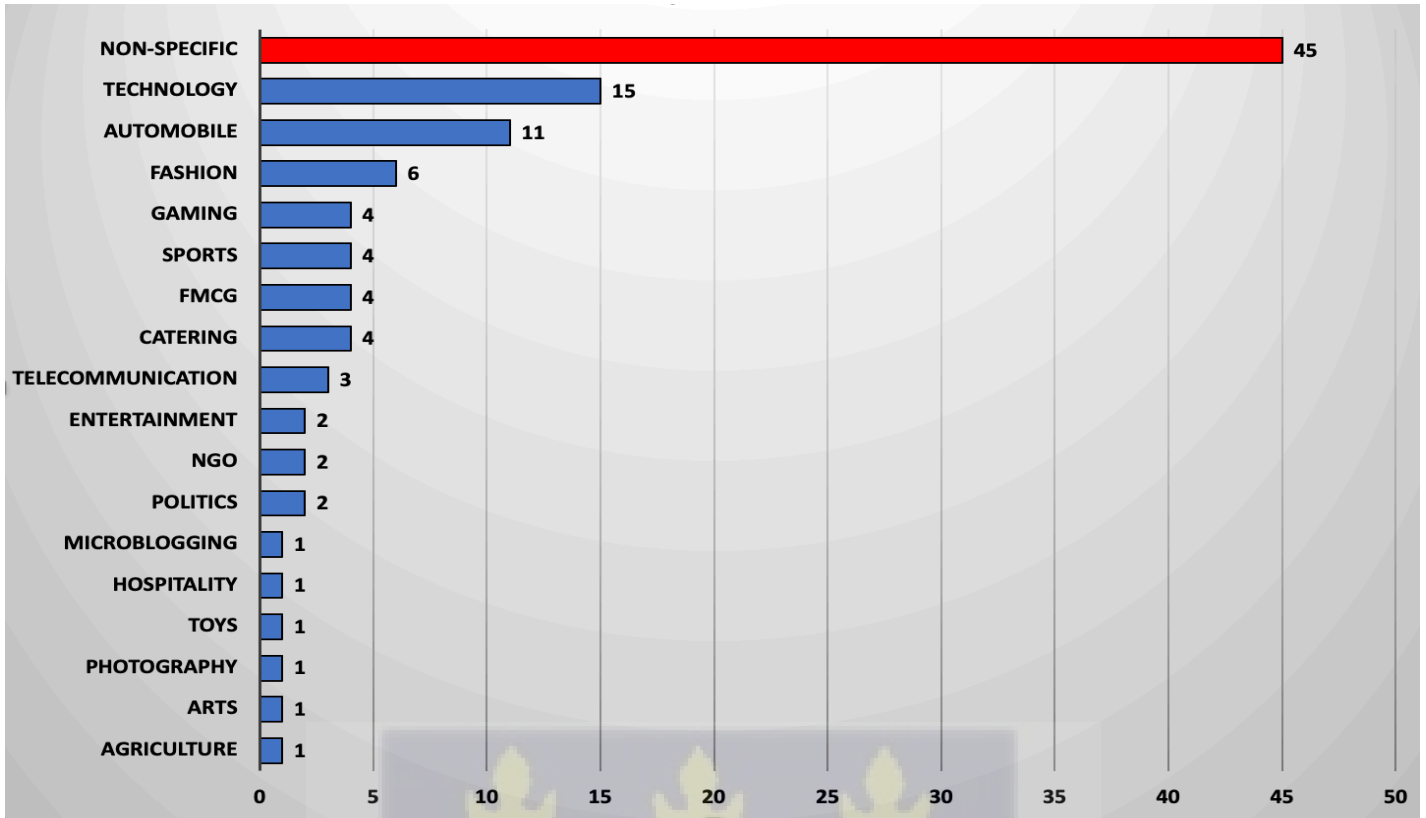
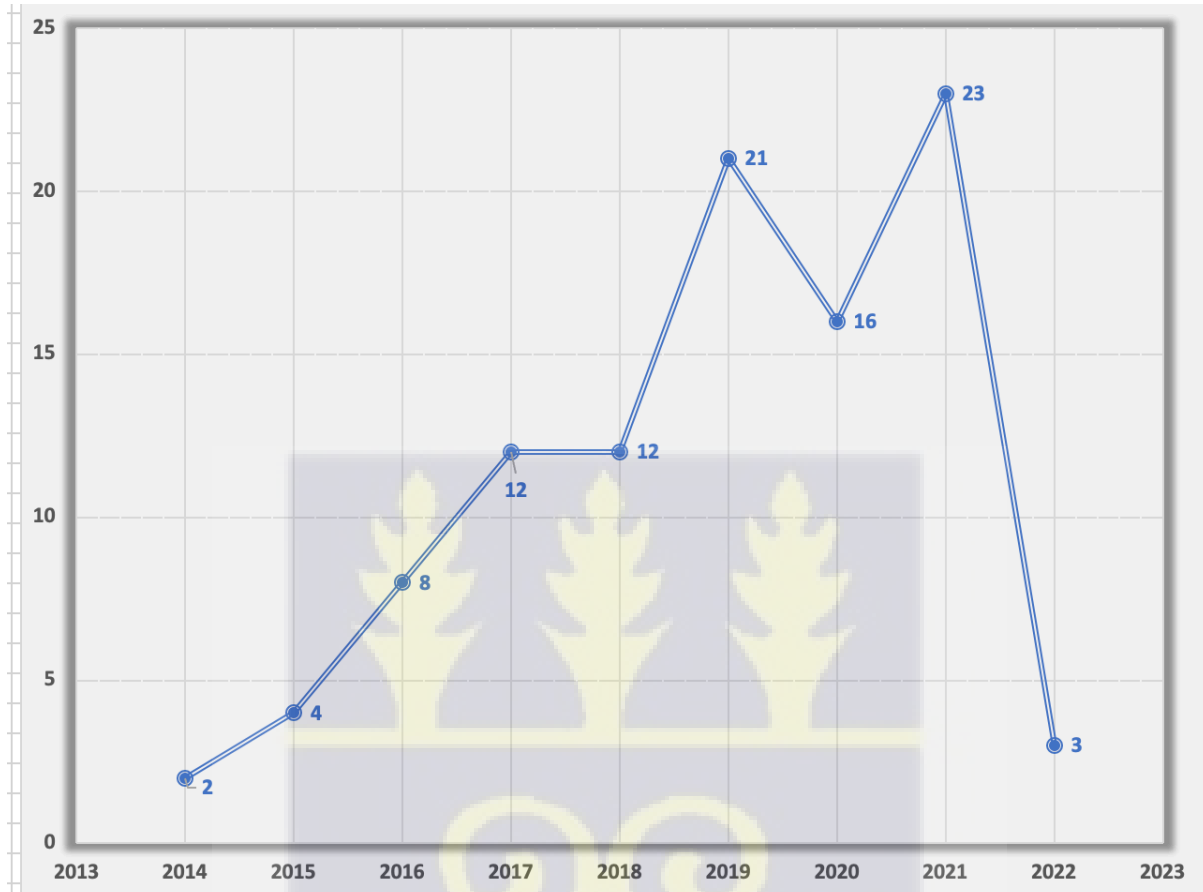


Figure 4.0 (Industry Distribution) Source: Author's Creation

### 3.6 Publication Distribution per Year

Another important conversation in the review is the growth of publications in the brand community discipline over the years. **Figure 5.0** below gives an illustrative overview of how publications in the field for the years under review continue to increase. From the figure below, it can be deduced that research on the subject matter has seen exponential growth. As the years passed, more scholars became interested in researching brand communities. This could be attributable to the postulations of Coelho et al. (2019) and Laroche et al. (2012), who found that, currently, organisations are becoming more interested in deploying relationship marketing tools in their quest to create long-term and more successful relationships with their customers. On the demand side, the literature has demonstrated how consumers are increasingly becoming intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to form or join brand communities (Thomas, 2021).

Consequently, scholars, especially those in emerging markets, would become more interested in researching the subject matter to help shape both academic and industrial activities.



*Figure 5.0 (Publication Distribution per Year) Source: Author's Creation*

### 3.7 Distribution of Data Site Across Years

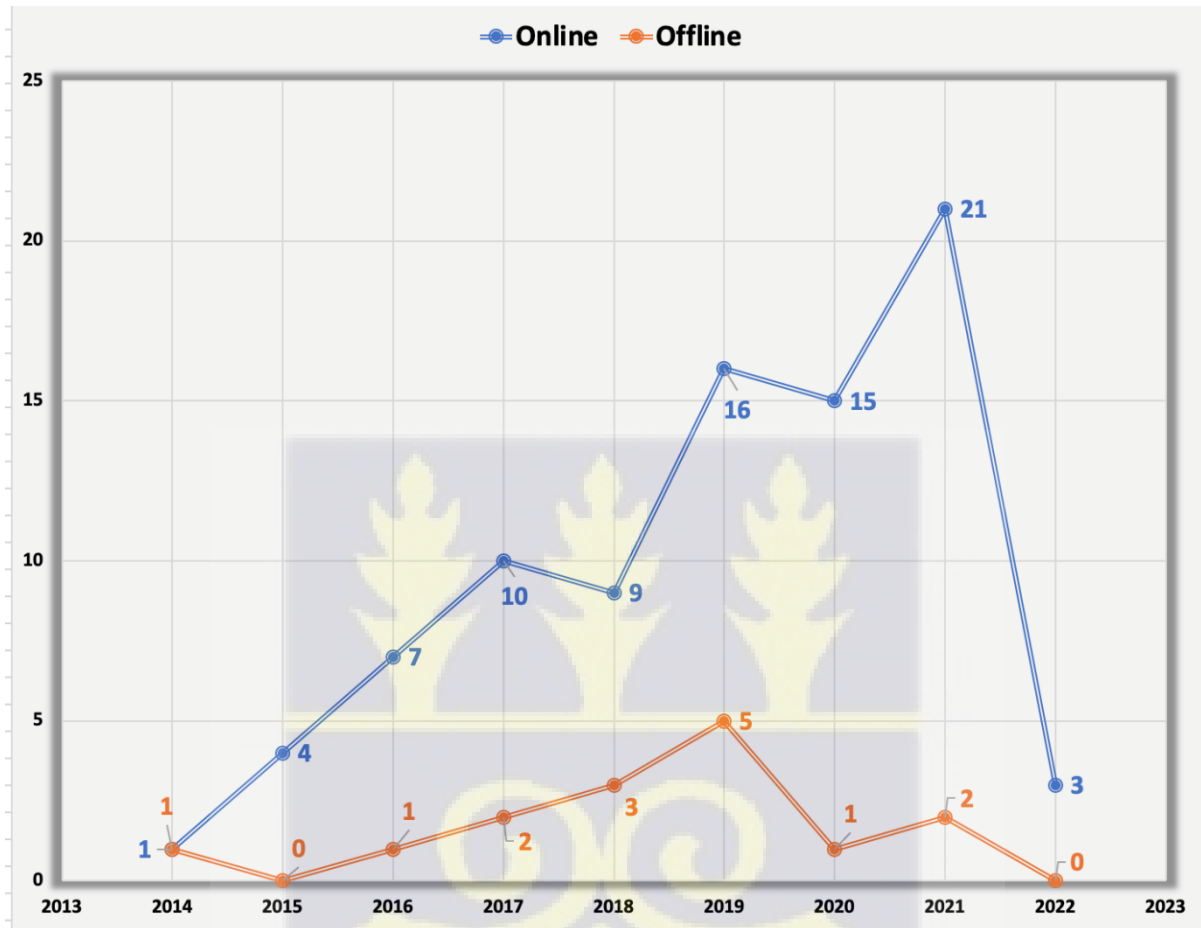
Another classification worth noting in this review of the extant literature is the data site. For the purposes of this study, the data site is explained to be the platform (online or offline) on which data was gathered. Throughout the review, the researcher noticed that many of the scholars under review were particular about their data site as they argued that the choice of data site was consequential to the outcomes of their various studies (Carlson et al., 2019a; Li et al., 2019; Kumar & Kumar, 2020; Wong & Lee, 2022). As shown in **Figure 6.0** below, the majority

of the studies under review focused on online brand communities and not offline brand communities. Of the 101 studies under review, they make up 80, representing 79.2%. This can be attributable to the growth in technology and the rise in global internet penetration. This position is corroborated by Ramaswamy and Ozcan (2016) as they posit that many firms have incorporated digital tools as a part of their customer engagement and participation strategies because these digital tools have demonstrated enormous implications for brand value co-creation, and Carlson et al. (2019b) also argue that organisations globally are investing a huge amount of resources into brand social media platforms to enhance their engagements and interactions with the customer.

However, this phenomenon creates a huge gap in the literature as not much may be known about brand communities whose activities are largely offline. In the quest to get further insights into the phenomenon from an emerging socio-economic context and for the purposes of triangulation (Creswell, 2013), this study has collected data from 2 different data sites.

In addition to the discussions on the choice of data site in the review, the researcher also sought to give an illustration of the data site distribution and how they play out in the years under review. In Figure 3.6 below, a pictorial illustration was generated using a line graph to give a snapshot of how the data site has been distributed over the years. The distribution in the figure below corroborates the researcher's earlier postulations that the exponential growth in internet penetration globally could account for the growing interest in internet or online-based brand communities. As evidenced in the figure below, the online literature continued to grow in ascending order as the years went by, and the year 2021 saw the highest leap. As of the year 2021, more and more people have become used to online transactions and activities because of the resultant effects of the Covid-19 pandemic and as such, researchers were highly likely to

be interested in brand-to-the-customer as well as customer-to-customer relationships online. As observed, the reverse was happening with the offline data, which showed a normal distribution.



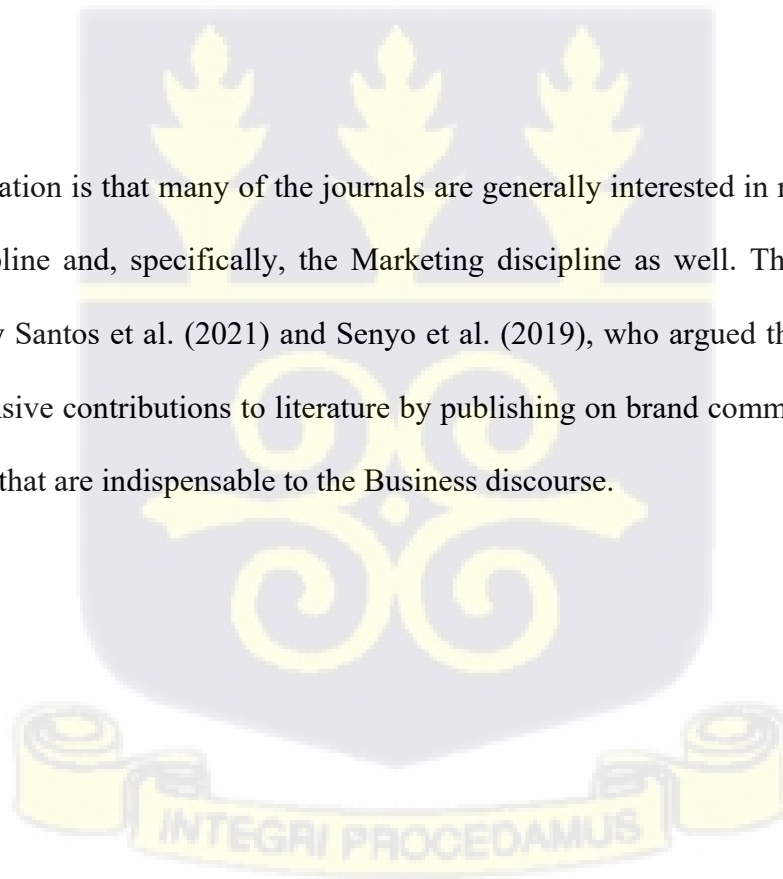
*Figure 6.0 (Data Site Distribution Across Years) Source: Author's Creation*

### 3.8 Dominant Journals Publishing in the Discipline

Again, the researcher deems discussions on the dominant journals publishing in the discipline crucial for this review because aside from making major contributions to the marketing literature, they offer higher levels of credence to the discipline and why research in the area, and most importantly, from an emerging market is worth pursuing.

The 101 articles under review had publications from a total of 56 different journals. From **Figure 7.0** below, it can be deduced that the journal with the highest number of publications on brand communities for the articles under review is the Journal of Business Research. It accounts for the publication of 9 out of the 101 articles under review, representing 0.99%. The journal also saw its highest number of publications in the subject area in 2019. There were 3 different publications in 2019 but saw a sudden drop in the number of publications in 2020, 2021, and 2022. It is also worth noting that 25 out of the 56 journals account for 70 out of the 101 articles, representing 69.3%. This implies that journals are dedicating a lot of publication spaces for studies on brand communities, and for that matter, research in the area is worth pursuing.

Another observation is that many of the journals are generally interested in research from the Business discipline and, specifically, the Marketing discipline as well. This observation is corroborated by Santos et al. (2021) and Senyo et al. (2019), who argued that these journals had made extensive contributions to literature by publishing on brand communities and other key disciplines that are indispensable to the Business discourse.



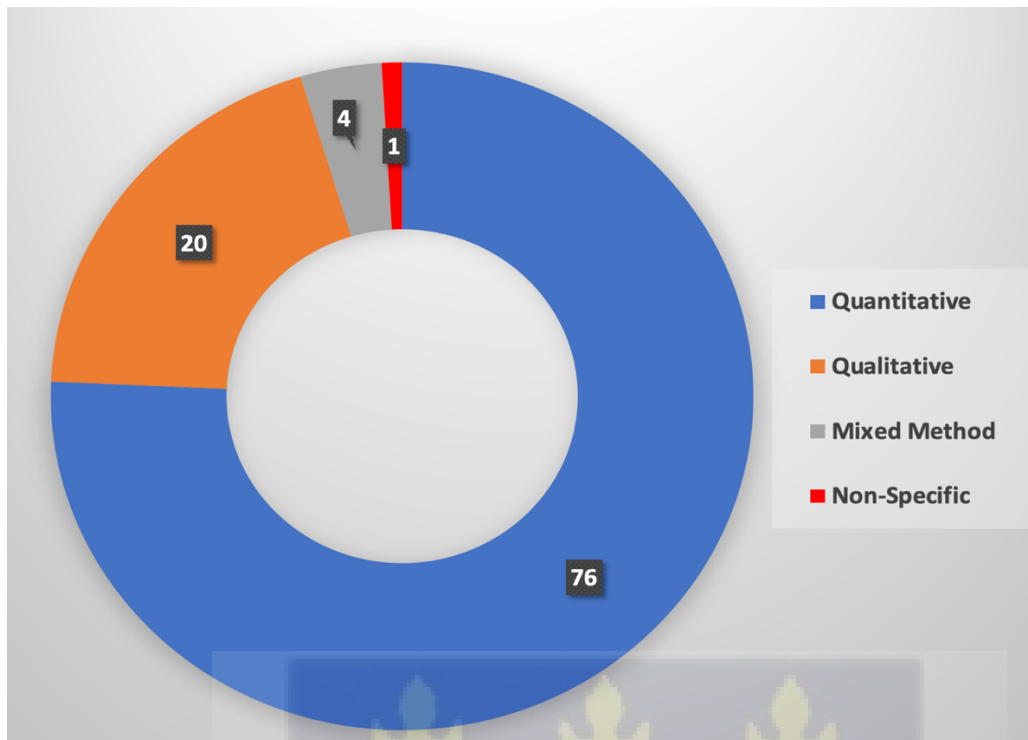
Ser.	Journals	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total
1	Journal of Business Research				*	**	***	*	*	*	9
2	European Journal of Marketing					*	**	**	**		7
3	Journal of Product & Brand Management						***	**			5
4	Computers in Human Behavior			*	*				*		3
5	International Journal of Information Management					*			**		3
6	Journal of Consumer Marketing						**		*		3
7	Journal of Marketing Management			*	*				*		3
8	Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing				*			*	*		3
9	Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics						*	*			2
10	Electronic Commerce Research and Applications				*		*				2
11	Information & Management		*							*	2
12	International Journal of Research in Marketing	*		*							2
13	Internet Research			**							2
14	Journal of Internet Commerce			*					*		2
15	Journal of Marketing Communications								**		2
16	Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice					**					2
17	Journal of Promotion Management		*		*						2
18	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services							*		*	2
19	Marketing Intelligence & Planning						*		*		2
20	Online Information Review					*	*				2
21	Procedia Computer Science								**		2
22	Psychology & Marketing				*				*		2
23	Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal		*					*			2
24	Spanish Journal of Marketing					**					2
25	Telematics and Informatics							*	*		2
26	Arts Marketing: An International Journal	*									1
27	Behaviour & Information Technology								*		1
28	Business Process Management Journal							*			1
29	European Business Review						*				1
30	Industrial Management & Data Systems								*		1
31	International Journal of Sports Marketing and Sponsorship						*				1
32	International Journal on Media Management						*				1
33	International Marketing Review					*					1
34	Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing					*					1
35	Journal of Consumer Behaviour								*		1
36	Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management: An International Journal							*			1
37	Journal of Global Marketing				*						1
38	Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science							*			1
39	Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights								*		1
40	Journal of Interactive Advertising			*							1
41	Journal of Marketing Research				*						1
42	Journal of Modelling in Management							*			1
43	Journal of Political Marketing						*				1
44	Journal of Relationship Marketing					*					1
45	Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services						*				1
46	Journal of Service Theory and Practice				*						1
47	Journal of Services Marketing								*		1
48	Kybernetes						*				1
49	Management Decision							*			1
50	Marketing Science		*								1
51	Marketing ZFP				*						1
52	PSU Research Review							*			1
53	Sport, Business and Management: An International Journal			*							1
54	Sustainability								*		1
55	Technological Forecasting and Social Change						*				1
56	The Service Industries Journal				*						1
	Grand Total	2	4	8	12	12	21	16	23	3	101

Figure 7.0 (Distribution of Dominant Journals per Year) Source: Author's Creation

### 3.9 Methodological Distribution

There cannot be any meaningful and conclusive academic discussion without the mention of methodology. It forms a core component of research as it presents the processes through which data is gathered and analysed (Creswell and Creswell, 2018). As argued by Punch (2014), research methodologies are best applied when the researcher has a good understanding of the worldview that underpins the research. It is in this light that an extensive discussion on the dominant methodologies that undergird the studies in the review is held. This will help understand the dominant worldviews that underpin research in the discipline to tease out the gaps that exist.

**Figure 8.0** below demonstrates the frequency distribution of the methodologies that undergird the articles under review, and it is worth noting that quantitative methodology is the dominant methodology for a subject area that is supposed to be hinged on social collectivism and cultural relationships (Bhattacharjee et al., 2021). The quantitative-based studies account for 76 of the 101 articles under review, representing about 75.2% of the total number of articles under review. The qualitative studies account for 20 of the 101 articles, representing 19.8%, and mixed methods account for four out of the 101 studies, representing about 4%. This leaves a clear methodological gap in the extant literature on brand communities, as employing more qualitative studies would have consequently led to different research outcomes. This study, therefore, fills the void by undertaking a purely qualitative study to unravel the motivations, rituals, and benefits of brand community membership in an emerging economy like Ghana. This is because the qualitative methodology is posited to be theoretical and interpretive and was best suited for studying cultural and relational phenomena such as members' participation in brand communities (Brennen, 2022; Creswell, 2013).



*Figure 8.0 (Distribution of Dominant Methodologies) Source: Author's Creation*

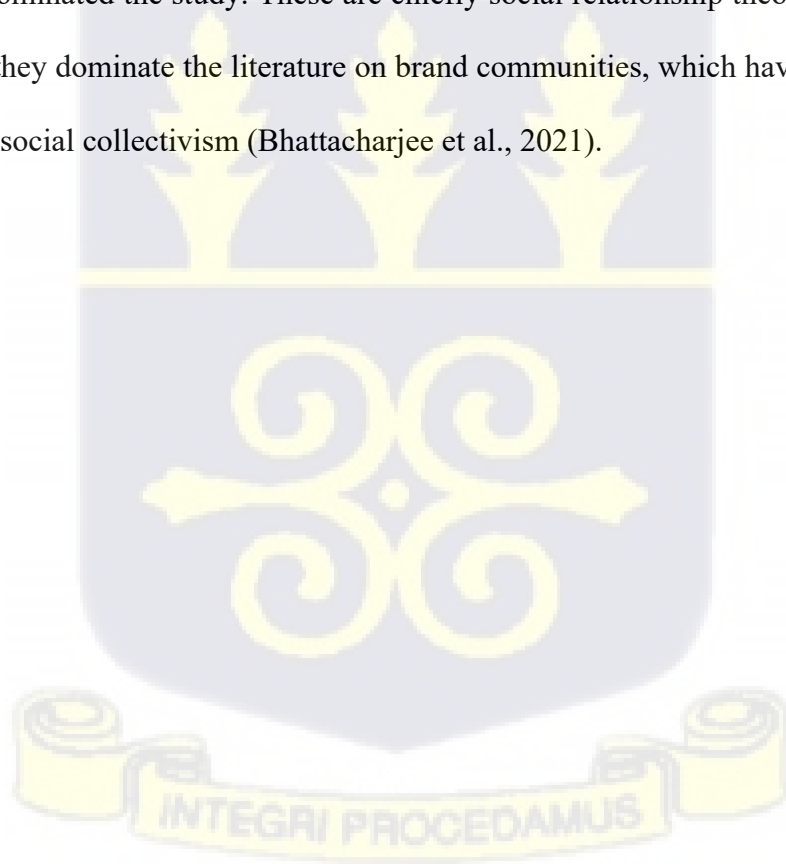
### 3.10 Underpinning Theories

Generally, scientific studies are underpinned by some theoretical constructs. This helps in drawing research findings and analysis within certain theoretical frameworks and goes a long way to help us appreciate these theories some more. It also helps the researcher to confirm the existence of a theory in a phenomenon, challenge the existence of the said theory or even show some extensions or variations that may exist in the theory. Therefore, it is important to discuss the major theories that have braced brand community research within the past 10 years.

From **Figure 9.0** below, 25 out of the 101 articles evaluated were either not specific about the theories that underpinned the studies or did not use any theories at all. However, the most used theory in the brand community literature over the past 10 years is the Social Identity Theory.

It has been employed in 13 of the 101 articles under review, representing 12.9%. This is corroborated by Wong (2021), who argued that the Social Identity Theory is fundamental to research on brand communities, and it describes how individual community members develop identities that stretch beyond their identities to that of a group-level identity and, as such, are influenced basically by group behaviour (Tajfel, 1974).

Other dominant theories are the Uses and Gratification Theory, which is predominantly found in articles with an online focus, *see Appendix 3.0*. Other theories, such as social capital, social exchange, psychological ownership, congruity, sense of community, social movement, and trust transfer, dominated the study. These are chiefly social relationship theories, and it is not surprising that they dominate the literature on brand communities, which have been argued to be a product of social collectivism (Bhattacharjee et al., 2021).



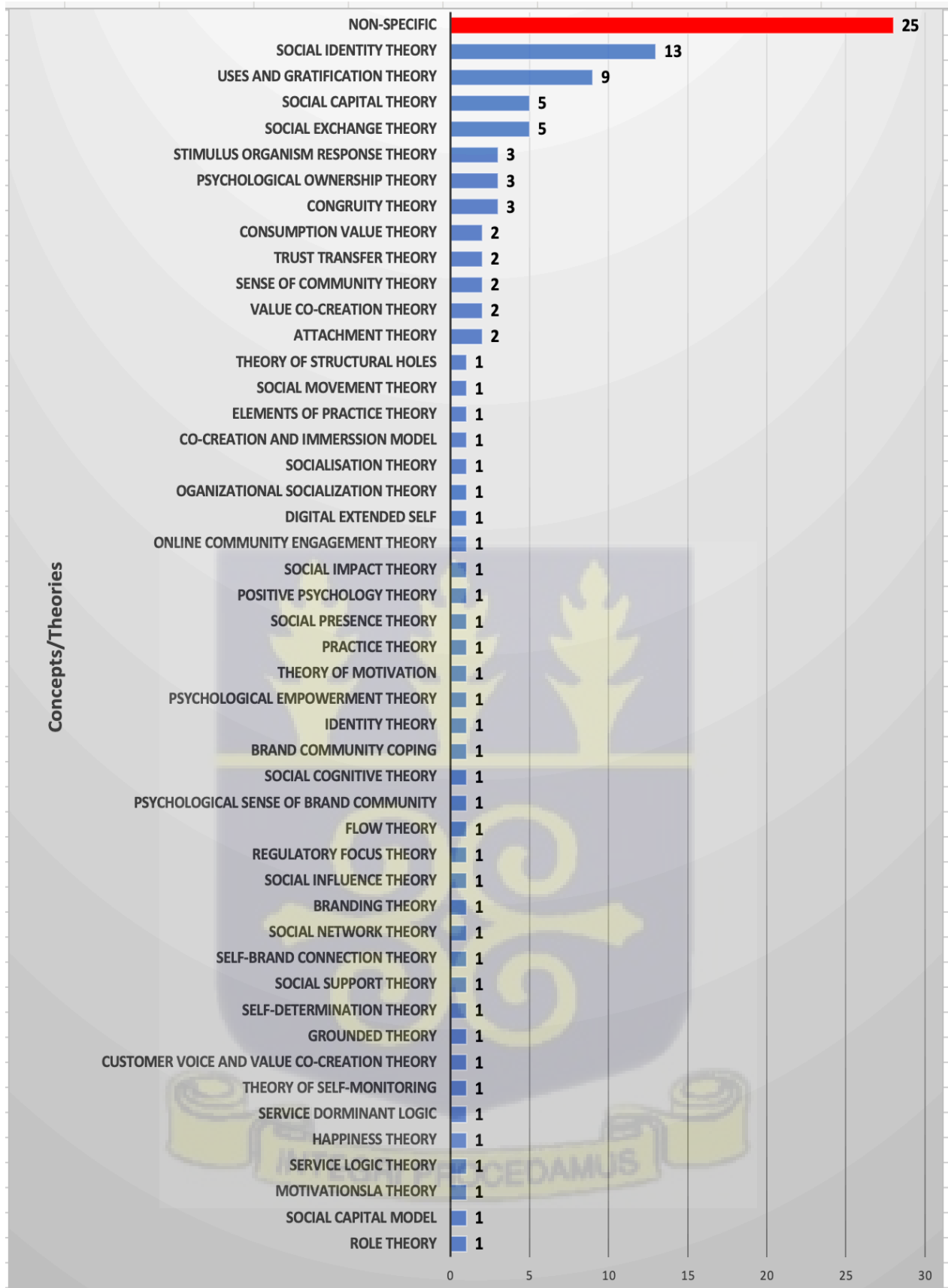


Figure 9.0 (Major Theories) Source: Author's Creation

### **3.11 Review Limitations**

There are significant limitations to this literature review that must be acknowledged. Despite attempting to evaluate brand community research from 2013 to 2023, there is no conclusive certainty that the 101 articles represent the full range of relevant research publications in the field within the period under review. There is a good chance that the list of keywords used for the search may exclude studies that were primarily focused on brand community but did not self-identify as such. Again, even though the databases used are sufficient in identifying very useful peer-reviewed articles, there is also a great chance that a good amount of evidence-rich journal articles were omitted since they did not make it to the databases under review (Emerald, J store, Science Direct, Scopus, Taylor and Francis, and Wiley) but may have made it to other databases. Similarly, grey literature that might possess quality evidence was likely to be ignored because they do not meet the criteria of academic journals. Given that the research only looked at articles published between 2013 and 2023, it is possible that some recent studies are still being reviewed or have been accepted but not yet published in their respective journals. Despite these shortcomings, the literature review makes important contributions by deepening the understanding of existing literature and teasing out gaps that are important for this study.

### **3.12 Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this systematic review was to explore the literature on brand communities by examining the prevailing themes, concerns, and evidence, as well as the conceptual and methodological approaches, and then tease out gaps within the literature to form grounds for building this thesis. The systematic review approach was adopted because it helped in appraising and synthesising existing literature in a manner that is organised, transparent and reproducible and has the propensity of reducing the researcher's biases (Lame, 2019).

The review reveals that there is a growing interest within the marketing literature on brand community research and this has evolved over the years, specifically in its enormous online capacity, as various empirical publications have expanded understanding of the subject through a synthesis of relevant research. The review has shown the dominant geographical locations from where the studies were undertaken, the dominant industries explored, the publication distribution per year, the dominant paper types explored (empirical or conceptual), the dominant sites from which data was collected (online or offline), the prevailing methodological and theoretical considerations, and finally but not least, the major research themes and focus of the studies under evaluation.

The review has demonstrated the scarcity of adequate geographical representation, especially within the African context, except for Cova et al. (2021), which was carried out in Cameroon, Wiese and Akareem (2019) which was a cross-border study between Australia and South Africa, and van Heerden and Wiese (2021) which was also carried out in South Africa. This makes it more urgent and justifiable to undertake research on brand communities in an emerging economy like Ghana to help populate and deepen context-specific understanding of the phenomenon from Africa's perspective. There is also evidence in the review suggesting that research attention from the qualitative and mixed methods approaches is limited, and this necessitates new scholarly attention. Thematically, the review has revealed that issues on the motivation of brand community members in joining the communities, their ritualistic practices, their coping strategies, the benefits the brands derive from the activities of the communities, and the congruity between the brand identity and the brand community identity are scant in the extant literature and as such call for research. The next chapter presents a thorough analysis of the theories that underpin this thesis and their justifications.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 4.0 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter has extensively reviewed the literature on brand communities and teased out gaps that exist in the stream of studies on the phenomenon. The chapter was underpinned by the systematic literature review approach. It compels the researcher to disclose their literature search criteria and the decisions to include and exclude studies in the review process. This way, the researcher's biases are drastically reduced because they synthesise, analyse, and review the literature in a rigorous, transparent, organised, and reproducible manner to guarantee validity and reliability (Lame, 2019). Beyond the findings in the previous chapter, there is a need to discuss in detail the theories underpinning this study, which can help provide an explanatory lens to the phenomenon under study (Collins & Stockton, 2018).

Therefore, this chapter discusses the theories that have undergirded this present research. From a multiple-theory perspective, the chapter also focuses on the relevance of these theories to the present study and the various facets of the discussions. Theoretical frameworks are important because they help draw research findings and analysis within specific frames and go a long way to help us appreciate these theories some more (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). They also help the researcher to confirm, challenge, extend, or vary a theory in the research setting (Collins & Stockton, 2018). To properly situate the discussion, the question of what theoretical framework is and in what circumstances they are used arises. According to Anfara and Mertz (2015, p. 23), a “theoretical framework is any empirical or quasi-empirical theory of social and psychological processes at a variety of levels (e.g., grand, midrange, explanatory) that can be applied to the understanding of phenomena”. This means that scientific

studies of this nature, especially those underpinned by the social constructionist paradigm, are meaningless without a theoretical framework because a clear understanding of the phenomena being studied will be significantly impaired.

Theoretically, the literature review in the previous chapter has revealed that theories such as the theory of motivation and the consumer culture theory, even though they are very important theories in exploring and understanding the formative frameworks of brand communities, have been given minimal attention within the literature. Furthermore, social exchange theory is among the most utilised theories in the literature on brand community. However, it exudes critical arguments that are analytically relevant to this study. Again, studies that have employed multiple theories in explaining the phenomena are non-existent per the scope of the literature review in this study (see chapter three). Using multiple theories in research strengthens the discussions because they provide synergy and complement each other (Cairney, 2013). As such, and also based on the research questions and objectives of this present study, the Theory of motivation, the consumer culture theory, and the social exchange theory were deployed as the theoretical frames with which the phenomenon under study was discussed.

#### **4.1 The Theory of Motivation**

To explain the theory of motivation in detail, it is first of all important to unpack the meaning of the concept of motivation. According to Avery et al. (2013), motivation can be explained as the drive which pushes humans to achieve a certain desired outcome or goal. What this means is that there are human needs that ought to be satisfied, and these needs trigger the motivation process. In other words, there is no motivation without a need. What is more, Solomon (2018) and Avery et al. (2013) have argued that need can be explained as the gap that exists between

one's current or actual state and one's desired state. This gap accounts for some discomfort or anxiety, which triggers motivation. According to Turner (1987), the level of anxiety determines the level of motivation. This means that the higher the anxiety, the higher the motivation and vice versa. Even though there are clear indications of forces that push individuals to behave or act on issues, Turner (1987, p. 15) has argued that "how to conceptualise these processes remains a controversial area in psychology, social psychology, and sociology". As such, many discussions on motivation utilise what seems to be the most simplistic and widely used framework of needs – Maslow's (1943) proposed hierarchy of human needs. These are basic needs – physiological and safety needs; psychological needs – love and belongingness as well as esteem; and finally, the self-fulfilment needs – self-actualisation needs.

Furthermore, several variations of the theory of motivation are used in the literature. For example, Whishaw and Kornelsen (1993) discussed the incentive motivation theory. They argued that consumers are motivated to build a relationship with a business because they expect some economic advantages and benefits from the business. These economic advantages may be in the form of special price offers or discounts. The study by Chan (2017) also provides another variation of the theory. The study categorised consumer motivations into two major folds – intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The study postulates that intrinsic motivations are those that give the consumer inherent satisfaction, whereas extrinsic motivations are based on external or material rewards.

Turner (1987) also offered a seemingly holistic variation of the motivation theory and named it the sociological theory of motivation. This variation offers insight into the motives behind human interaction. The scholar argued that key motivational drivers such as group inclusion

needs, trust needs, ontological security needs, symbolic/material gratification needs, avoidance of anxiety needs, confirmation of self needs, and sense of facticity needs form the fundamental motives for human interactions. However, all of the variables discussed in Turner's (1987) postulation can be traced to Maslow's (1943) proposed human needs, as discussed above. Even though this study is not aiming at resolving the seeming differences that exist in the variations of the theory of motivation, it is important to mention them because they provide a lens to wholistically explicate the phenomenon of consumer motivations to join and participate in the activities of brand communities.

#### ***4.1.1 Relevance of the Theory of Motivation to this Study***

Maslow's (1943) theory of human motivation provides a valuable framework for understanding consumer motivations to join brand communities by addressing the hierarchical needs that drive human behaviour. Consumers often seek to fulfil specific needs—such as belongingness, esteem, and self-actualization—through their interactions with brand communities. The core assumption of the theory of motivation, especially in the consumer behaviour literature, is that consumers are moved by certain needs to act or make a decision. Since this study examines the motives that drive brand community members to join and participate in the activities of the communities, the theory provides an important lens through which the findings are discussed and put into practical perspectives.

#### **4.2 The Consumer Culture Theory**

Arnould and Thompson (2005) conceived the consumer culture theory. This theory draws on the relationships that exist between consumption and marketplace cultures. The study was

hinged on a quest to provide a theoretical frame for analysing the “sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption” (p. 868). This was a departure from some of the early marketing scholarship that postulated that consumers were only logical and rational in their consumption choices (Brown, 1996).

The theory holds that consumers are not merely purchasing and consuming products in the marketplaces but also reworking and negotiating their cultural or social identities in the marketplace. This means that consumers are highly likely to engage in brand activities if they offer them the opportunity to validate their social identities, especially through the brand’s display of cultural elements. For example, in the case of brand communities, the theory can explain how consumers negotiate the cultural meanings encoded in either the marketplace itself or the brand and how this helps them showcase their identities and lifestyles (Holt, 2002).

#### ***4.2.1 Relevance of the Consumer Culture Theory to this Study***

The theory of consumer culture explains how the marketplace provides consumers with many resources that help them either construct new individual and group identities or negotiate existing ones (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This can be tied to the rituals and traditions displayed in the marketplace beyond buying and consuming. It can also be connected to consumers' sense of belonging to a unique social group with members exhibiting and validating similar cultural elements. Since this work sought to explore and examine the rituals and traditions performed in brand communities, this theory becomes suitable in providing a framework through which the discussions and analysis are held.

### 4.3 Social Exchange Theory

The core argument presented under the social exchange theory is that people enter into relationships, nurture and maintain these relationships with the view that it shall be beneficial and rewarding to them (Blau, 1968; Homans, 1958). This means that those relationships are not accidental but rather contingent on the parties' perceived or real rewards emanating from them. As argued by Emerson (1976), parties that get into these types of mutually beneficial relationships are self-interested parties who believe that they cannot attain those rewards without the help of others.

Furthermore, another idea in the theory is that these self-interested parties who engage in these socially transactional relationships do so with the hopes of minimising their costs and maximising their benefits because they are rational beings. This also means that each self-interested party has something of value and is ready to exchange it for something valuable. In this case, both parties decide on what to give away and in what quantities they will be given away. These resources of value can be both economic and social. When they are economic, the expected outcomes from both parties are usually known and predetermined, but when they are on a social basis, they are normally unspecified (Miles, 2012). However, the difficulty of these relationships is that there are usually doubts over the parties' ability to reciprocate the rewards. As such, trust has become an important tenet of social exchange theories, and proponents argue that it has grown over time (Miles, 2012).

#### ***4.3.1 Relevance of the Social Exchange Theory to this Study***

The tenets of the social exchange theory have been espoused in four different folds – i) that the motive that underly social exchange relationships are economic or social motives, ii) that before the parties enter into these social exchange relationships, they perform a cost-and-benefit analysis to be certain that the benefits are worth the sacrifice, iii) that when the parties involved continue to reward each other over time, they build trust and cohesive bonds, iv) the dynamics and norms of the relationships continue to grow with parties meeting them effortlessly (Rudner, 1966). This can relate to the relationship that exists between the brand community and the represented brand. The theory can help explain the relationship motives that exist for the brand community members and the brands they represent and explore the rewards and benefits (social and economic) they get thereof.

#### **4.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter discussed the importance of theory to this present study and explored the various theories that undergirded this project. The core assumptions of the theories, as well as their relevance to the present study, were thoroughly discussed. Specifically, the theory of motivation, the consumer culture theory, and the social exchange theory were digested. Their core assumptions, constructs, and the philosophical lens they provided for this study have been discussed. The next chapter will focus on the methodological approaches adopted for this project. The philosophical paradigm, data collection techniques, and ethical considerations are treated in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### METHODOLOGY

#### 5.0 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter delved into the theoretical underpinnings of this present study. It explored the various theoretical frames that formed the basis of the discussions in this study. As indicated by previous scholars, theories have an important place in every scientific endeavour because they help provide meaningful explanations for human phenomena (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Theories play a central role in qualitative research, serving as a fundamental framework that sheds light on the research process and aids researchers in comprehending the social phenomena being examined (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). They also provide a conceptual framework for comprehending and analysing the data acquired through qualitative research. This approach provides researchers with a framework to examine and evaluate their findings and present a system for arranging and classifying the abundant and frequently disorganised qualitative data. This facilitates the identification of patterns, themes, and links within the data, ultimately resulting in more relevant and insightful conclusions. In the absence of a theoretical underpinning, qualitative research runs the risk of devolving into a mere process of gathering data without a cohesive analytical framework (Anfara & Mertz, 2015). Consequently, this poses difficulties in deriving meaningful and strong conclusions from the amassed information.

Beyond the theoretical underpinnings, there is a need to detail the empirical component of this present study. According to Mailhot et al. (2019), the inclusion of a well-defined empirical methodology in a scientific endeavour of this nature is crucial in guaranteeing the transparency, replicability, and validity of the study. The comprehensive reporting of the research

methodologies utilised in a study enables readers, reviewers, and other researchers to assess the study's structure and the suitability of the selected methodologies to the aims and objectives of the study. The establishment of transparency plays a crucial role in fostering trust among members of the scientific community and facilitating the progression of collective knowledge (Stockdale, 2022). As such, every scientific and controlled process should be characterised by a well-defined research methodology that is hinged on scientific philosophies and principles. Specifically, this chapter details the philosophical assumptions and paradigms that undergird this research, the methodological approach, the research design that creates a roadmap for the scientific inquiry, the data collection technique, sampling strategy, ethical considerations, data analytical techniques, and the trustworthiness of this study.

### **5.1 Research Philosophical Assumptions**

Scientific research is characterised by a diverse range of philosophical assumptions that form the foundation of how knowledge is pursued, developed, and comprehended (Mailhot et al., 2019). This means that researchers across varied disciplines have ontological stances concerning the fundamental nature of reality, epistemological viewpoints on the process of acquiring knowledge, methodological stances, and axiological stances pertaining to values and ethics (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In many fields of study, philosophical foundations are sometimes overlooked, yet they fundamentally influence the research process and play a crucial role in moulding the researcher's perspective and influencing their study inquiries, methodologies, and analyses (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

As such, the importance of these philosophical assumptions cannot be overemphasised as they exert a tremendous impact on the decisions made by researchers throughout their study

endeavour. Generally, there are four philosophical assumptions – Ontology, Epistemology, Methodology, and Axiology which will be discussed in detail in the subsequent paragraphs. However, briefly, ontological assumptions can be explained as determining an individual's perception of reality, either as an objective and tangible entity or as a socially produced and subjective concept (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Again, the researcher's epistemological orientations have a crucial role in shaping their inclination towards empirical observation. It influences their positivist approaches or their acceptance of the interpretive and context-dependent character of knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Axiological considerations play a crucial role in defining the ethical landscape of research, as they inform decisions regarding the pursuit of value-neutrality or the recognition of researchers' attitudes and prejudices (Maxwell, 2013). The ensuing paragraphs explore the complexities of the philosophical assumptions and clarify their significance as guiding principles for researchers. These assumptions do not only ensure the rigour and validity of their findings but also ensure their alignment with the overarching paradigms that influence the field of inquiry.

### ***5.1.1 Ontological Assumptions***

Ontological assumptions pertain to the nature of reality that is examined by researchers and clarify a researcher's philosophical position regarding the essence of social reality (Baškarada & Koronios, 2018). According to Hatch and Cunliffe (2013), there are usually two schools of thought in the scholarly literature that provide evidence for the disparities in research orientations, which revolve around ontological assumptions. These two schools of thought delve into the topic of whether ontology accurately depicts a continuing occurrence (objective reality) or if it reflects the researcher's subjective perception of what is ongoing (subjective reality). Again, Bryman (2006) makes the argument that objectivism is the understanding that

social realities exist in absolute terms and are independent of the researcher's own biases and perceptions, whereas subjectivism is the assumption that social realities are not absolute but are rather constructed based on the biases of the research actors and participants. As such, stating a researcher's ontological assumptions is important for creating an understanding of how they view the world and how their realities are shaped. Therefore, scholars may choose to embrace a realist standpoint, positing the existence of an independent reality that can be examined or adopt a constructivist perspective, positing that the perception of reality is shaped by social and individual constructs and lived experiences (Brennen, 2022).

### ***5.1.2 Epistemological Assumptions***

Epistemological assumptions constitute fundamental beliefs in research pertaining to the nature of knowledge and how it can be obtained or produced (Bryman, 2006). These assumptions serve as theoretical frameworks that shape researchers' perspectives and methodologies in comprehending and exploring phenomena. Easterby-Smith et al. (2012) argue that in research, it is common to encounter two prominent epistemological perspectives: positivism and interpretivism. Positivism, which has its foundations in the realm of natural sciences, postulates the existence of an objective reality that is independent of human perception and can be examined through the means of empirical observation and measurement (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Positivists espouse the adoption of systematic, objective, and value-neutral epistemologies in order to produce knowledge, placing particular emphasis on the utilisation of quantitative data and experimental approaches to establish causal relations and principles that can be applied universally or generalised (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). On the other hand, interpretivism adopts a perspective that is more subjective and contingent upon the context when it comes to understanding knowledge. The epistemological principles of interpretivism

argue that individuals and social groupings actively generate their realities and meanings by engaging with their experiences and interpreting them. Scholars adhering to this philosophical framework seek to understand the subjective phenomena, viewpoints, and sociocultural environments of individual research participants, frequently utilising qualitative research methodologies such as interviews and observations to delve into the intricacy and profundity of human experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The significance of epistemological assumptions lies in their substantial impact on the entirety of the research process, which includes the development of research inquiries, selection of research methodologies, and implementation of data analysis procedures. The importance of acknowledging and openly discussing one's epistemological position cannot be overstated. This practice not only influences the structure and methodology of research but also allows researchers to express the foundations of their knowledge claims clearly.

### ***5.1.3 Methodological Assumption***

Methodological assumptions in research refer to the underlying views and concepts that inform the choices made about research methodology, data-gathering techniques, and data-processing procedures (Bryman, 2006). According to Irwin (2013), these assumptions are indicative of the researcher's viewpoint towards the acquisition of knowledge, the conduct of research, and the criteria for a valid and rigorous research methodology. In terms of methodological philosophy, scholars frequently associate themselves with either positivism or interpretivism, which are seen as the two main research paradigms.

The positivist methodological principles prioritise the utilisation of quantitative research methodologies and an organised and objective approach to the collection and interpretation of data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Brennen (2022), scholars who embrace a positivist perspective generate discoveries that are empirical, reproducible, and capable of being generalised or extrapolated. The assumption is made that research can be carried out in a manner devoid of subjectivity. Statistical and experimental techniques are employed to establish causation and correlations between variables (Forgues, 2012). On the other hand, the interpretivist paradigm embraces methodological assumptions that are inclined towards qualitative research methodologies, emphasising in-depth and detailed investigations, comprehension, and contextualisation (Reay & Jones, 2016). Researchers adhering to an interpretive paradigm recognise the inherent subjectivity and contextual dependence of human experiences. They aim to comprehensively capture the complexity and depth of these experiences by employing designs such as ethnography, case study, phenomenology and data collection techniques such as participant observations, interviews, document analysis, and focus group discussions (Pickard, 2017). The researchers frequently highlight the significance of researcher subjectivity and the social construction of reality within their study methodology.

Thus, the methodological assumptions have a significant influence on the entirety of the research process, encompassing the development of research questions as well as the gathering and examination of data. It is imperative for researchers to clearly articulate their methodological position, as it influences the structure of the research design and enables readers to assess the suitability of the methods employed in a specific study. The aforementioned assumptions are of utmost importance in shaping the scope and rigour of the study undertaken within a certain paradigm.

#### ***5.1.4 Axiological Assumption***

Axiological assumptions in research refer to the underlying values and ethical principles that shape the research process, and they impact the researcher's choices regarding what is deemed significant, permissible, and morally appropriate in the quest for knowledge (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher's perspective on the importance of values in research and the ethical considerations that should be addressed along the research journey are shaped by these assumptions. In research, it is common to encounter two principal axiological positions: value-neutrality and value-laden studies.

According to Stevenson (1989), value-neutral research is a methodological principle which posits that researchers should endeavour to maintain objectivity and impartiality throughout the study process. This involves minimising the influence of personal values, prejudices, and preferences. Scholars who embrace a value-neutral position prioritise the production of objective and unbiased results, striving to keep a distinction between their convictions and the outputs of their study (Pickard, 2017). On the other hand, value-laden research recognises the inherent presence of values inside the research process and their potential to impact research inquiries, methodologies, and analyses (Stevenson, 1989). Scholars adhering to this particular viewpoint acknowledge the role of values, encompassing ethical and social values, in influencing the choice of research subjects, how research participants are treated, and the utilisation of research outcomes (Forgues, 2012). The primary objective is to promote openness by recognising and resolving value-based considerations, frequently pushing for research that conforms to ethical ideals and social justice. This means that incorporating axiological assumptions in a scientific study of this nature is of utmost importance as they influence the ethical dimensions of research, the selection of research subjects, and the subsequent

interpretation of research outcomes. It is important for researchers to possess an understanding of their axiological standpoint and effectively convey it in order to uphold honesty and integrity in their scholarly endeavours. These assumptions also highlight the significance of ethical considerations and the necessity for researchers to go through the scope of values, ethics, and societal norms in their research pursuits.

## 5.2 Research Paradigms

Research approaches and designs are generally birthed out of a certain philosophical standpoint or worldview, and according to Blaikie (2010), it is important for every researcher to explicitly demonstrate the set of research philosophies governing their empirical processes. What is more, according to Myers (2020), it is important for researchers to effectively and clearly articulate the philosophical worldview that underpins their empirical data collection processes, as it is the fundamental framework around which the entire research endeavour is constructed. This means that the selected paradigm establishes a framework for interpreting the outcomes of the study and facilitates the evaluation of the study's ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological presumptions. This not only improves the credibility and validity of the study but also allows other researchers and readers to assess the suitability of the methods used in connection to the research questions and ensures that the research is consistent with a well-defined philosophical perspective (Truong et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the recognition of the guiding paradigm promotes scholarly rigour and enables productive discourse within the academic sphere, as it allows the understanding of knowledge generation and the inherent biases and constraints that are linked to various philosophical frameworks (Gannon et al., 2022). Some of the seminal definitions of a research paradigm are

attributed to Kuhn (1970), who described it as a comprehensive framework encompassing beliefs, values, and methodologies that provide guidance for members of a particular discipline in determining the problems they should investigate and the kind of explanations that are deemed valid within that discipline. In every academic inquiry, it is widely recognised that no singular paradigm can fully encompass the complexities inherent in any given field of study. Consequently, the growth of academic disciplines relies on the recognition and utilisation of many research paradigms, which can facilitate scholarly investigations within any given discipline. According to Slife and Williams (1995), even though philosophical positions are usually concealed in research reports or sometimes regarded as irrelevant (Giddings, 2006), they still affect how the entire research is conducted and, as such, must be identified and reported.

Again, as argued by Creswell and Creswell (2018), every research worldview or paradigm is distinguished by its ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions. As such, it is important to identify and discuss the various paradigms and how they differ from each other and also state the ones that undergird your research by providing justifications for your choice. It is on this basis that Rod (2009, p.128) argued that “academics should be free to subscribe to whatever guiding epistemological and ontological philosophy they choose.”

### ***5.2.1 The Positivist Research Paradigm***

Creswell and Clark (2018) make the argument that every research endeavour is built upon a certain philosophical framework or worldview, and researchers should be cognizant of the

underlying assumptions they have regarding the acquisition of information during their investigations. As indicated in the preceding paragraphs, these research worldviews have a significant role in shaping the methodologies employed in research and how inquiry is carried out. One such research worldview or philosophical paradigm is the positivist paradigm.

Several scholars have touted the positivist paradigm as one that is built on the strong principles of logical and scientific observations (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Clark, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Pickard, 2017). The positivist paradigm in scientific inquiry is founded upon the conviction that the acquisition of knowledge ought to align with the principles of empiricism, objectivity, and the exploration of absolute universal laws that govern both natural and social phenomena (Pickard, 2017). The philosophical framework of positivism asserts the existence of an objective reality that is independent of human perceptions and biases (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Creswell and Creswell (2018) further contend that this reality can be comprehensively examined and understood through the systematic application of empirical observation and measurement. This means that scholars operating within the positivist paradigm place emphasis on employing quantitative research designs, such as experiments and surveys, to gather data that can be statistically analysed in order to establish causal relationships and uncover patterns or principles that may be extrapolated. Again, positivists endeavour to maintain value neutrality, to reduce personal biases and emotions, and they prioritise the replication of research findings as a method of substantiating knowledge (Stevenson, 1989). According to Pickard (2017), the aforementioned paradigm has played a crucial role in the progression of scientific disciplines such as physics and biology since the 19th century, where the pursuit of objective facts and universal principles has yielded significant results. Recently, however, it has become a staple paradigm in the business science disciplines like marketing.

Nevertheless, proponents of the positivism paradigm face some level of opposition from critics who contend that its applicability may vary across different areas of study, notably within the realm of social sciences. This is because human behaviour and experiences are complex and contextually nuanced (Brennen, 2022). The emphasis on quantification and objectivity within the positivist paradigm may not comprehensively convey the intricate and multifaceted nature of social processes. Notwithstanding these criticisms, the positivist approach remains a significant contributor to scientific research, particularly in cases where the objective is to discover empirical patterns, establish causal connections, and contribute to the advancement of evidence-based practices and policies. It continues to be regarded as a fundamental paradigm that forms the basis for the acquisition of knowledge across diverse scientific fields.

### ***5.2.2 The Interpretive Research Paradigm***

Unlike the positivist research paradigm, the interpretive paradigm is a philosophical perspective that emphasises the subjective and context-dependent aspects of human experiences and meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Scholars working under this philosophical framework place significant emphasis on understanding the manner in which individuals and collectives form their perceptions and understandings of the world around them (Schwandt, 2015). The interpretive approach recognises that knowledge is influenced by people's lived, social, cultural, and historical circumstances rather than being only based on absolute objective truths. Scholars adhering to this philosophical framework frequently utilise qualitative research methodologies, including interviews, observations, and content analysis, to build an in-depth investigation into people's lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The interpretive paradigm has gained significant traction within the field of social sciences as scholars increasingly acknowledge the significance of addressing subjectivity, reflexivity, and

the researcher's influence on the study process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Through the examination of nuanced human occurrences and the acceptance of the notion that reality is shaped by social constructs, interpretivist scholars make valuable contributions to enhance the understanding of cultural diversity, individual viewpoints, and the complex dynamics that underpin social interactions (Corbetta, 2003). The paradigm promotes the acknowledgement of the researcher's role within the study setting, highlighting the importance of introspection about personal biases and preconceptions in order to strengthen the rigour and validity of the research process (Schwandt, 2015).

### ***5.2.3 The Transformative Research Paradigm***

The transformative paradigm (also known as the critical theory or critical perspective) in scientific research is characterised by its progressive and socially conscious nature, beyond conventional paradigms, through its emphasis on the acquisition of knowledge that has the potential to bring about good societal transformations (Gergen et al., 2001). The approach places significant importance on matters about power dynamics, disparities, and the pursuit of social equity. It positions research as a tool for questioning and altering repressive systems and societal standards (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Scholars operating under the transformative paradigm have a strong dedication to tackling urgent societal concerns and advocating for marginalised populations by deploying a more critical scholarship. They frequently utilise qualitative methodologies, such as participatory action research, to actively involve communities in the research endeavour. The transformative paradigm emphasises the significance of reflexivity and acknowledges that research is not devoid of values but should actively seek ethical involvement and beneficial influence on society (Gergen et al., 2001; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011).

The aforementioned paradigm has garnered significant attention in various disciplines, including education, social work, and community development. Within these domains, scholars aim to establish partnerships with marginalised populations in order to recognise and rectify structural injustices (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2011). Researchers are faced with the task of critically examining their positions as catalysts for societal change and ensuring that their research endeavours are in line with the fundamental values of fairness, empowerment, and the promotion of social change. This paradigm expands the scope of research beyond knowledge generation to actively pursue a fair and just society by prioritising social justice issues and advocating for transformative action.

#### ***5.2.4 The Pragmatic Research Paradigm***

The pragmatic paradigm in scientific research presents a versatile and solution-focused methodology that emphasises the practicality and pragmatic significance of research outcomes (Morgan, 2007). This paradigm is based on the philosophy of pragmatism, which places significant emphasis on the selection of research methods and approaches that are best suited for answering specific research inquiries and resolving practical issues (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Scholars operating within the pragmatic paradigm acknowledge that the choice of a single paradigm is not wholistic enough to explain the totality of human phenomena. They respect the suitability of various research methods in different contexts, and they are receptive to the integration of qualitative and quantitative approaches as necessary to achieve a holistic comprehension of a research issue (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This means the utilisation of methodological flexibility is heavily promoted, enabling researchers to modify their techniques according to the specific attributes of their study context. The ultimate goal is to produce

research that is both rigorous and applicable to practical considerations (Morgan, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010).

The aforementioned paradigm has garnered significant attention within research domains that prioritise practicality, problem-solving, and the utilisation of research outcomes. These domains include education, public policy, and programme assessment (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Researchers working under the pragmatic paradigm place a high emphasis on the practicality of their research in terms of its ability to guide decision-making processes and address real-world difficulties. By embracing a pragmatic stance, they acknowledge that research should not exist solely for the sake of knowledge generation but should actively contribute to improving the human condition and addressing pressing societal issues.

#### ***5.2.5 The Chosen Research Paradigm and Rationale***

For the purposes of this present study and based on the research aims and objectives as well as the research questions that guide the study, the most suitable research paradigm is the interpretive research paradigm. The selection of the interpretive research paradigm for this study was motivated by the acknowledgement that the research inquiries and domains necessitate an in-depth understanding of human experiences, significances, and social settings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Specifically, the lived experiences of the brand community members regarding their motivation for joining and participating in the community's activities, the benefits their affiliate brands derive from the community, and the forms of cultural and ritualistic practices they exhibit have been explored in this study. As posited by Schwandt (2015), researchers who espouse an interpretive philosophy contend that the perception of

reality is shaped by the research participants' social processes, and the acquisition of knowledge is a result of individual subjective interpretations and interactions within distinct cultural and historical frameworks. As such, the interpretive paradigm becomes the most aligned. This paradigm holds particular significance when examining complex social phenomena, such as the subjective experiences of individuals, cultural customs, and the details of human interactions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **5.3 Research Approach**

The term "research approach" pertains to the methodical plan or methodology utilised by researchers in order to collect and analyse data to address particular research questions or objectives. The guiding framework plays a crucial role in shaping the structure and trajectory of a study, impacting the selection of data collection methods, data analysis methodologies, and the overall research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Research methodologies encompass qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches. These distinct options possess individual advantages and analytical tools that facilitate the exploration and understanding of different research issues (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The determination of a suitable research approach is contingent upon the characteristics of the research inquiry, the purpose, the nature of research questions, and the intended results, ensuring the research procedure is both rigorous and efficient in producing significant findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

For the purposes of this present study and also based on the choice of research paradigm as articulated in the paragraphs above, the qualitative research approach is the most appropriate and suitable. The qualitative research approach, as opposed to the quantitative approach, is a

methodology that prioritises the examination and comprehension of occurrences that are derived from the worldview and personal experiences of the individuals directly engaged in the study in a theoretical and interpretive manner (Brennen, 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This research methodology is distinguished by its utilisation of qualitative data, including interviews, observations, and textual or visual materials, to acquire a deeper understanding of the underlying significances, experiences, and social contexts associated with certain research subjects (Brennen, 2022; Punch, 2014). It emphasises an understanding of complex concepts and making sense of language, which is generally based on human experiences and relationships (Brennen, 2022). This study explores the complex nature of brand community involvement and participation in Ghana. The study explores the community members' motivations based on their worldviews and personal experiences. The study has also explored the cultural and ritualistic practices of the brand communities in a manner that is interpretive and in-depth in nature. As such, the qualitative approach is deemed suitable.

Furthermore, qualitative studies are usually concerned with latent meanings other than the number of events, and this is duly corroborated by Kvale (1996, p.11), who argued that qualitative research is not “objective data to be quantified, but meaningful relations to be interpreted.” Again, Creswell and Creswell (2018) argued that qualitative research is mainly concerned with examining or exploring the meanings people attach to social phenomena rather than measuring a situation using predetermined yardsticks. This is due to the argument that social realities are individually constructed based on preconceived thoughts and personal experiences (Punch, 2014). Since this study set out to investigate how the brand community members construct their social realities in the community and how the brand managers interpret the benefits they derive from the activities of these communities, the qualitative approach becomes the most appropriate.

As such, the argument can be made that the justification for selecting a qualitative research methodology frequently stems from the necessity to investigate research inquiries that lead to a grasp of the context and a wealth of detailed information. Qualitative research methods are particularly appropriate for investigating subjects in which the researcher aims to understand and document the beliefs, encounters, and interpretations of people (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Within the social sciences, qualitative research serves as a valuable tool for explaining the cultural and contextual elements that have an effect on behaviours and beliefs within a particular community or group (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

Another strong justification for using the qualitative approach is seeded in the literature. As per the literature review in Chapter Three of this study, it becomes apparent that the distribution of methodologies employed in the reviewed articles is heavily imbalanced and biased. It was observed that the quantitative methodological approach was very prevalent in the brand community literature, a subject area that is expected to be centred on social collectivism and cultural relationships (Bhattacharjee et al., 2021). It was observed that out of the 101 articles included in the review, a whopping 76 articles, constituting around 75.2% of the total, were found to be underpinned by the quantitative approach. Again, out of the total 101 publications reviewed, qualitative studies comprise a proportion of 20, which corresponds to about 19.8%. Additionally, the studies underpinned by the mixed-methods approach constitute four out of the 101 articles, accounting for around 4% of the total. The current body of literature on brand communities exhibits a notable methodological gap, as the absence of qualitative investigations has not resulted in divergent research findings. Therefore, the selection of the qualitative paradigm does not only align with the research objectives and questions but also hinged on the quest to fill the methodological lacuna that exists in the literature.

#### 5.4 Research Design

As espoused by scholars such as Pickard (2017) and Creswell and Creswell (2018), a research design is the blueprint or master plan that details the approach and structure of the study, and it is an essential element of the research process, serving as the framework or strategy that delineates the methodical approach and organisation of a study. As such, the selection of an appropriate research design is crucial in addressing specific research questions or objectives because certain research questions can only be answered using certain specific research designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research design functions as an outline for researchers, aiding them in describing the extent of their inquiry, choosing suitable research methodologies, and guaranteeing the robustness and credibility of their investigation (Punch, 2014). In order to generate significant and reliable research findings, it is imperative to employ a meticulously crafted study design.

The overarching purpose of this study is to comprehensively unearth the motives behind joining brand communities, the ritualistic practices that occur in these communities, and the benefits that these communities provide to brands. As such, the most appropriate research design to successfully execute the purpose above is the case study research design. Although this study can also be situated within ethnographic research due to the cultural-sharing elements that are characteristic of communities, and to wit, brand communities (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), its intent is not to ascertain how cultures function in brand communities, as distinguished by Creswell and Poth (2018). Rather, this study is motivated by the lack of adequate knowledge on the motivations that push consumers to join and participate in brand communities in emerging markets, the ritualistic practices that are performed in the brand communities and the benefits the affiliate brands derive from the existence and activities of the brand communities.

This study uses the cases of four brand communities in Ghana as illustrations to resolve these notable deficiencies in the brand community literature.

Hence, it is congruent with Creswell and Poth's (2018) position on case study research as the selection of a case (single-case study) or several cases (multiple-case study) and describing how it (they) illustrates a problem or an issue, leading to its in-depth analysis. Again, Yin (2018) defines case study research as an empirical mode of inquiry that extensively examines a current phenomenon, referred to as the case, in its natural or actual context, particularly when the distinction between phenomenon and context is not easily discernible. In a simplified perspective, Yin and Davis (2007) contend that doing a case study is beneficial when a researcher wants to comprehend a real-world situation and believes that this knowledge will likely contain significant contextual factors relevant to the specific case.

Again, Yin (2018) advances a second-fold definition for case study research, which is embedded in its features. According to the scholar, a case study "benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis, and... relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion" (Yin 2018; p. 50). The two-fold definition, which is of scope and features, signifies an all-encompassing mode of inquiry. Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 153) combined Yin's (2018) two-fold perspective and propose a comprehensive definition of case study research as "a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case themes".

The selection of a case study as a research design has become a common phenomenon in the marketing discipline (Crick, 2021; Hagen et al., 2019; Ozdemir et al., 2020; Shah, 2024), and it involves a thorough and comprehensive examination of single or multiple cases of a specific marketing phenomenon, such as a brand or consumer behaviour. The essence is to gain a complete understanding of that marketing phenomenon. Again, the choice of case study in the context of brand community research is consistent with the study of Cova and White (2010), who deployed the design in studying the CouchSurfing travel and accommodation and Warhammer tabletop wargame communities. Case study design is adopted across multiple fields and disciplines, making it a widely recognised mode of inquiry.

### **5.5 Data Collection Techniques**

Based on the aims and objectives as well as the research paradigm and design chosen for this study, which is case study, three data collection techniques were utilised in this study. They are participant observations, interviews, and focus group discussions. In case study research, the use of data collection techniques is not rigid or constrained to any specific number. The choice of techniques is contingent upon the specific research aims, the research context, and the desired level of comprehension the researcher wants to achieve (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Case study researchers frequently employ a variety of techniques for gathering data, including participant observation, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and surveys (Yin, 2018). This approach allows them to triangulate data from several sources and perspectives, leading to the completeness and validity of their research findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The ability to modify and integrate different data collection techniques is a distinguishing feature of case study, enabling researchers to customise their methodology to the distinct attributes of the cultural or social setting under investigation and to systematically capture the

complex and abundant nature of the phenomenon being studied (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007).

Data collection techniques play an important role in the research process, especially in determining the rigour and transparency of the methodology. Ultimately, these factors have a direct impact on the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The two major categories of data are primary sources and secondary sources. Primary data collection refers to the direct acquisition of new and authentic data that is explicitly intended for the purpose of a research study. In the qualitative approach, primary data collection is typically achieved through various techniques such as interviews, participant observations, or focus groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). These data collection techniques enable researchers to directly interact with participants and delve into study inquiries comprehensively, resulting in the production of abundant and context-specific data. On the other hand, secondary data collection involves the utilisation of pre-existing data sources, such as documents, archival records, or previously gathered qualitative data, which are subjected to reanalysis (Yin, 2018). Primary data collection provides researchers with a higher level of control over the research process. However, secondary data collection can be a valuable resource in investigating historical trends, analysing long-term changes, or conducting comparative analyses. It offers insights into research questions that may not be feasible to address solely through primary data collection (Yin, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Based on the study's aim to collect new and authentic data from brand community members and managers of the represented brands in a manner that creates an avenue for direct interaction with participants, the primary data sources were utilised.

Including these strategies in a study report is crucial for multiple reasons. Firstly, the provision of information regarding the data collection process enhances the transparency of the study, enabling readers to evaluate the suitability of the selected methods for addressing the research topic (Bryan, 2015). Additionally, it enhances the reproducibility of the study by providing a comprehensive account of the data collection processes employed, thereby reinforcing the methodological soundness of qualitative research (Bryan, 2015).

The following sections discuss the data collection techniques and procedures. The process of data collection in qualitative research entails the systematic acquisition of information from participants through several approaches, as indicated in the preceding paragraphs. The researcher interacts with individuals in order to explore their lived experiences, viewpoints, and actions, frequently utilising open-ended questions to stimulate in-depth answers (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The data collection in qualitative research is normally characterised by iteration, which improves data-gathering in response to emerging insights. Additionally, it establishes rapport with participants to foster a trustworthy and conducive environment for open and honest discussions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### ***5.5.1 Participant Observation***

As indicated above, one of the data collection techniques in a case study research design is participant observation. It is a technique where researchers fully engage themselves in the natural environments or social situations of the individuals being studied. This entails actively monitoring and occasionally participating in their activities and interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). As such, this technique became one of the data collection strategies utilised in

this study. The participant observation process began with the researcher immersing himself in selected outdoor activities of the brand communities adopted for this study. The immersive process included attending a clean-up exercise organised by the Rainbow Radio Listeners Club, an on-the-ground marketing activation organised by the Tecno Mobile with participation from members of the Tecno Fans GH, and a golf playing exercise organised by the Ecobank Top Depositors Club. This helped to properly understand what happens in these communities from an insider perspective.

With the permission of the gatekeepers, the researcher recorded the activities, communication styles, behaviours and symbols of the communities in observation notes. The participant observation was sequential and not intermittent. That is to say, the researcher observed the selected outdoor activity of the communities before conducting the focus group discussions to benchmark and reinforce the evidence found earlier. The purpose of the observation was to take note of how members construct their identities and negotiate social meanings in the brand communities and how all of these play out in the ritualistic practices that occur.

Based on the above, behaviours that define or corroborate a member's motivation for joining the community were closely observed. Their rituals and often repetitive activities and actions were also observed. For instance, active participation in community discussions signified that a member of Tecno Fans GH had a strong desire for frequent mobile updates, which was the motivation for joining the community. For the ritualistic practices, the recurring events, symbolic gestures, and shared rituals that reinforce the group identity were observed and documented.

Participant observations allow researchers to acquire a broad understanding of the social and cultural processes in operation, granting them access to insights that may not be achievable through alternative methods of data collection (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Participant observers commonly conduct extended periods of fieldwork, establishing a strong connection with participants and adopting an insider's perspective in order to capture their viewpoint effectively (Pickard, 2017). It is one of the few data collection techniques that involves immersing oneself in a particular data site to gain insights into the underlying meanings, social norms, and contextual factors that influence behaviour and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). One of the objectives of this present study was to explore the cultural and ritualistic practices exhibited by brand community members in a manner that is immersive and extended. As such, the participant observation as a data collection technique is fit for purpose.

### ***5.5.2 Interview***

As indicated above, another data collection technique adopted in this study is the interview. In research, an interview refers to an exchange between a researcher and a participant or interviewee. During this exchange, the researcher presents questions or prompts to gather information, insights, or viewpoints pertaining to a particular research subject (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Interview sessions with the brand managers were conducted to gain insights into this phenomenon. This is because one of the research objectives was to understand the benefits that brand communities provide to brands. Hence, the perspectives of the brand managers were integral in addressing this objective. A total of eight interviews were carried out, with two managers from each brand, ensuring a well-rounded perspective on the subject matter. The managers selected for the interviews held strategic positions within their organisations. For communities that are brand-initiated (Ecobank Top Depositors Club and Shell Club), the

managers in charge were interviewed. For those that are member(s)-initiated (Tecno Fans GH and Rainbow Radio Listeners Club), managers that have direct lines of communication with the brand communities or understand the contribution of the communities to their brand were interviewed.

The interviews were arranged at mutually suitable times for the participants. The interviews were guided by a semi-structured guide, which focused on important areas such as their knowledge, engagement and support to the brand community and its inclusion in the corporate strategy. Other areas, such as the benefits the brands derive from the brand communities, were also discussed. The questions were intended to elicit comprehensive responses while allowing the managers to openly tell their experiences and perspectives. The interviews were also recorded with participants' permission and transcribed for analysis. Interviews serve as a prominent technique for qualitative data collection, enabling the acquisition of first-hand accounts, lived experiences, and narratives from individuals. This contributes to a deep understanding of the research phenomenon. In case studies, interviews are considered a significant method for collecting data. They are used to gather detailed and contextually relevant information from individuals who are part of the case being studied, which in this case is the brand communities (Yin, 2018; Pickard, 2017). The interviews might assume many formats, such as structured, semi-structured, or unstructured, depending on the study objectives and the preferred degree of conversational flexibility (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Case study researchers frequently use semi-structured interviews that promote the expression of lived experiences, beliefs, and viewpoints by the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Specifically, the semi-structured interviews were used in this study.

The use of a semi-structured interview in research involves the integration of predetermined questions or subject areas while allowing participants the freedom to expand upon their responses and contribute added perspectives through follow-up questions where necessary (Bryan, 2015). This offers a well-rounded structure that enables researchers to steer the discourse through a series of essential inquiries while also permitting impromptu and unstructured conversations to capture the depth and diversity of participants' lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews are frequently employed by researchers as a means of achieving a middle ground between structured and unstructured frameworks (Bryan, 2015). For the purposes of this study, the semi-structured interview was adopted.

### ***5.5.3 Focus Group Discussions***

The third data collection technique deployed in this study is the focus group discussion. According to Krueger and Casey (2015), a focus group discussion is a way of collecting qualitative data in research that involves a group of participants who engage in a moderated and facilitated conversation on a certain topic or research question. For the purposes of this study, the focus group discussions were conducted among 48 members across all four brand communities. Every one of the four brand communities sampled had two focus group discussions comprising 6 members of each brand community. The purpose was not only to explore members' motivations and cultural interactions in the brand communities but also to clarify the observations noted in the communities and provide answers to questions that cannot be solved with mere observations. The sessions were organised to provide a favourable atmosphere for participants to share their candid perspectives and experiences. There were a total of eight group discussions across all four brand communities, with each focus group having six participants. No further predetermined criteria, such as level of participation, gender

and so on, were deployed in the selection of the participants. Rather, participants were conveniently selected based on their availability and willingness to partake in the study. However, it was ensured that at least one community leader of each community was included in the discussion for superior perspectives, which will not be obtained from any other member.

Two of the sessions (those with the Ecobank Top Depositors Club) were held online, while the remaining six focus group discussions for Shell Club, Tecno Fans GH, and Rainbow Radio Listeners Club were held in person. Whereas the researcher preferred in-person due to the ability to adequately record non-verbal cues and gestures and evoke an atmosphere that will ensure the maximum sharing of participants' lived experiences relative to online settings, the online sessions were organised to fit some participants' requests and availability. As such, a simple majority of each group was left to decide the most convenient option for their group. Regardless of the option decided, the researcher ensured, to maximum capacity, that there was interaction and the exchange of personal experiences relating to the participants' association with the brand communities. Throughout the conversations, a semi-structured guide was used to direct the discussion while also allowing for adaptability to delve into new issues. The key issues discussed were the motives for joining the brand community and the significance of ritualistic practices in sustaining their association with the community. The moderator encouraged participants to share personal stories and experiences as much as possible. The discussions were recorded with participants' consent and transcribed for analysis, with rapt attention given to both the content and context of the issues discussed.

This phenomenon is distinguished by the presence of group dynamics and interaction, which facilitates the exchange of participants' experiences, views, and opinions while also enabling

them to respond to the contributions made by others. Focus group talks are frequently utilised as a technique to investigate subjects, collect a wide range of ideas, and reveal common beliefs or lived experiences. This renders them highly valuable for generating comprehensive insights and delving into the complexities of participants' perspectives (Krueger & Casey, 2014). The choice of this technique aligns with the postulations of Pickard (2017), who avers that focus group discussion is the most appropriate data collection technique if the researcher is interested in exploring consumers' group behaviour and preferences.

Within case study research, focus group discussions serve as a valuable technique to supplement participant observation and individual interviews (Bryan, 2015). This is achieved through fostering group dynamics and promoting collective perspectives within the community or cultural environment under study (Liamputtong, 2011). These discussions allow case study researchers to witness the process by which participants engage in the negotiation of meaning, exchange cultural norms, and interact with one another, thereby offering valuable insights into the collective beliefs, values, and social dynamics at play (Liamputtong, 2011). Through the use of collective interactions, focus group discussions can unveil consensus or disagreements within a group, expose a range of perspectives, and shed light on issues that may be culturally sensitive. These outcomes ultimately contribute to a more profound and comprehensive understanding of the community under investigation (Liamputtong, 2011).

## **5.6 Sampling Strategy**

In the field of research, a sampling strategy pertains to a methodical plan or process employed to choose a subset, commonly known as a sample, from a larger population of interest to the researcher (Pickard, 2017). The primary objective of this strategy is to ensure that the selected

sample accurately reflects the features of the population under investigation (Bryan, 2015). For the purposes of this present study, both the purposive and the convenience sampling strategies were adopted. Purposive sampling is a non-probabilistic sampling strategy that is utilised in research when researchers intentionally choose particular individuals, cases, or elements from a population in order to fulfil predetermined criteria or to guarantee the inclusion of specific characteristics or perspectives (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The brand communities studied were chosen based on a set of predetermined criteria. First of all, for a community to qualify to be studied, it ought to be domiciled or have an operational presence in Ghana. Secondly, the managers of the represented brand ought to also have an operational presence in Ghana. Thirdly, the community should have an offline presence where all or certain aspects of its activities must be happening in person, as opposed to happening strictly online. Lastly, the brand community should be a structured one, with a clear distinction of who the leaders are and who are mere community members. Again, being a structured society means that it is organised and made up of people who interact inside a predetermined framework or system, frequently under the direction of established guidelines, customs, or objectives (Lockwood, 1995). This official or informal structure offers governance and a feeling of order. To qualify as a structured community, the community must also have clear rules and regulations governing it. Any community that did not meet all of these set of predefined criteria were not sampled.

The purposive sampling approach is especially advantageous in circumstances where the study objectives necessitate a comprehensive understanding, precise details, or distinctive perspectives from certain subgroups or cases within a community (Patton, 2014). On the side of managers of the represented brands, their interviews were conducted based on the criteria that the brand communities sampled were affiliated with their brands. The purposive sampling strategy not only helped this study to deliberately choose participants based on their direct

relevance to the research question at hand but also enabled the study to concentrate its data collection efforts on sources that were most likely to yield valuable insights.

The inclusion of the selected sampling approach is important in research for multiple reasons. To begin with, it is important to note that the inclusion of information on the sampling strategy and its appropriateness to the research questions and methodology employed in a study promotes its transparency and replicability (Nachmias et al., 2015). This enables other researchers to comprehend the process by which the sample was obtained and to assess the suitability of the methods used in relation to the research topic (Bryan, 2015). Additionally, the sampling approach plays a crucial role in evaluating the external validity of the study, as it determines the extent to which the findings can be extrapolated to the larger population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Lastly, it allows readers and reviewers to assess the study's overall methodological rigour by evaluating the possibility of bias or errors that may have been introduced throughout the sampling process (Bryan, 2015).

As indicated above, the second sampling strategy used in this study is the convenience sampling strategy. It is a non-probabilistic sampling technique commonly utilised in qualitative research. It involves the selection of participants or elements based on their accessibility, willingness to participate, and ease of inclusion in the study (Bryan, 2015). Beyond the selection of the brand communities and the managers of the represented brands based on the predefined criteria as enumerated above, there was a need to sample the individual community members for the focus group discussions. This was where the convenience sampling strategy was adopted. The individual community members were sampled based on who was available and willing to participate in the study. However, the caveat is that for every brand community

sampled, the study ensured that some community leaders were included in the sample for superior insights into the brand community activities. The utilisation of this sampling approach is commonly observed in scenarios where practical factors, such as time limitations, budgetary constraints, or restricted resources, are prioritised over the representativeness of the sample (Bryan, 2015). Convenience sampling was employed in this study because there was a need for prompt and cost-effective data collection and the research inquiry did not demand a completely representative sample.

### ***5.6.1 Sample Size***

In qualitative research, the determination of an appropriate sample size is complex, multifaceted, and context-dependent (Bryan, 2015). Unlike quantitative research, which relies on the principles of statistical significance, qualitative research considers the concept of data saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Therefore, in this study, four brand communities were sampled. These communities are the Rainbow Radio Listeners Club, Tecno Fans GH, Ecobank Top Depositors Club and Shell Club. These communities fit the predefined criteria discussed above. Across these four brand communities, there were a total of 48 focus group discussion participants. Specifically, there were two focus group discussions for each community, consisting of six participants in every one of the four brand communities. Furthermore, there were a total of eight interviewees across the four brand communities, comprising two interview participants from each of the represented brands. The aim of this study is not to draw a comparative analysis between the sectors within which the brand communities operate. The aim is to explore the concept of brand communities and its formative frameworks in multiple cases. Yin (2018) argues for the use of multiple cases and claims that they increase the

applicability of the insights in the bounded cases. This is the rationale for the choice of the multiple industries

Data saturation pertains to the stage at which further data collection no longer produces new insights or themes (Guest et al., 2006). The importance of sample size in qualitative research lies in the emphasis on the quality and depth of data rather than the sheer number of participants. Qualitative researchers aim to strike a balance between gathering sufficient information to comprehensively address their research inquiries and data overload (Morse, 1995). Although there are no established guidelines for determining sample size in qualitative studies, researchers ordinarily adhere to the principle of data saturation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This principle ensures that the sample size is adequate to achieve data saturation, thereby facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the research phenomenon (Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 1995). Again, Fowler (2014) argues that the selection of an appropriate sample size should be based on the study's analytical plans and objectives. Therefore, this study was guided by the principle of data saturation as opposed to the principle of statistical significance.

### **5.7 Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis involves a systematic approach to immersing, reviewing, interpreting, and making sense of the data that has been acquired. This data is typically rich in detail and embedded within its natural context (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The process encompasses a series of interrelated procedures, which include data coding, categorisation, theme development, and interpretation (Saldaña, 2021). During the process of analysis, researchers engage deeply with the data collected, diligently detecting recurring patterns, thematic elements, and valuable insights that arise from the narratives or observations provided by the

participants. Therefore, in this research, the analytical strategy employed for the three data types (field notes from participant observations, data from focus group discussions, and data from interviews) is the thematic analysis. According to Smith and Firth (2011, p.3), thematic analysis can be described as an “interpretive process, whereby data is systematically searched to identify patterns within the data in order to provide an illuminating description of the phenomenon.”

At the outset of the participant observation, comprehensive fieldwork was undertaken to take notes of selected activities of the brand communities. This helped in retrieving data that encompass the contextual elements, behaviours, and interactions of the brand communities under investigation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The notes encompassed several aspects of the brand community experiences, such as detailed accounts of the community’s outdoor activities, observations of the conduct of brand community members during the events, and the documentation of both verbal and non-verbal cues. After the collection of data, the researcher went ahead with data coding, thematisation, and analysis. The field notes were examined and arranged to identify emerging patterns, themes, and cultural practices. The significance of these observations was also interpreted and benchmarked against the aims of the study and the theoretical frameworks employed. These processes helped to generate a thorough understanding of the cultural and social experiences in the brand communities in line with the postulations of Denzin and Lincoln (2018).

The focus group discussion and the interview sections were all recorded and transcribed into text to make the identification of codes and themes easier. The researcher then read through the transcribed text thoroughly and took note of issues raised by the focus group and the

interview participants. This process allowed for immersion and familiarisation with the data, as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Reoccurring themes and patterns were identified across the responses from the focus group discussions and interview participants and coded. The themes identified from the interviews included Motivations for Joining Brand Communities in Ghana, Ritualistic Practices in Brand Communities in Ghana, and Brand Community Benefits to Brands. These themes then formed the basis of data interpretations, narrations, discussions, and analysis.

It is also noteworthy that the data was analysed with the aid of the MAXQDA Software in accordance with Brennen's (2022) claim that qualitative research gives the researcher the chance to understand and discuss the data obtained thoroughly and rigorously. A comprehensive method of coding and analysing qualitative data was achieved with the use of computer-aided software called MAXQDA. In addition to the descriptive statistics of the coded data, the study looked at the co-occurrences of parent codes and subcodes to ascertain the frequency of coded materials. These frequencies reflect the number of times a particular code or issue has been articulated in the transcript. Following Mensah et al's. (2023) approach, this study established a criterion for code occurrences by determining that parent and subcodes were significant only if they showed up in the transcript three or more times. Consequently, code co-occurrences below the three-point cutoff were removed since they were considered insignificant. This contributed to analytical clarity and simplicity.

The study, in employing the thematic analysis as a technique, identified common patterns, codes or themes that are reoccurring and offered a description of the codes. The initial stage was to engage in open coding, where the data collected and transcribed was broken down into

separate parts and examined for similarities and differences. The next step was to engage in axial coding, where the codes were further reduced by establishing the relationships between the open codes to form more coherent categories. The final coding step was selective coding, where the core categories that integrate all the data were identified and reduced to the central phenomenon of motivations for joining brand communities, the ritualistic practices in the brand communities, and the benefits brands derive from their affiliate brand communities. These processes are corroborated by Braun and Clarke (2006), who argue that thematic analysis is a commonly employed analytical technique in qualitative research, where the data is systematically examined to identify, categorise, and interpret reoccurring themes or patterns. Researchers employ data coding, wherein they allocate codes to text segments or data that exhibit shared meanings or concepts. Thereafter, the codes are further categorised into comprehensive themes that encompass the fundamental concepts or recurring patterns that arise from the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). All the codes were induced from the data and were not deduced or appropriated from any previous literature.

The process of qualitative data analysis is frequently described as iterative, enabling researchers to enhance their understanding and develop deeper insights through repeated examination of the data and continuous reflection (Saldaña, 2021). The primary objective of qualitative data analysis is to condense complex and diverse data into significant results that enhance the understanding of the phenomenon being examined. As argued by Frankel and Wallen (2003), qualitative data analysis is a task that involves synthesising all the information a researcher gathers in the field and drawing parallel and logical lines in the data according to the set of research questions the study is seeking to answer.

### 5.9 Ethical Considerations

There are standard research ethical codes that are prescribed by the University of Ghana for its faculty and students to strictly adhere to when conducting any form of research that involves both human and non-human subjects. To follow these ethical principles religiously, a researcher studying within the humanities would have to apply for ethical clearance from the Ethics Committee for Humanities (ECH) of the University of Ghana before commencing any data collection procedures. The process of seeking ethical clearance involves reading and understanding all the ethical protocols set by the university. The researcher immersed himself in the ethical dictates to be able to use them fully. An application for ethical clearance was made to the ECH, and the data collection processes began only when the clearance was granted.

Firstly, the ethical considerations indicate that researchers must seek the consent of their research participants, bearing in mind that they have the right to fully understand what the research is about and agree or decline to participate in any research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The researcher, in adhering to this clause, sought the permission of the participants through a written letter to the brand community leaders and brand managers of the represented brands detailing the purpose and other particulars of the study. This was followed up with the consent form issued by the ECH. This consent form was presented to all participants, detailing the purpose of the research. The written letter subsequently received a response granting the participants' consent. The consent forms were also signed on the day of the focus group discussions and interviews. These were in line with the ethical postulations of Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2019), who proposed that for researchers to be ethical in their research processes, they ought to adhere to three basic principles – informed consent, participants' privacy, and debriefing.

Aside from the fact that the participants were duly briefed on all facets of the research so that they had full information to decide on whether they wanted to participate or not, they were also assured of maximum anonymity. According to Pickard (2017), anonymity and confidentiality hold significant importance in research by protecting the privacy of participants and fostering an environment that encourages openness and trust. This enables participants to provide precise, unrestricted, sensitive, or personal information openly and freely without apprehension of being revealed. From an ethical standpoint, this principle exhibits a profound regard for the rights of individual participants. This helps in insulating participants from possible undue attacks on their persona. Again, there was a series of pre-interview and focus group discussion conversations over the telephone that allowed the participants to probe further into the research angles to decide whether they would want to proceed as participants or not. This allowed debriefing, as proposed by Croucher and Cronn-Mills (2019).

What is more, Creswell and Creswell (2018) also propose some ethical philosophies that should be adhered to. They propose that researchers ought to respect and protect their participants and build trust between themselves. They also admonish researchers to respect the sensitivity of the participants in a manner that prevents stereotyping and name-calling that are not appropriate or accepted by the participants. All of these principles guided the conduct of this study while in the field collecting data. The researcher showed respect for the research participants first of all by arriving for the interview and focus group discussions minutes before the agreed time and also used very polite words during the engagements. The participants were accorded maximum courtesy in line with the cultural norms and values in the Ghanaian culture. In the quest to build trust with the participants, the researcher did his best to be as open as possible. The researcher also showed the participant his identification card to authenticate himself. This eventually brought some level of genuineness and made the research participants

more relaxed and willing to participate. Again, in adhering to Creswell and Creswell's (2018) proposal that researchers ought to avoid stereotypes, the researchers were keen on asking questions that were neutral and devoid of the possibility of hurting the moral, political, and religious sensibilities of the participants. The researchers did not make any comments that reinforced already existing stereotypes.

### **5.10 Qualitative Validity and Reliability**

Creswell and Creswell (2018) make the argument that in a typical qualitative study, researchers make an effort to validate their findings every step of the way. That notwithstanding, there is the need to report fully on the measures deployed in this present study to demonstrate validity and reliability. The reporting of validity and reliability does not only help in establishing the trustworthiness of the research findings but also its accuracy (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Again, Gibbs (2007) makes the argument that validity and reliability in qualitative research carry a different connotation from that of the quantitative approach. Whereas the aim of reporting the validity and reliability in the quantitative approach would be to make a strong case for the extrapolation of the findings, in the qualitative approach, it is to establish the authenticity and credibility of the findings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Therefore, validity in qualitative research, according to Creswell and Miller (2000), can be described as the determination of the accuracy of the research findings not only from the perspective of the researchers but also from the perspectives of research participants and interested parties who read the research report. This means that when an account is given by the researchers on the project, the readers and the research participants from whom the data was collected must see the account to be accurate and a true reflection of whatever transpired.

To achieve this, Creswell and Creswell (2018) proposed eight mechanisms qualitative researchers ought to use to increase the validity of their research (*triangulation, reflexivity, member checking, use of thick and rich description, report information counter to the theme, spending extended time in the data field, use of external auditors, and use of peer debriefing*).

To attain qualitative validity, this study employed several of the mechanisms proposed by Creswell and Creswell (2018), including data triangulation, member checking, prolonged stay in the field, and peer debriefers, among others. On the issue of triangulation, data was collected through participant observation, focus group discussions, and interviews. Specifically, the participant observation was carried out by joining selected outdoor events and programmes of the brand communities. The focus group discussions were held with selected brand community members, and the interviews were conducted with selected managers of the represented brands. Collecting data from these multiple sources enhanced the validity of the codes and themes that were developed for the data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Again, after collecting the data and transcribing the audio discussions, the transcripts were sent to selected participants to ensure that their views and experiences were accurately captured. This is what Creswell and Creswell (2018) call member checking. This also contributed to the validity of the findings. In the researcher's quest to fulfil the validity mechanism that proposes a prolonged period in the data site, he participated in three activities across the sampled brand communities for the participant observations. The final research report was also shared with two peer debriefers who are colleague PhD students in the Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship of the University of Ghana Business School to read and ascertain whether the qualitative account as narrated resonates with them beyond the researcher's understanding. Finally, the study's findings were discussed using thick and rich descriptions. The thick description of the findings has the potential to immerse readers in scenes depicted in the report. This gives a sense of

shared experiences with the participants in the discussions. When qualitative researchers provide comprehensive descriptions of the research setting and present multiple views on a given issue, the outcomes of the study become more authentic and valid.

Furthermore, Creswell and Creswell (2018), as well as Yin (2018), define qualitative reliability as the extent to which the research processes and findings are consistent, dependable, and stable. Gibbs (2007) proposes some mechanisms to ensure reliability, and this includes cross-checking transcripts to be sure they are devoid of any palpable errors, ensuring a consistent definition of codes and themes, and attaining inter-coder agreement. To attain reliability for this present study, two Graduate Assistants were recruited from the Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship of the University of Ghana Business School to review and crosscheck the code sheet that was generated by the principal researcher to ascertain whether they agreed with the codes generated and would have generated similar codes if handed the transcripts. This eventually led to intercoder reliability and agreement. The transcripts were also scrutinised over and over again to purge them of any conspicuous errors. Overall, these activities contributed to the reliability of the study.

### **5.11 Chapter Summary**

This chapter set out to outline the empirical components of this study by detailing the methodological choices and data collection and treatment techniques. The chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the philosophical assumptions that serve as the foundation for the study by precisely outlining the ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological viewpoints that informed this research. By clearly providing these underlying assumptions, the reader is afforded a deeper understanding of the philosophical framework that

guided the researcher's thinking and perspectives. Again, the research paradigms and their corresponding approaches were discussed. This offers a coherent justification for the selected qualitative approaches within the wider research context. The detailed explanation of the research design, highlighting the complex relationship between the case study methodology, strategies for data collection, and the specific methods utilised to gather comprehensive and contextually relevant data that is essential to achieving the research objectives, were all discussed.

The chapter also highlights the data analysis mechanisms as well as ethical considerations that were made throughout the data collection process. These considerations encompass informed consent, participant confidentiality, and the imperative for researchers to be polite and culturally sensitive. The precise detailing of these ethical principles serves to underline the commitment to upholding them. Finally, a discussion on the concepts of validity and reliability emphasising the steps implemented to guarantee the credibility and robustness of the qualitative data gathering and analysis procedures was provided in the chapter. As such, there is an assurance of strengthening the methodological basis upon which the subsequent research outcomes and inferences are established. Overall, this chapter offers a thorough and substantiated framework for the empirical aspect of the study by establishing the foundation for the empirical analysis in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER SIX

### PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

#### 6.0 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter has focused on the philosophical assumptions, research paradigm, the research approach that underpins this work and the sampling techniques employed to solicit responses from the informants. It also details the data collection strategies and processes adopted, the ethical considerations that were in place to collect data from all the human subjects, and the treatment of the data. Above all, the qualitative validity and reliability mechanisms adopted to demonstrate the trustworthiness of the data and the results have all been discussed in the previous chapter. These discussions have contributed to the general authenticity of the findings and the level of transparency and replicabilities that are required in such a scientific endeavour (Bryan, 2015).

In line with the objectives and research questions that underpin this research, this chapter focuses on reporting the analysed data by highlighting the key findings and outcomes of the study. In line with Brennen's (2022) argument that qualitative research offers the researcher the opportunity to interpret and discuss the data collected deeply and rigorously, the data was analysed thematically with the help of the MAXQDA Software. MAXQDA is a computer-aided software that allows for qualitative data coding and analysis. In order to determine the frequency of coded materials, the analysis included looking at the co-occurrences of parent codes and subcodes in addition to the descriptive statistics of the coded data. In line with the strategy of Mensah et al. (2023), we determined a criterion for code occurrences by considering both parent and subcodes to be important only if they appeared in our data at least three times. As such, any code co-occurrences that fell below the three-point cutoff were deemed

inconsequential and were eliminated as a result. This helped in maintaining analytical simplicity and clarity.

Furthermore, as indicated in the previous chapter, data was collected through interviews, focus group discussions, and participant observations. To grant the research participants anonymity (Croucher & Cronn-Mills, 2019), they were pseudonymised in this analysis. Therefore, the names that appear in the analysis are not their real names and are made up to make the reading of this report much easier and relatable, as done by previous researchers like Hayes et al. (2023).

## 6.1 Participant Demography

As indicated in the previous chapter, the importance of sample size in qualitative research lies in the emphasis on the quality and depth of data rather than the sheer number of participants. In collecting data for this study, the aim was to strike a balance between gathering sufficient information to comprehensively address the research questions and data overload (Morse, 1995). This means that reaching data saturation (Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 1995) was a priority (Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 1995). Albeit the case, there were a total of eight focus group discussions comprising six participants in each, who are members of the four brand communities under investigation (Tecno Fans GH, Ecobank Top Depositors Club, Shell Club, and Rainbow Radio Listeners Club). This brings the total of focus group participants to 48. Again, there were eight interviews conducted with the representatives of the brands around which the communities are built. This brings the total number of participants in this study to 56. The breakdown of their demographic information is in **Table 2.0** and **Table 3.0** below.

**Table 1.0 Demographic Profile of Focus Discussion Participants**

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Sample Composition</b>
	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>Age</b>	
18 - 30 yrs	26
31 - 40 yrs	16
41 - 50 yrs	5
51 - 60 yrs	1
61 yrs and above	0
<b>Gender</b>	
Males	40
Females	8
<b>Educational Level</b>	
Basic School	12
Secondary School	23
Tertiary Undergraduate	11
Tertiary Postgraduate	1
No Education	1
<b>Employment</b>	
Unemployed	7
Self Employed	6
Employed	22
Student	13
<b>Nationality</b>	
Ghanaian	46
Non-Ghanaian	2
<b>Years Spent in Brand Community</b>	
0 - 5 yrs	42
6 - 10 yrs	4
11 - 15 yrs	1
15 yrs and above	1

***Level of Engagement in Brand Community Activities***

Very Often	36
Often	8
Seldom	4
<hr/>	
N = 48	

From Table 2.0 above, it can be gleaned that the majority of the participants (54%) are in the 18 to 30 years age bracket, sending an indication of the youthful nature of the members in the brand communities under study. There is, however, an imbalanced gender distribution among the focus group discussion participants, and as indicated in the table, male participants make up 83% of the total, at the expense of the female participants. In terms of educational level, the majority of the focus group discussion participants had completed at least second cycle education. Again, the majority of the participants (96%) are Ghanaians, gainfully employed, and have spent between zero and five (0-5) years in their respective brand communities. In the estimation of the researcher, the duration spent by the majority of the participants in the brand communities is sufficient for them to provide useful insights about the operations of the brand communities. The demography of the interview participants is also presented in **Table 3.0** below.

***Table 2.0 Demographic Profile of Interview Participants***

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Sample Composition</b>	
	<b>Frequency</b>	
<b><i>Age</i></b>		
18 - 30 yrs		1
31 - 40 yrs		3
41 - 50 yrs		3
51 - 60 yrs		1

61 yrs and above	0
<b><i>Gender</i></b>	
Males	7
Females	1
<b><i>Educational Level</i></b>	
Basic School	0
Secondary School	0
Tertiary Undergraduate	2
Tertiary Postgraduate	6
No Education	0

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N = 8

From the table above, the majority of the interview participants, who are predominantly male, fall between the ages of 31 and 50 years and have postgraduate qualifications. These participants have been brand managers for at least five years and have indicated knowledge of the existence of the brand communities, making them suitable for the discussions leading to the data analysis below.

## **6.2 Narratives from the Field**

For the purposes of this presentation, the general observations and narratives from the research field are presented first before the specific responses to the research questions underpinning the study. This is to help provide a panoramic view of some of the critical issues emerging from the data to put the specific responses in a certain perspective. Generally, participants have argued that their quest to form the brand communities was largely a demonstration of their passion for the brand rather than any commercial motives. Two of the brand communities studied (Ecobank Top Depositors Club and the Shell Club) were brand-initiated communities.

In contrast, the Tecno Fans GH and the Rainbow Radio Listeners Club were consumer-initiated communities. Even though the founders of these brand communities differ, no visible differences were observed in their operations. The brand managers were very much aware of the existence of these brand communities and generally showed a positive disposition towards their affiliate communities. For example, one of the brand managers, Mr Kusi, said

*I know a lot about Tecno Fans GH. That is our brand community. It's an important part of our marketing plan because it helps us get to know our customers better. We interact with the public on social media platforms and at events to get feedback and make people loyal to our brand. The market has become very competitive, so if you don't devise these strategies, it will not help at all.*

Another brand manager with Ecobank, Kwame, intimated that they pay key attention to the nature of customer experiences that are shared in their brand community.

*I know of the club and its activities, which are mainly done through online platforms and some offline activities too. It's a community where a lot of interactions happen among the members. They are a priority group, so we pay key attention to the experiences they share with us and ensure we provide feedback on our services on time.*

On the formation of the brand communities, it was observed that many of the community members did not know or care about how the brand community was formed. A lot of them claimed to have joined these communities without questioning the motive behind the formation

of the community. This may be attributable to the claims of (Carlson et al., 2019) that brand community members could be driven by their passion for a brand and join the community such that the peripheral issues associated with the community would not matter to them. One of the brand community members, Adwoa, said

*I can't pinpoint the moment of creation, and I didn't even ask. I joined the Facebook group in the early days of 2017. I was drawn to Tecno Mobile due to its affordability and beautiful design. The efficiency as well. When I got it, I wanted to know more about the brand, so I searched Facebook with the name of the mobile phone, and I came across the community and have become a member since then. I met other group members who shared these interests as well, and I have made great friends since.*

Another brand community member, Kobby, claims that the brand community was formed because the represented brand saw the need to group their high-end customers into one community so they can interact and engage with each other as well as the brand.

*...the Ecobank Top Depositors Club was created to recognise and reward our continuous commitment to the bank. The bank recognised its most valued depositors and decided to build a network where all of us could interact with each other, share our experiences, and enjoy special advantages. The goal was to create a good connection among customers who entrusted the bank with very big deposits. I recall receiving an invitation to join the club. It was wonderful because it seemed like the bank had acknowledged my loyalty. This provides a chance to meet other top depositors and bankers, and it always feels great.*

Another point of importance to this study was the level of engagement that existed between the leadership of the brand communities and the managers of the represented brands. It was observed that there were very cordial and regular engagements between the leaders of the communities and the brand managers. This is important for the growth and ultimate benefits of the brand communities. One of the brand managers, Essuman, said

*... part of our plan is to work with the leaders of our brand community. Every now and then, we get to talk about issues affecting the community, and that also gives us the opportunity to get feedback from them and other community members. That way, we can work together to co-create initiatives that help both the customers and our business.*

Another manager, Abigail, says, "... we keep a good relationship with the leaders of the club. We stay in touch with the members, too, by keeping our doors open to them". Some of the leaders have also corroborated these claims by stating that even though there are no special treatments given to them, they feel very respected by the brand managers. Ali, one of the brand community leaders, said

*Well, I will not say that they give us (leaders) any special treatment because we still buy the phones just like our friends. But once in a while, they will call on us to give our opinions about something or to mobilise our friends for a float or something. So yes, I will say they know us and respect us a lot.*

Another Brand community leader corroborated these claims by stating that they are always a pot of call when the brand wants feedback from the community.

*... you know we are the chiefs or community leaders of the club, so they always get in touch with us to see what members think of their programmes, and they also ask what they can do to help us. Sometimes, we go through the radio station to get sponsorships from some of the companies that work with them whenever we have upcoming programmes. So I will say our (leaders) relationship with the managers and the presenters is very good and cordial...*

Another point of importance for this study was the kinds of social aspirations that the community members have and whether these aspirations are being met or not. This aligns with Hsieh et al.'s (2022) argument that brand communities are bound to fail if they are unable to drive participation and engagement in a manner that will be at variance with the social aspirations of community members. Many of the brand community members have claimed that one of their most pressing social aspirations is to expand their networks because networking drives a lot of social influence. In a country where the citizenry places a premium on social relations to gain favours and get a lot of things done (Kumi & Copestake, 2021), this finding is not surprising. One of the focus group participants said

*In Ghana, a lot of the things you can achieve are based on how many people you know. In the club, we have a lot of professionals, and this means that when you belong to such a group, you can get many advantages. The last time one of our members was sick, we*

*spoke to another member who is a Doctor at 37, and he quickly came to her aid. This is one big example I can remember.*

In a similar response, a participant of the Ecobank Top Depositors Club said

*One of my social goals is to build a strong network of people who share my interests. I want to meet other top investors who have the same financial interests and goals as me. I hope that these relationships will help us work together on business projects, share our investment knowledge, and help each other grow. I also aim to use my financial status to give back to society. Being a member of the club gives me the opportunity to participate in charitable initiatives where we can continue to impact society.*

The account above indicates that there are other social benefits brand community members enjoy from their engagements and participation in the activities of the community. Whereas this is a positive thing because it is likely to sustain their stay in the community, brand managers must be careful so that this phenomenon does not cause any digressions in the main aim of forming and supporting the brand communities.

Furthermore, through the participant observations, it was observed that community members show a great deal of enthusiasm towards the activities of the brand community. You hardly find any lethargic attitude towards any call to duty. Members interact with each other on several issues, ranging from news about the brand to social issues outside of the core focus of the community. These interactions show the camaraderie that exists in these communities even

though each member is assigned different roles and responsibilities. The roles are well coordinated, with very few deviations or glitches. For example, it was observed during the cleanup exercise organised by the Rainbow Radio Listeners Fun Club that members were enthused about the whole exercise of tidying up the Abelemkpe area. This area was strategically chosen because that is the physical location of the radio station (represented brand). The members appeared in their white branded T-shirts to undertake the clean-up exercise. You can observe that members were not bothered about the colour of the T-shirts and were not careful when cleaning the gutters and the streets. It was also observed that members cheered each other on with symbolic gestures and brand chants, demonstrating their love and loyalty towards the brand.

Another very key observation was that during the exercise, the brand community members unanimously and impulsively hooted at a vehicle that passed by and coincidentally bared the brand of a competitor media house. This was a display of oppositional loyalty towards competing brands. This finding is in tandem with the assertions of Liao et al. (2020) and Marticotte et al. (2016), who argued that customers, in their quest to demonstrate their loyalty to a brand, may end up exhibiting negative and antagonistic attitudes and even engage in hostile behaviours against competing or rival brands.

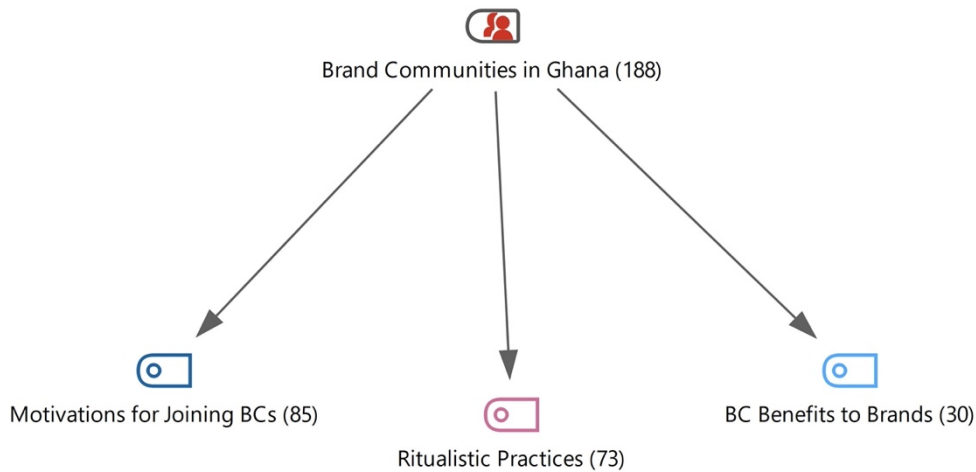
Furthermore, not much of the oppositional loyalty mentioned above has been observed in the outdoor activity of the Ecobank Top Depositors club when they converged to play Golf. However, they also showed a lot of enthusiasm and friendliness towards each other. They demonstrated geniality and talked about several topics, including politics and social issues. Only a few of them had branded sports kits under the name Ecobank, and these kits were not

the major ones they used. Kits such as hand bands and headbands were the only ones observed to be branded under the name Ecobank. Major kits such as joggers, shorts, and T-shirts, among others, were under different brand names. This phenomenon could be attributed to the kinds of support they claim they receive from the bank. These supports include tailored and accelerated banking services as opposed to strategic social investments in the activities of the brand communities. Overall, they showed love for the Ecobank brand in several other ways, including symbolic gestures and hailing.

### 6.3 Responses to Specific Research Questions

The ultimate aim of this study is to build a formative framework for marketing and public relations professionals in Ghana and other emerging markets to utilise brand communities as an alternative business strategy. This will help develop sustainable relationships with the public in a manner that does not only engender brand love and loyalty but also positive brand evangelism and oppositional loyalty towards rival brands. To be successful at this, the study responded to three major research questions: *1. What are the various motivations behind brand community members' interest in joining and participating in brand community activities? 2. What are the rituals and traditions performed in these brand communities? 3. What benefits do the represented brands derive from the existence of the brand communities?* The study collected context-specific and socially nuanced data to respond to these questions appropriately. **Figure 10.0** below depicts the single hierarchical code-subcodes that have emerged from the coding and thematisation of the transcript with the help of the MAXQDA software.

## Single Hierarchical Code-Subcodes for BCs in Ghana



**Figure 10.0 (Single Hierarchical Code-Subcodes showing the Major Themes) Source: Author's Creation**

From the figure above, it can be gleaned that three major themes emerged out of the coding and thematisation of the transcript. These themes are Motivations for Joining Brand Communities (with nine different codes), Ritualistic Practices (with nine different codes), and Brand Community Benefits to Brands (with six different subcodes). In all, Motivations for Joining Brand Communities carry a total of 85 code frequencies, Ritualistic Practices carry 73 code frequencies, and Brand Community Benefits to Brands carry a total of 30 code frequencies. The following sections will discuss the themes in detail.

### 6.4 Motivations for Joining Brand Communities in Ghana

The first research question sought to explore the motivations that influence members to join and participate in brand communities. Avery and Mittal (2017) assert that the concept of motivation explains the human drive to achieve specific objectives. This implies that members

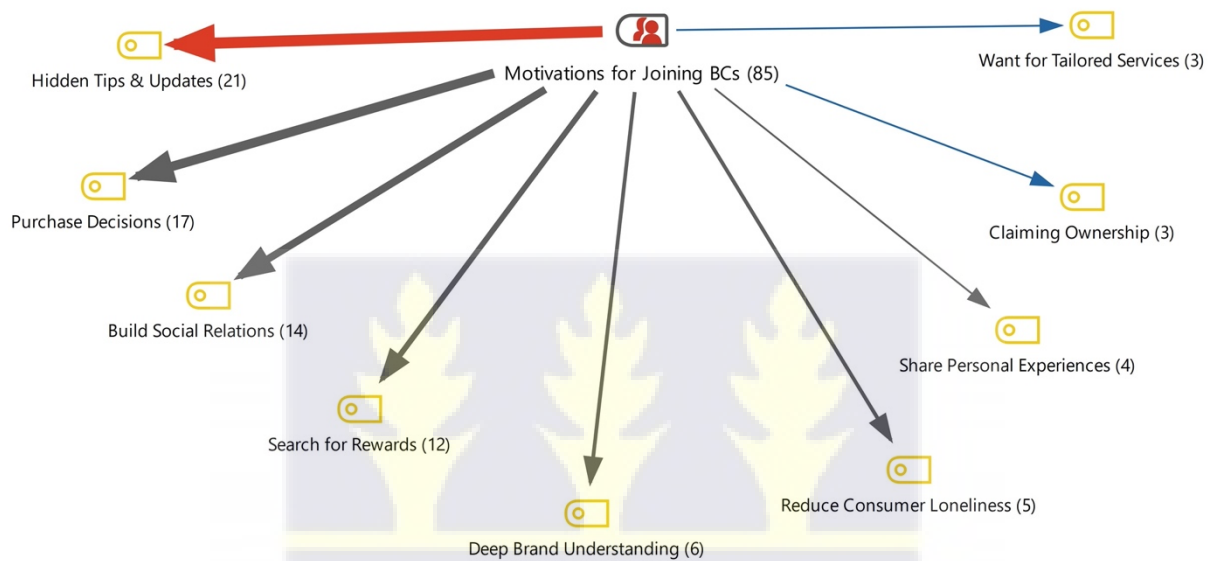
of brand communities may possess distinct motivations for their engagement and participation in community activities to achieve particular social outcomes. Indeed, in the consumer behaviour literature, motives play a very significant role in predicting brand-customer relational outcomes and as argued by Haverila et al. (2020c), they are better predictors of engagement in brand communities than personal identity.

At face value, there may be misconceptions that consumers may join brand communities only because they want to engage in brand-related activities. This turned out not to be the case after all. As evidenced in the findings presented in **Figure 11.0** below, it was revealed that consumers join brand communities for several reasons other than brand-related activities. The significance of examining this phenomenon lies in the necessity for brands to comprehend the motives of both existing and prospective community members. By understanding and addressing these motivations, brands can enhance member satisfaction and foster greater brand affinity. This is an important part of the formative framework because it can guide future marketing communication pieces that will be curated to encourage consumers to form or join brand communities. **Figure 11.0** below shows the sub-themes (codes) that emerged to form the theme “Motivations for Joining BCs”.

It can be gathered from the figure below that a total of nine factors (codes) have emerged from the data as the push or pull factors that shape members’ quest to join brand communities. The factor “Hidden Tips & Updates” is the most frequently articulated factor that induces members’ interest in joining brand communities in Ghana. It carries a frequency count of 21 out of the 85 frequency counts for the theme in question, and that is also reflected in the size of the arrow. It is also highlighted in red to show this superiority in numbers. Again, the figure shows that the

least articulated factor (with an arrow highlighted in blue) is “Share Personal Experiences”. It carries a frequency count of four out of the total of 85 frequency counts for the theme under investigation.

### Single Hierarchical Code-Subcodes for Motivation



**Figure 11.0 (Single Hierarchical Code-Subcodes showing Factors that Motivate people to join BCs Source: Author’s Creation**

#### 6.4.1 Hidden Tips & Updates

As previously mentioned, participants in the focus group discussions indicated that a primary motivation for joining brand communities is the desire to access exclusive tips and updates about the products and services of the associated brand. They argue that after acquiring a product, there is usually a limited understanding of how it works, and this typically pushes them to join brand communities to find some of these hidden updates or tips. John, one of the participants in the Tecno Fans GH, reiterated his motivation for joining the brand community.

*I became a member of the community so that I could enhance my understanding of my Tecno phone so I could use it better. I just felt that joining this community of Tecno lovers would let me get some useful advice and tips. Also, it was about the frequent updates. I wanted to know the new updates about the phone, so I joined for an explanation of these updates.*

This finding is in consonance with the postulations of Chan (2017), who asserts that consumers are likely to be driven by extrinsic motives to join brand communities because these types of motives are characterised by tangible rewards or outcomes.

#### **6.4.2 Purchase Decisions**

The second most articulated motive for joining brand communities in Ghana is making purchase decisions. The participants claim that they join brand communities to look for information that will help make purchasing decisions easier, as sometimes, they are confused about which particular product type or service to pay for. With smiles, Akwesi, another participant, claims that joining the brand community has helped him overcome some of the most confusing moments in his life.

*Sometimes, you are confused about which of the products to buy or which ones people are talking about the most. Since I joined the club, this tension has reduced for me paa because I will hear other colleagues do reviews, and that will give you some clarity on*

*the way forward and which of the products you should also buy. Me sometimes, I want to even know the one more people are using so I can buy the opposite because I want to be unique. (Akwesi, Tecno FGD)*

#### **6.4.3 Build Social Relations**

This study found that another predominant motive for members to join brand communities is their quest to build new social relations and networks. This discovery aligns with the claims of Haverila et al. (2020c) that some of the motives that drive brand community members to join and engage in the activities of the community could be finding new friends. As indicated above, this is in sharp contrast with popularly held opinions that community members join brand communities solely because of brand-related activities. Joyce, one of the participants in the Ecobank Top Depositors Club, makes the following assertion.

*...for me, it was all about the networking opportunities available. Being a member of a community of top depositors meant that I would be able to meet and connect with others who share my financial or commercial interests, which would provide a good opportunity for personal and professional development. I also joined because of the personal financial services... (Joyce, Ecobank FGD)*

Another participant corroborated the assertions above.

*My goal is to grow my social network and meet people who share my passions. Through the community, I want to make new friends so that I can get help from other people or also help other people. This, I must say, has helped so much. Now, I have friends who are lawyers and doctors all because of this community. (Haki, Shell FGD)*

Again, another member of the Rainbow Radio Listeners Club corroborates the claims above.

*I wanted to make new friends with other loyal listeners because I could also be recognised and admired by the station and other members of the club. This is what led me to join it. I wanted to feel valued as a loyal listener and get special friends and also special mentions on air. So, I can say so far, I am getting the recognition I wanted, and it is making me feel like I'm an important part of the community. Almost every member of the club knows me now. (Yolanda, Rainbow FGD)*

#### **6.4.4 Search for Rewards**

Other brand community members claim that they are pushed to join brand communities in Ghana in search of rewards, discounts, and other incentives. This finding contradicts the assertions of van Heerden and Wiese (2021) that the statement that all three utilitarian motives (convenience, information seeking, and remuneration) are significant predictors of brand community engagement was not true. On the contrary, brand community members in Ghana demonstrated that when presented with brand-related rewards and incentives, they were very likely to join brand communities and engage in their activities. We observed that some brand-related rewards and perks were exclusive to only some community members, and some of these

utilitarian rewards accounted for community members' quest to join brand communities. Erasmus, one of the members of the Shell Club, made the following assertions.

*I was looking for ways to cut down on my monthly fuel costs, which take up the majority of the income I make. The community offers special deals and discounts that are only available to community members. Those discounts were very attractive, and they met my need to save money, so I joined. Also, the extra car services they offer to community members pushed me to join them. If I weren't a part of the community, I would have been paying more for those services elsewhere. (Erasmus, Shell FGD)*

#### **6.4.5 Deep Brand Understanding**

Another factor articulated by the participants as accounting for their motivation to join brand communities is their quest to get an in-depth understanding of the represented brands. These members have shown that they are looking for in-depth brand insights and knowledge and, as a result, are drawn to join these brand communities. Indeed, the literature supports the assertion that consumers are interested in learning more about companies for several reasons, including forging emotional connections, thorough understanding, and having the ability to make well-informed decisions (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). It was observed that even though these individuals have demonstrated a strong affinity for the brand and a deep interest in its mission, values, and offerings, they sometimes felt the need for further insights, and they believed that this gap would be filled when they joined the communities. They claim that in the communities, they obtain in-depth information, exchange stories, and pick up tips from other brand fanatics by participating in the community's activities. Their entire brand experience is improved by

this deeper understanding, which also helps them to appreciate the details of the brand, make more educated decisions, and identify more closely with its identity. In the end, this drive strengthens consumers' emotional bonds with the company, which increases advocacy, brand loyalty, and brand evangelism. Joana makes the following claims to support the assertions above.

*You know, when I used to listen to the show live, I have been wondering how things work and I even sometimes imagine myself doing it. So, I have always wanted the opportunity to get closer to the presenters and have a deeper understanding of how they do their things. So I was so happy when I first heard of the fun club. I said to myself that my dreams will come through. I will get more understanding, so I quickly joined them, and I registered. I will say our visit to the station and other events have really made me better understand how things work now, and I can say it's not easy. (Joana, Rainbow FGD)*

These claims are in tandem with the assertions of Escalas and Bettman (2005), who argued that consumers will search for deeper information about brands to help them build and express their self-identity. This, they argue, helps them to align their individual identities to the identity of the brand. Furthermore, Park et al. (2010) observed that a deeper brand understanding increases consumer pleasure and trust because it empowers them to make better judgements about the goods and services they choose to interact with. For instance, consumers who become deeply aware of a brand's sustainability and green practices become predisposed to support the brand because their principles align with those of the brand. This can lead to positive attitudes, such as brand advocacy and trust towards the brand (Keller, 2003).

#### **6.4.6 Reduce Consumer Loneliness**

Another motivating factor observed from the participants is the quest to reduce consumer loneliness. Consumer loneliness is a psychological state that occurs when consumers perceive a deficiency in their social relations regarding a product or service they consume (Kim et al., 2005). As argued by previous scholars (Larsen et al., 1999; Pansari & Kumar, 2017), this psychological state can affect the consumers' choices and their relationship with the brands. Even though it is not one of the most articulated motivating factors for joining brand communities, we observed that some participants exhibited this perceived deficiency in their social relations when they consumed certain products, which accounted for why they joined the brand community to find other consumers and reduce their loneliness. Kofi, one of the focus group participants, expressed their social anxiety in feeling alone when consuming a product from their admired brand and claimed that in search of social connections and to get a sense of belongingness.

*... I first joined their Facebook page because, at some point, I was wondering if I was the only one using Tecno mobile phone. My friends who used other phone brands used to tease me a lot, so I started searching online to see if I can also vibe with other people who use Tecno. That is how I found myself in the club. Now I can say that the loneliness is gone because I have people who have something in common like me and I feel that I belong there. (Kofi, Tecno FGD)*

Matipa, another participant, claims that she had to abandon one brand and become a fan of another because he felt lonely following it, while others within her circles did the opposite.

*... so, in those days, I used to listen to a certain radio station a lot. I don't know if I am allowed to mention the name, but my friends and some of the people in my area forced me to stop. Do you know why? They will talk about the programmes of Rainbow Radio and even discuss some of the events they organise and all. At some point, I felt left out and lonely listening to my previous radio station, so I had no choice but to switch. You know what they say: if you can't beat them, join them. (Matipa, Rainbow FGD)*

These findings corroborate studies conducted by Pansari and Kumar (2017), which show that consumers who are alone tend to get more attached to companies and goods that represent friendship or social bonds. Since lonely people depend on these businesses to satisfy their unfulfilled social requirements, this attachment may promote brand loyalty and positive repurchase behaviours. In addition, Shrum et al. (2022) discovered that lonely customers may become more active on social media and in online groups as a means of reducing their loneliness.

#### **6.4.7 Share Personal Experiences**

One of the main reasons participants claimed to push them to join brand communities is their interest in sharing their personal experiences. The study observed that the participants are motivated by their innate need to interact with people who share their interests and to represent who they are by associating with a brand. Indeed, McAlexander et al. (2002) aver that brand communities give consumers a place to talk about their feelings, experiences, and stories associated with the brand, which promotes a sense of belonging. They argued that the sharing of personal experiences strengthens the community's identity as a whole as well as the

individual's bond with the brand. Junior, another focus group discussion participant, claims the following.

*The main aim of joining the community is to look for a platform where I can share my knowledge and experiences of the brand with others who may be in need. Since most of us have some very good tips and tricks that we use, I thought that it might be easier to start sharing information with each other in the Facebook group community. Most often, some group members post issues that they encounter with their devices that they cannot resolve on their own in the group. So, some of us come in quickly to give advice and solutions to fellow members. (Junior, Tecno FGD)*

These observations find expression in the assertions of Schau et al. (2009) that sharing personal stories in brand communities might result in the co-creation of brand value. By sharing their stories, community members deepen their emotional connections with one another and enhance the meaning of the brand. They also add to the collective knowledge and culture of the group. The brand and its customers gain from this co-creation process since it increases engagement and loyalty. Furthermore, Tsai and Men (2017) have shown that the social and psychological advantages of community involvement correlate with the desire to share personal experiences. They argued that consumers share their experiences and get feedback from their peers in order to get validation, support, and appreciation from them. Their attachment to the brand and sense of self-worth are both increased by this engagement, which also meets their social aspirations.

#### 6.4.8 Claiming Ownership

Another key observation in this study was the participants' claim of psychological ownership of the brands. The concept of psychological ownership describes the idea that a thing or brand belongs to someone even when they do not own it (Dawkins et al., 2015). Having this sense of ownership can be a strong incentive for people to interact with brands. Customers are more inclined to participate in brand-supporting activities, such as joining brand communities where they may express their attachment and influence others when they have a strong psychological feeling of ownership.

According to Pierce et al. (2001), psychological ownership stems from three primary elements: mastery over the thing or brand in question, deep familiarity with the object, and self-investment in the object. They claim that people who have a sense of ownership over a brand may become more devoted to it and advocate for it to preserve and strengthen their ownership. Through encounters with like-minded individuals, customers can demonstrate their loyalty to a brand and develop their connection to it by joining brand communities. This study found that, albeit one of the least articulated motivating factors, participants articulated their quest to demonstrate psychological ownership as one of the push factors to join and participate in the activities of the brand community. Adjetey, a member of the Rainbow Fan Club, made the following declaration.

*For me, Rainbow is my station. I listen to it 24/7 so if they are doing any programme, I think I should be part of them. I will even say that some of the people in the fan club are new and strangers who were just transformed to become listeners so if they "kroaa"*

*they are part, how much more we the owners who have been with the station from day one? (Adjetey, Rainbow FGD)*

These claims reflect the assertions of Fuchs et al. (2010), who discovered that customers are more inclined to engage in brand communities and make contributions to brand-related activities when they experience a sense of psychological ownership. They perceive taking part in the activities of the brand communities as an opportunity to strengthen their bond with the brand and demonstrate their ownership, which strengthens their dedication and devotion even more.

#### **6.4.9 Want for Tailored Services**

Again, one of the least articulated push factors for joining brand communities is the consumer's want for tailored services rendered by the brand. Tailored services are interactions that are specifically tailored to meet the needs and preferences of each consumer (Franke et al., 2009). When customers look for customised services, they frequently want a more unique brand experience than what is provided generically. As indicated, this study observed that one of the main reasons the brand community members join and participate in the activities of the brand communities is the desire for personalised services from the represented brand. Ato, one of the members of the Ecobank Top Depositors Club, claims that he was convinced to join the club because he wanted tailored banking services.

*One of my needs is to be able to get personalised banking services. As someone who always saves huge sums of money at the bank, I needed advice on the best banking*

*products and expedited services. I will say this level of personalised service was something the club offered, and it was a big reason why I chose to join. I also needed faster and better customer service. Before I joined the club, dealing with the bank would sometimes take too long. As a member, I knew I would get tailored services and support that fit my needs. (Ato, Ecobank FGD)*

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002) assert that improving customer happiness and loyalty requires personalised service. Customers like interactions that recognise their distinct preferences and offer customised solutions to address their specific issues. As brand communities frequently offer more direct and customised interactions with the company, joining one might give customers access to such customised offerings. Furthermore, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) stress how crucial co-creation is to providing individualised services. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) contend that there is a growing trend among customers to actively participate in co-creation activities with companies, whereby they can influence the design and personalisation of goods and services. Brand communities provide a forum for this kind of co-creation by inviting participants to share their thoughts and opinions, which may result in more specialised and individualised products from the brand.

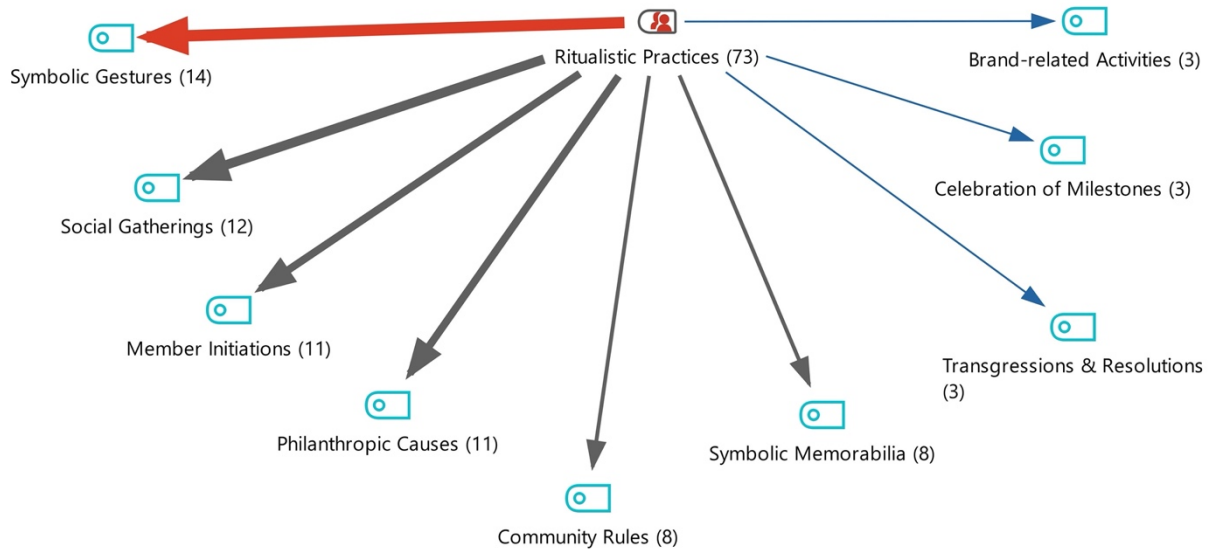
What is more, Schau et al. (2009) discovered that brand communities help individuals share individualised knowledge and experiences. These discussions reinforce people's decision to join and stay involved in the community, which gives them the impression that the brand understands and caters to their unique needs (Schau et al., 2009).

### 6.5 Ritualistic Practices in Brand Communities in Ghana

The next major theme and research question explored in this study is to understand the ritualistic practices of the brand communities. In brand communities, ritualistic practices are the shared routines and the manifestations of the collectively repeated activities and behavioural patterns that the community members engage in to communicate with each other and build a sense of togetherness (Yang et al., 2022). According to Schau et al. (2009), these practices manifest through a variety of activities like meetings, events, customs, and other symbolic activities. They argued that these activities reinforce a member's sense of belonging to the group or brand to which they are tied. In addition to creating a sense of community among themselves, these activities engender a sense of emotional connection and belonging to the brand itself. It is important to explore the ritualistic practices of the brand communities because it can help marketing strategists to better understand how customers co-create the meaning and value of brands, strengthening their case for managing customer-brand interactions (Cova & Pace 2006; Liu et al., 2024).

**Figure 12.0 below** depicts the subcodes that have emerged from the data under the theme “Ritualistic Practices in Brand Communities in Ghana.” It can be gleaned from the figure below that a total of nine different ritualistic practices (codes) were uncovered. The use of symbolic gestures in the brand communities is one of the most articulated ritualistic practices in the brand communities under study, carrying a frequency count of 14. Other ritualistic practices like frequent social gatherings, member initiations, and philanthropic courses are among the most frequently articulated practices, while celebrating milestones and engaging in brand-related activities form part of the least frequently articulated ritualistic practices in the brand communities

## Single Hierarchical Code-Subcodes for Rituals



**Figure 12.0 (Single Hierarchical Code-Subcodes showing Ritualistic Practices in BCs  
Source: Author's Creation)**

### 6.5.1 Symbolic Gestures

Symbolic gestures refer to signals or actions that are known to members of a culture-sharing group and carry a different meaning to them beyond their literal meaning, which may be observed by an outsider who is not part of the group (Cochet & Vauclair, 2014). These gestures convey social and cultural connotations, and in the context of consumer behaviour, these symbolic gestures can be described as rituals that are deeply ingrained with the identity and values of the brand community (Schau et al., 2009). According to Schau et al. (2009), these social and solidarity actions validate the identity and perspectives of a given cultural group. This study found that symbolic gestures were quite rampant in the ritualistic practices of the brand communities under investigation. The participants emphasised that symbolic gestures allow for easy identification of members and reinforce their cultural uniqueness. When asked how they come by these ritualistic practices, the participants argued that the rituals sometimes

emerge accidentally and other times deliberately, and they grow naturally over time. They claim that the practices usually start as simple and regular activities that members enjoy or find important, and when more people join these activities, they become a tradition. Kwame, one of the participants, said the following.

*Usually, when I see someone wearing the T-shirts that display the Shell logo, I wave at them, or when they are close to me, I greet them and ask them if they are a member of the community. This does not happen often, though, but sometimes you think you have to greet them. There is always something in you that will push you to do that. I am a Trotro Driver, and most of my colleagues have stickers, so whenever I see another Trotro Driver with a sticker, I blow my horn. (Kwame, Shell FGD)*

This study also observed that in the consumers' quest to exhibit their loyalty or allegiance to the brand, they perform these symbolic gestures, and this provides that extra layer of significance to their overall experience with the brand. A Rainbow Radio Listeners Fun Club member stated,

*...during our clean-up exercises, we always begin with a prayer and a song that we all can sing. When it happens like that, we all feel more connected, and then you can say that, yes! You are a part of something bigger. (Jesse, Rainbow FGD)*

These findings reinforce the arguments of Belk and Costa (1998), who claim that symbolic gestures offer an opportunity for community members to construct sentiments of belonging

and nonconformity to established and unhelpful social norms, all of which tend to strengthen the connection between a brand and its consumers. This means that brand community members show their commitment to the business and its people through these symbolic activities, which adds another level of social and cultural meaning to consumption.

### **6.5.2 Social Gatherings**

Another very profound finding in this study is that brand community members use social gatherings as one of the ritualistic practices. The study observed that social gatherings are an important aspect of the rituals of brand communities, and members hold them dear to their hearts. The observation was that these events create an avenue for personal interactions and a sense of belonging, all of which engender stronger emotional bonds between the members of the community and, by extension, the brand. This observation is not surprising because it fits the description of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) as well as Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder, (2008) when they argued that brand communities are social entities with common awareness, rituals, and traditions. The study observed that in Ghana, social events such as attending naming ceremonies for members who have given birth or attending funerals for members who have lost a relative are some of the manifestations of these ritualistic behaviours, and these gatherings provide a forum for members to deeply engage with each other and by extension, the brand. Jojo, one of the participants, claims that these events strengthen the communal bonds that exist in the group and promote mutual respect and togetherness.

*Well, we engage in a lot of social activities like what you see us do this morning playing golf. Sometimes, too, we organise parties to celebrate a member's birthday or attend*

*funerals and child christening events to show support for our members. Besides this, we organise quarterly meetings where we address issues, take stock of the club's activities and also render accounts to members. Sometimes, we also organise seminars and workshops for members on several topical issues. I will say that these activities have become the backbone of the club because they help us grow and also strengthen the relationship between members. I will say it is what is holding us all together as one big family. (Jojo, Ecobank FGD)*

Another participant corroborated these claims by arguing that the level of social support they enjoy from the social gatherings of the community is enormous.

*We come together a lot to do so many things like our keep fit walk, picnic and so many other things. It is at these events that you will get to know some people physically because all the time we are on WhatsApp and sometimes you don't know who is who and what they do. I will say the support has been great so far because me personally, one lawyer in the club linked me up with a job. My current job oo. So you see, today, I am able to buy my basic needs because of that support. So I can tell you for a fact that being a member of the club is helping some of us. This also makes me love the radio station more because if not for them, I wouldn't have joined this club, and I wouldn't have got this job. (Linda, Rainbow FGD)*

In the reflections of Hofstede et al. (2010), through the lenses of the collectivism versus individualism cultural dimension, Ghana, like many African countries, scores low on individualism. This means that Africans prefer collectivism as a cultural attribute that

emphasises the value of group cohesion, familial relationships, and community-oriented behaviour. In such communities, people frequently prioritise the group's wants and aspirations over their own, producing a strong sense of belonging and mutual support. These attributes reflect deeply in the descriptions and accounts of the participants above. This collectivist perspective can be seen manifesting in many elements of Ghanaian society, including social gatherings and communal decision-making, as well as the emphasis on extended family networks and community involvement (Foster, 2000; Tanga, 2013).

### ***6.5.3 Member Initiations***

Member initiation is the third most articulated ritualistic practice in the brand communities in Ghana, with a code frequency of 11. This study found that the brand communities have certain rituals that are dedicated to inducting new members into the community. It was observed that this ritual was fundamental to the new member unlocking so many opportunities to join and participate in the activities of the community. Besides unlocking the chance to start participating in the activities of the communities, these initiation rituals also become grounds for cultural assimilation, which gives the members room to appreciate the core values, norms, and rules of the brand community. The induction activities come in different forms, and they differ from one community to the other. What is profound, however, is that they have Ghanaian cultural undertones, and these activities trigger a sense of belonging even from the word go. Juliana, one of the members of the Rainbow Radio Fan Club, shares her experience concerning member initiations.

*... so we don't just introduce new members raw like that. It comes with some ritual, as you put it. Sometimes, when they introduce you as a new member to the group, you will tell us who introduced you to the group and then you tell us about what you do, where you stay and all. You will also be made to tell us how you think you can contribute to the growth of the group. Then, after that, we will welcome you with ponding **[pouring water on you to welcome you to the group]**. Me my time, they even asked me to dance; it was all fun, and that way, you don't feel you are new to the group anymore. **(Juliana, Rainbow FGD)**.*

Another participant claims that in their brand community, new members are made to swear an oath of allegiance to the community and the brand itself.

*Usually, when you are a new member, you will be introduced in our next meeting. You will tell us which particular Tecno product you have and what you like about it and after all of that, you will then take our oath. This is not like an oath for a cult or anything oo. Just to pledge your support for the group and that is all. So you repeat a few words after the leader, and you are good to go. **(Emma, Tecno FGD)**.*

Indeed, such rituals not only reinforce the new individuals' sense of belonging but also promote the community's collective identity (Banerjee & Sreejesh, 2022; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In

#### 6.5.4 Philanthropic Causes

Another key observation in this study is that brand communities are incorporating philanthropic causes into their ritualistic practices as a way of helping their represented brands gain visibility while they fulfil their social aspirations of contributing their quota to the larger society. These activities frequently entail altruistic contributions, community service projects like clean-up exercises, or social responsibility programs that support the brand's values and the values of the brand communities themselves. The participants claim that participating in these initiatives enables them to develop stronger bonds with the brand and the larger Ghanaian society. Abu, one of the participants, said the following.

*You get to a certain stage in life, and you look back, and all you think of is how to give back to your society. Like social responsibility. So, I will say that is one of my social aspirations, and obviously, I look out for such an opportunity all the time. So I will say that is one of the things I like about this club because we engage in a lot of such social interventions. Like last year, we made some donations to the prison service, and this year, we may go somewhere else. We are even considering establishing a scholarship fund, and I know the bank may want to support it. We are yet to have those conversations but obviously, that is something we do annually in the club. So it's not just about banking banking all the time. Another advantage is that doing such community support activities paints a good picture of the bank because we do it in their name. (Abu, Ecobank FGD).*

These accounts were corroborated by Adwoa, a participant in the Rainbow Radio Fan Club.

*One of the things we do as a ritual is that we always engage in outreach programmes and clean-up exercises. Our members come together to show love to the needy in society, and sometimes, too, we plant trees and so on. We usually do these on Green Ghana Day. The last time, for example, we did a clean-up exercise at Abelemkpe, near the neighbourhood of the radio station, and it was something a lot of the people around there liked what we were doing. I think that is an opportunity to market ourselves too because you see a lot of people asking questions and wanting to join the club. (Adwoa, Rainbow FGD).*

The literature supports the assertion that engaging in charitable endeavours strengthens brand communities' sense of community because it brings people together around a purpose that goes beyond consumption (Cova & Pace, 2006; Gong-li et al., 2024). Again, brand communities that participate in socially beneficial activities end up establishing a favourable linkage with the brand in a manner that transcends the products or services that are on offer (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This is demonstrated in Ghana by the involvement of brand communities in development initiatives. Engaging in such activities aligns with the collective spirit of Ghanaian society, which places great importance on community and social ties. This makes philanthropic causes an effective means of fostering brand loyalty and engagement within these communities.

### 6.5.5 Community Rules

What is more, in this study, it was uncovered that the crafting and adherence to community rules and regulations have become key components of the ritualistic practices of brand communities in Ghana. This observation is a manifestation of how structured these brand communities are. This is because these rules and regulations provide a social and ethical framework that regulates the conduct of members and also imbibes in them a sense of urgency and unity. Additionally, it was observed that these community guidelines were essential for maintaining the unique character and distinctiveness of the brand communities under investigation. Indeed, these rules and regulations distinguish members from non-members and foster a sense of belonging by establishing clear social expectations and boundaries within the brand community. Some of the participants claim that knowing the rules is one of the critical processes of the onboarding protocols in the brand community.

*As for the rules and regulations, we don't joke with them at all. When a new member joins us, we let them read the rules and regulations so that they know what to expect and what not to expect in the group. This is one of the things that help us respect each other and guide our steps. Our rules talk about the criteria someone must meet to join the club, the privacy and confidentiality of issues that are discussed in the group and also the reporting lines, like who the leaders are and who to report issues to. There are also things on how to talk to each other and show respect towards everyone in the club.*

**(Edem, Shell FGD).**

Furthermore, the study observed that in some of the brand communities, the rules are unwritten, but the community members still have a way of assimilating them and making sure that every member abides by them.

*... Oh yes. There are rules and norms in our fan club, even though we have not written them. Everybody is expected to be polite and respectful towards each other so that everyone will feel safe and respected in the club. You see, this will encourage new members to also join. For example, you can't use rude or insulting words or make personal comments that show disrespect to other members because we are all like one big family. Our rules also include participation in community football events, live radio interaction sections with the station, especially on holidays, and health walks. People are always encouraged to participate in these events, and the rule is that if you can't attend any of these events, you must inform the leaders about it. (Theo, Rainbow FGD).*

In the assertions of Algesheimer et al. (2005), community rules of this nature go a long way to strengthening social ties and promoting communal cohesion within the brand communities. They also enhance the community members' interactions with each other and the brand generally because these rules are meant to safeguard and regulate the sanctity of the group, and this rubs off on the represented brand. This also creates a sense of belonging and strengthens the collective group identity of the brand communities (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Truccone-Borgogno, 2022).

### 6.5.6 Symbolic Memorabilia

The use of branded souvenirs and other merchandise forms a core part of the ritualistic practices of the brand communities under investigation, creating a symbolic identity and togetherness for the community members. At the same time, it aids in projecting the represented brand. From the accounts of the participants, it was revealed that these branded souvenirs are distributed to every member, and they strike a chord of affiliation and association with the represented brands. They also discussed how they use these branded souvenirs with pride and how they help the individual community members construct their own consumption identities. Some of the branded items mentioned are caps, T-shirts, and keyholders, which the participants claim that they wear with pride during events to show their commitment to the brand community and, by extension, the represented brand.

*Well, I'll say the Shell logo is the biggest symbol that helps me to identify another person who is likely to be part of us. Once you see someone wearing a T-shirt with the logo, you immediately feel that they are your friends or maybe they are also part of the club. Another thing, too, is the sticker. When you see the Shell sticker, usually on the petrol tank side, you will know that the person also loves to buy fuel from Shell and may be enjoying all the benefits that come with the club. (Juliana, Shell FGD).*

These claims were corroborated by Francisca, who is one of the leaders of the Rainbow Radio Fan Club.

*Yes, we have some paraphernalia which shows that you are a member of the club. That is our identity, so whenever we have an outdoor event, we wear our branded T-shirts and caps, and we make sure that every member has one and is always in good shape. Usually, when you see someone wearing that, you can tell immediately that he or she is one of you. (Francisca, Rainbow FGD).*

These proclamations are rooted in the literature on subcultures of consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995), which emphasises that members in a consumption group reinforce their ties to the brand and each other by exchanging and using these symbolic souvenirs to strengthen the social ties and common identity that are essential to the community's survival.

#### ***6.5.7 Transgressions and Resolutions***

In the context of this study, transgressions make up the conduct or actions of brand community members that violate the set down rules and regulations of the community, and the resolutions thereof encompass how these transgressions are resolved. In the interactive marketing literature, brand community failure is a huge conversation and as indicated by Liao and Wang (2020), transgressions in brand communities are likely to lead to brand community failure, which would have adverse effects on the represented brand. The participants have emphasised that transgressions and resolutions are part of the ritualistic practices of the brand communities. They recognise the effects of the transgressions and how that could lead to negative and hostile behaviours towards the represented brand. Aminu, one of the focus group discussion participants, made the following statements.

*... so, just like every family, issues will happen. You will see that this person will not be talking to another person because they have some issues to resolve. The few times issues like that happened, the leaders came in quickly. They talked to the people directly about the situation and why they should look at the bigger picture. Sometimes, too, they will caution them on the need to respect others all the time. If the behaviour doesn't change after some of these warnings, there can be more serious measures, like being sacked out from the group, maybe for a while or forever. This helps keep the other people on their toes. (Aminu, Rainbow FGD).*

These practices not only resolve issues but also ensure the continuity and growth of the brand community and reaffirm the social norms and values of the community and even the brand itself (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

#### **6.5.8 Celebration of Milestones**

Albeit one of the least articulated ritualistic practices in the brand communities under investigation, the celebration of key milestones was found to be fundamental to the cultural ceremonies that characterised the brand community members' quest to come together and demonstrate their love towards their represented brands. Key activities and events, such as the anniversary of the brand, the launch of a new product or even the anniversary of the brand community itself, attract important communal celebrations. The study also observed that these celebrations mark the shared history of the brand communities and strengthen the social ties they have within the brand community and the relationship with the brand itself, all of which have positive implications for the products and services of the brand. Akuma, one of the

participants, emphasises the importance of these celebrations to their social cohesion in the brand community.

*We don't joke with the anniversaries at all. These are like very important days, and so we mark the celebrations and usually prepare some activities to mark it. Sometimes, we have sports, and sometimes, we make donations and like a small durbar, to mark the anniversaries of the brand. These activities also help us to stay together as one big family because we get to see and interact with each other. The managers, too, do well to offer some discounts and special offers when it comes to the anniversaries, and the community leaders get to know about it and share it with us on WhatsApp. (Akuma, Tecno FGD).*

These observations align with the assertions of Cova and Cova (2002), who argue that commemorations of this nature and magnitude solidify their collective social identity and entrench the consumer-brand relations, which have been proven to ender positive behaviours like word-of-mouth recommendations and repurchase intentions (Gruber & Deschênes, 2024).

#### **6.5.9 Brand-Related Activities**

Again, one of the least articulated ritualistic practices observed in this study is engaging in brand-related activities. Even though the brand communities have their activities lined up, the community members get invited to participate in the brands' initiated activities once in a while. The participants claim that from time to time, the brand managers invite them to engage in some brand-related activities, like on-the-ground sales activations, among others. This, they

argue, is a great avenue for brand-consumer engagement because the brand community leaders feel regarded and pushed to go all out in support of the activities of the brand. Ali, one of the participants, claims that they are always willing to show up for brand-related activities.

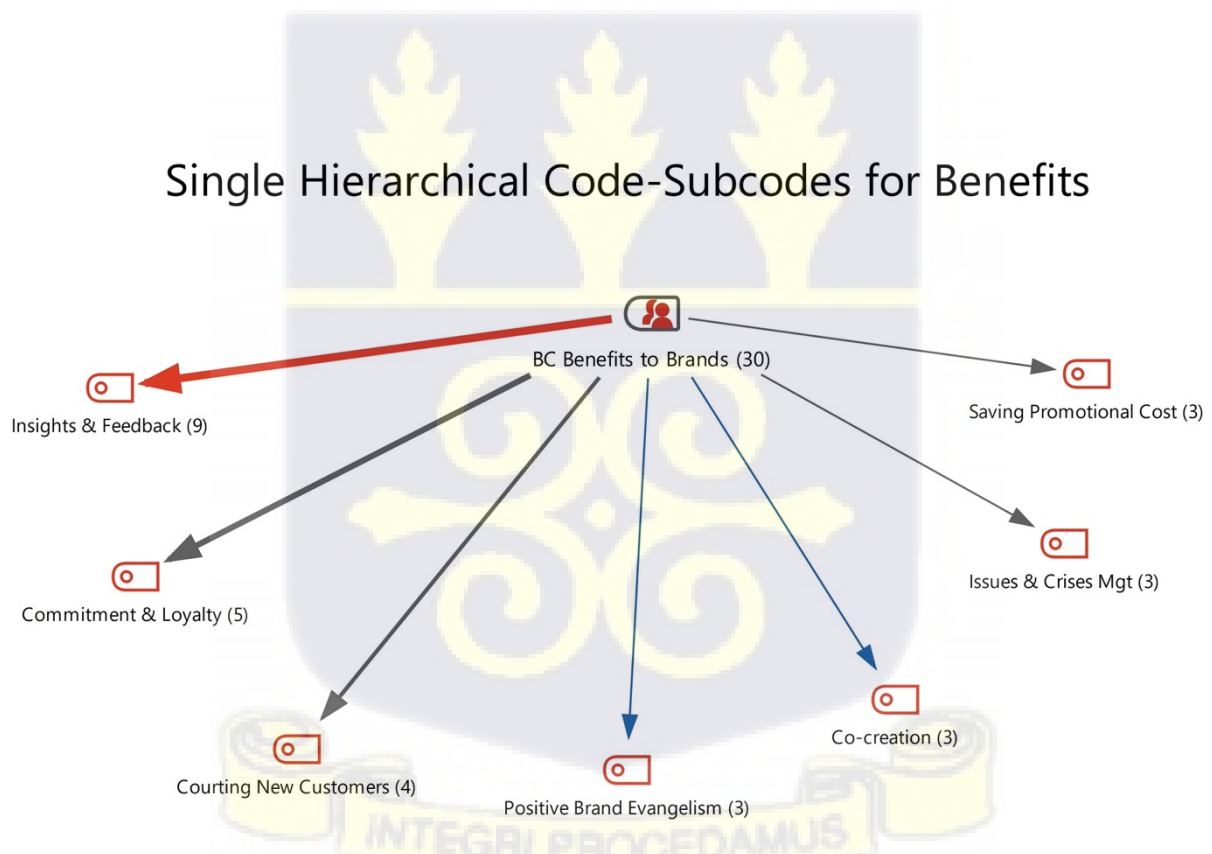
*Usually, when they are going for a float, they invite us to join. So they usually give us the Tecno T-shirts to join the big trucks with music and everything. So we help them with the numbers and everything. Sometimes, those of us who can dance do it to give some entertainment to the whole thing. Aside the money they give us, some of us are willing to go because I think they show us a lot of respect. (Ali, Tecno FGD).*

This study observed that for the brand communities under investigation in Ghana, engaging in these brand-related activities takes a social collectivist approach (Hofstede et al., 2010), which is a reflection of the social orientation of the Ghanaian people where members of the brand communities are not only helping to promote the products and services of the brand but also enhancing their consumer-consumer relations (Chen et al., 2024).

## **6.6 Brand Community Benefits to Brands**

One of the most marginalised phenomena in the brand community literature, as argued in chapter one of this study, is the benefits that the represented brands derive from the existence, activities, and engagements of their affiliate brand communities. The plethora of research on the benefits of brand communities has solely examined the phenomenon from the viewpoint of the consumers as opposed to the brand managers or from the firm's perspective (Dessart & Veloutsou, 2021; Kumar & Kumar, 2020; Siuda, 2021). This was the basis of the third research

question in this study, which explored the benefits the represented brands derive from the activities of the brand communities from the perspective of the firm. This theme has generated a total of seven subcodes, as reflected in **Figure 13.0 below**. It can also be gleaned that out of the seven subcodes that have emerged from the data under the theme “BC Benefits to Brands”, getting consumer insights and feedback from the existence and activities of the brand communities is one of the most articulated benefits, carrying a frequency count of nine. Other benefits like customer commitment and loyalty, the ability to court new customers, positive brand evangelism, brand-customer co-creation, issues and crisis management and saving costs associated with the promotion are the other benefits that have been uncovered through the semi-structured interviews conducted with the managers of the represented brand.



**Figure 13.0 (Single Hierarchical Code-Subcodes showing BC Benefits to Represented Brands Source: Author’s Creation**

The discussion on the benefits the represented brands derive from their affiliate brand communities is crucial because this information sheds light on how these communities support customer retention, brand loyalty, and overall brand equity. According to Schau et al. (2009), brand communities help customers and the brand to form strong emotional bonds that enhance positive brand evangelism, repeat purchases, and maximum loyalty. This means that a discussion like this can facilitate the resource allocations brands will make towards community-building activities to engender customer involvement and yield sustainable income. According to research, brand communities can have a big impact on a company's ability to succeed in the market by fostering a stronger bond between consumers and brands and allowing companies to use consumer feedback to inform marketing initiatives and new product development (McAlexander et al., 2002).

### ***6.6.1 Insights and Feedback***

One of the discoveries in this study is that brands, through the existence and activities of their affiliate brand communities, can easily and swiftly gather insights and feedback from consumers to improve both product and service quality. The brand managers argued that this is a great advantage because the members of the brand communities are readily available and willing to provide this feedback, which hitherto would have been difficult or expensive to collect. When asked why they think this is the case, the brand managers emphasise that traditionally, they would have paid huge sums of money for market research to get the kinds of insights that are effortlessly accessible in the communities. Adzo, one of the brand managers, reiterates these points.

*Because of the community, we can get direct feedback from customers frequently, which helps us fix problems quickly and make our services better. As of now, we all know the importance of customer feedback, so if you put together a group that can guarantee you that they all know and use your product, then it will be the best place to get information on the performance of your products and the services you render. So, we get feedback on the performance of our various phone models and also the kind of customer service they get whenever they visit our outlets. (Adzo, Tecno INT)*

Another brand manager emphasises how this phenomenon saves resources that would have been channelled into market research.

*Their feedback also helps us improve our goods and the kind of services we render because the community gives room for a lot of people to provide such feedback in real-time. So you can imagine how this singular benefit saves us a lot from intensive market research. So we do market research only when it becomes extremely necessary and when the responses we need are above the brand community. (Eugene, Shell INT)*

The literature supports the assertions that brands may gain essential insights and feedback from brand communities because they provide direct, unfiltered access to consumer thoughts, preferences, and experiences (Bozkurt et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024). Members of brand communities actively discuss their experiences with the products and services offered by the brand, giving brands access to real-time data that can be used to improve customer service, marketing strategies, and product development. Schau et al. (2009) corroborate these claims by arguing that these communities frequently participate in activities that provide group

knowledge about the brand, which companies may use to improve their products and services and better meet the demands of customers. They argued that brands are able to be more flexible and adaptable because of the degree of interaction, which eventually increases consumer happiness and loyalty.

### **6.6.2 Commitment and Loyalty**

Consumer commitment and loyalty have occupied the business strategies of many corporations as competitor businesses continue to thrive. In order to acquire the confidence and loyalty of their clients, businesses implement various schemes, including mileage programs, discounts, coupons, and co-creation activities, among others, intending to discourage customers from migrating to competitors. (Hur et al., 2011). These programs are short-lived in nature, so as they might be effective to some degree, they may not be enough to develop and maintain consumer loyalty (Gustafsson et al., 2005). As a response, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) have argued that brand communities are avenues for sustainable forms of consumer commitment and loyalty. As such, it is no surprise that brand managers articulated this as one of the major benefits derived from the activities of the brand communities. This study found that due to the strong sense of belonging that is achieved through the activities of the brand communities, the community members turn to develop commitment and loyalty towards the brand and, even sometimes, oppositional loyalty towards the competitors of the affiliate brand. Aminu, one of the brand managers, makes the following assertions.

*... another thing that makes the club very dear to our hearts is the level of commitment we get from the members. You see, if you actively participate in the club, it will get to*

*a point where you even think that you own the bank, and just like people defending their properties with all their hearts, that is the same way you would defend the bank. So I will say we get serious loyalty and commitment from these members. But this is not by magic. It is also because of the way we treat them. They are our top depositors, so we give them all the attention you will need in such a prestigious category of customers.*

**(Aminu, Ecobank INT)**

Another brand manager, John, confirms the assertions above.

*As for the brand community, I think it is a good thing with a lot of benefits. Their activities make us build a good relationship between the station and them. This is the kind of relationship that you will need to maintain your listeners and even get new ones. So as for loyalty, I will say it is not doubted at all. You should see how they promote our programmes. Sometimes without any message ooo. They themselves will go promoting our existing programme and even new ones that we develop from time to time. So the commitment, I will say, is top. (John, Rainbow INT)*

These findings corroborate existing knowledge that brand communities are based on customs, rituals, and shared consciousness that strengthen the bonds members have with the brand and themselves, and this motivates them to stick with the brand in the face of competing options (Lin et al., 2017; Haverila et al., 2020; Munnukka et al., 2015). This means that a brand community's ability to create a sense of belonging can greatly increase customer retention and decrease brand-switching behaviour.

### 6.6.3 Courting New Customers

Again, in the Ghanaian context, it was observed that the activities of the brand communities under investigation have proven to be a great avenue for attracting new customers with ease. The brand managers have emphasised that the euphoria that characterises the events of the brand communities easily attracts new customers who are sometimes glued to competing brands that do not have brand communities. They also added that they have observed that the brand communities have become fertile grounds for passionate admiration towards the represented brands, and they have seen this phenomenon degenerate into positive brand advocacy where members, on their own accord, preach about the brand to non-members, leading to multiple conversions. One of the interview participants, Emilia, avers that through their numerous community engagements, the community members naturally entice new customers to the brand.

*One of the reasons we don't joke with the Tecno Fans GH group is that because of the members' testimonies and activities in general, the group continues to appeal to new people and grow naturally. This is a community that started small, and before we knew it, we had over 13,000 new members on Facebook and still counting. You know, the economy is becoming quite difficult and that means sales will be slow. The competition out there, too, is tough. This is where you need the community the most to bring in new members who will not just buy today and go but will be kept with us because there is a side attraction, community activities. So, I think our investment in the activities of the club is really paying off. (Emilia, Tecno INT)*

Indeed, these findings are indications that in collective societies like Ghana (Hofstede et al., 2010), personal networks and social ties will play a crucial role in consumer decision-making (Ashman et al., 2015; Wang & Yu, 2017), in which case trust transfer becomes apparent. Members of the brand community can have a particularly strong influence when it comes to attracting new clients. This effect is strengthened by the communal structure that can be found within Ghanaian society, which encourages people to trust and heed the advice of their peers.

#### **6.6.4 Positive Brand Evangelism**

According to P. Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013), brand evangelism signifies a high form of brand support where consumers embark on enthusiastic advocacy and recommendation for the products and services of a brand to their social networks. They argued that members who engage in brand communities that have strong social bonds tend to exhibit these forms of support towards the brand in a manner that is sometimes unsolicited. The authors have proposed three supportive behaviours, which they claim are a combination of adoption and advocacy strategies used to operationalise brand evangelism. These behaviours are purchase intentions, positive referrals, and oppositional brand referrals. We observed that this phenomenon was prominent in the brand managers' articulation of the benefits their brands derive from the existence and activities of the brand communities. Emefa, one of the brand managers, makes the following assertions.

*It is our primary responsibility to market our products to existing and potential customers, but obviously, we can't be the only ones doing so. You need to multiply the message, and that is where the community members come in. We are aware that once*

*you treat them right, they will go out there and spread the word. So, I will say this is one of the biggest advantages of having such a social community. The oil and gas market is already crowded, so you definitely need people like these to say good things about you to others so you can continue to survive in the market. A lot of the time, we track where consumers get information about us, and it turns out that the advocacy of other consumers does the work for us. (Emefa, Shell INT)*

These findings show that brand evangelism is prominent in Ghanaian brand communities, and this phenomenon goes a long way to strengthen the reputation of the represented brand. It also ensures its brand longevity by increasing its visibility and boosting the confidence of prospective clients through these positive word-of-mouth recommendations and brand advocacy. These assertions are affirmed in the work of Wilk et al. (2021), who argued that through shared experiences and storytelling, brand communities function as a collective voice that may strengthen brand identity and values. The job of brand evangelists becomes even more important in Ghana, where community endorsement and personal encounters are key factors in building trust in products. These brand ambassadors support the establishment of a positive brand image by dispelling any unfavourable opinions and boosting the company's reputation, influence, and reach in the marketplace.

#### **6.6.5 Co-Creation**

According to Hatch and Schultz (2010), co-creation can simply be described as the collective development or refinement of products and services between brands and their consumers in a manner that has positive implications for innovativeness and consumer-brand relations. This

study found that this phenomenon marks one of the critical advantages brands derive from the existence and activities of their affiliate brand communities. Some of the brand managers interviewed argued that this phenomenon had yielded many insights that formed the basis of tailor-made firm innovations and led to maximum customer satisfaction. Opoku, one of the brand managers, reiterated these points by stating that the community has been helpful in brainstorming and coming up with new programme ideas.

*One of the things about our fan club is that they help us in coming up with sellable programmes. Sometimes, you can run an idea or two by them about a programme we want to develop for the station, and you would be amazed by the level of creativity they bring on board. Other times, too, it's about making our existing programmes more appealing, so they contribute a lot to making our programmes more exciting. (Opoku, Rainbow INT)*

Füller (2010) has noted that because co-creation involves community members in actively defining the brand's future, it brings about a deeper emotional connection between the brand and its consumers. Because social connections and community involvement are highly noticeable in brand communities, co-creation can be an effective means of establishing credibility and trust. Füller (2010) argues that brands may build a more genuine and meaningful relationship with their consumers by factoring them into the development process of their products and services. This will bring about customer happiness and foster long-term loyalty. Furthermore, the innovations that come from co-creation initiatives can help the brand stand out in a crowded market by offering a special value proposition that appeals to prospective consumers.

### **6.6.6 Issues and Crises Management**

In a very volatile era like the digital age, companies continue to pay attention to the issues that surround their brands and how those issues may degenerate into events that may jeopardise the reputation of the brand (Cornelissen, 2014). As such, brands have become sensitive to the concept of issues and crisis management. It is no surprise that this was one of the benefits the brand managers claim that they derive from their affiliate brand communities. They assert that the community members become helpful in mitigating any issues or crises that arise because of their pre-existing relationship with the community members. They claim that members of the brand communities serve as a first line of defence for their brands during the rise of any issues or crises, allowing them to promptly recognise and resolve these problems before they get worse. One of the managers states the following.

*Sometimes, when issues arise, it is easier to deal with them because the club members are people who are passionate about our brand and would ordinarily not want to do anything to harm it, so I will say this is another great benefit we enjoy from them. Sometimes, all we need to do is to explain the issues to them because there may be misconceptions out there. So, you will often see them even defending us. (Suna, Ecobank INT)*

These assertions conform to the postulations of Shang et al. (2006), who argue that members of brand communities frequently use these forums to discuss their experiences and concerns, and this helps brand managers monitor and keep an eye on public opinion and proactively address possible problems before they escalate into uncontrollable situations. This means that in times of crisis, loyal consumers who are members of a brand community can embark on a

journey of counter-narratives in favour of their admired brands (Schultz et al., 2011) to forestall reputational damages and loss of confidence from the larger consumer market. Through the use of trust and loyalty within these communities, brands can enhance their crisis management efforts and convert possibly risky situations into opportunities that will reinforce consumer relationships and fortify the brand.

#### **6.6.7 Saving Promotional Cost**

Another key finding in this research is that the activities of brand communities lead to their affiliate brands saving resources that would have been allocated to promotional activities. The brand managers have argued that these brand communities have created an organic platform for marketing and promotion purposes, thereby reducing their advertising budget. Amin, one of the brand managers, said the following.

*The thing is, it is peer-to-peer, so that kind of marketing moves faster than you can think. This is not too drastic, but the fan group has contributed to reducing our promotional budget to an extent. As I said, it is not too drastic, but we noticed along the line that a lot of the posts we make on social media, for example, get so much engagement, like comments, likes and reshares, so the money we would have spent boosting our posts on similar media, we channel that into something else. So, in a way, that saves us some resources. (Amin, Tecno INT)*

From the discussions above, it is apparent that peer-to-peer marketing works very well because customers are more likely to believe recommendations from friends and family than from the

commercials that are championed by the brand itself (Fournier & Lee, 2009). In brand communities, word-of-mouth and social connections are important factors in consumer choice, which means that the effect of brand community members endorsing the brand can considerably lessen the expensive resources that are allocated to advertising campaigns. As a result, the brand community grows into an organic entity that naturally raises brand awareness and fosters customer loyalty, saving significant money on advertising (Swimberghe et al., 2018).

### **6.7 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presents the results of this study, which were generated through a thematic data analysis (Smith & Firth, 2011). Again, the core narratives from the research field are presented in this chapter. Overall, these analyses helped respond to the three research questions that underpinned the study, which are as follows.

1. What are the various motivations behind brand community members' interest in joining and participating in brand community activities?
2. What are the rituals and traditions performed in these brand communities?
3. What benefits do the represented brands derive from the existence of the brand communities?

The first part of this chapter sheds light on the field experience with issues such as the formation of the brand communities, the support the communities gain from their affiliate brands and the nature of the relationship that exists between the leaders of the communities and the managers of the brand discussed in-depth.

What is more, the first research question sought to unravel the factors that motivate brand community members to join and participate in these communities. This is an important element of the formative frameworks of brand communities, especially in emerging markets like Ghana. In response to this question above, nine motivation factors have been unearthed, with the search for hidden tips and updates being the most articulated motivating factor and the search for tailor-made services and claiming ownership of the brand being some of the least articulated motivating factors that were uncovered. The second research question sought to unearth the various ritualistic practices that occur in the brand communities. This is an attempt to explore the cultural dynamics that come with consuming the products and services of one's favourite brand. Nine different ritualistic practices were uncovered, with the use of symbolic gestures to communicate the identity of the community emerging as the most articulated ritualistic practice. Resolving community transgressions, celebrating important milestones, and engaging in brand-related activities, albeit part of the least articulated ritualistic practices, were some of the other cultural activities that were unravelled in this study.

Last but not least, the third research question which sought to explore the benefits that affiliate brands derive from the existence and activities of brand communities, produced seven different benefits. It turned out that the most articulated benefit that affiliate brands derive from the brand communities is easy and swift access to consumer insights and feedback, whereas the least articulated benefits are saving the cost associated with marketing promotions and enhancing the ability to manage issues and crises. These findings are useful to the overall objective of this study, which is to eventually develop a formative framework that will guide the adoption and use of brand communities as a niche public relations and marketing strategy in emerging markets. The next chapter will focus on the empirical and theoretical discussions of these results.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### EMPIRICAL AND THEORETICAL DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

#### 7.0 Chapter Overview

The previous chapter focused on the presentation of the results from the four brand communities sampled for this study. The Ecobank Top Depositors Club, the Tecno Fans Gh, Rainbow Radio Listeners Fan Club, and the Shell Club. These brand communities were purposefully sampled because they were based in Ghana and had an offline presence. They were also sampled because they belong to some of the most underrepresented industries, as articulated in the literature review chapter (Chapter Three) of this study. All the critical outcomes in this study were presented, and the research questions were thoroughly dealt with. Three major themes emerged from the data collected and transcribed. They are 1) *Motivations for joining brand communities in Ghana*, 2) *Ritualistic practices in brand communities in Ghana*, and 3) *Brand community benefits to brands*. These three themes had a total of 25 subcodes, eventually forming the basis of the analysis and results.

The previous chapter also presented some narratives from the research field, focusing on the relationship that exists between the brand communities and their affiliate brands, as well as the level of support the brand communities get from the represented brands. Some of these narratives were told from the participant observations that were conducted. In line with the postulations of Gibbs (2018), important quotes were also sourced from the transcript to solidify the presentation of the results and serve as proof for many of the observations and claims made by the researcher.

This chapter focuses on the thorough empirical and theoretical discussions of the findings presented in the previous chapter. As argued by Creswell and Creswell (2018), every standard research requires a thorough discussion of results because it offers a full analysis of the data gathered and enables researchers to explain the importance of their findings concerning the objectives of the study and the body of previous literature. The discussion in this chapter aids in placing the results in the larger context of the field of brand communities, especially in the emerging market context. This chapter also explores how the results confirm or challenge previous findings in the field by providing potential justifications for the results that were uncovered. It is also apparent that the raw data, without any thorough discussion and debates, does not have any value, and that makes it challenging to draw any theoretical and practical conclusions or even develop the post-study framework, which is one of the overarching aims of this study.

What is more, a thorough discussion of the findings enables the identification of research gaps and areas that require additional study, all of which are critical to the advancement of knowledge in the brand community literature. Additionally, the critical analysis of the data and the discussion of its implications allow for proposals on how to bridge the gap between theory and practice by suggesting useful applications for the findings. In addition to strengthening the study's credibility, this in-depth analysis acts as a manual for other scholars and industry professionals, ultimately promoting and expanding knowledge and innovation (Saunders et al., 2023). This study explored brand community members' motivation for joining and participating in the activities of brand communities, the ritualistic practices that are undertaken in these brand communities and the benefits that the affiliate brands derive from the existence and activities of the brand communities. With the help of a qualitative research approach anchored on focus group discussions with the members of the brand communities, participant

observations of selected outdoor activities of the brand communities, and semi-structured interviews with managers of the affiliate brands, this study unearthed several context-specific results.

### **7.1 Motivations for Joining Brand Communities in Ghana**

This study uncovered nine different motivations or push factors that attract consumers to join and participate in the activities of the brand communities in Ghana. Consumers' search for hidden tips and updates about the products or services that the brand offers was determined as the most important and articulated motivation for joining brand communities. In the literature, this outcome conforms to the arguments of Chan (2017), who claims that as concrete or tangible benefits characterise extrinsic incentives, customers are likely to be motivated by them to join brand communities. This result also confirms the core assumptions of the theory of motivation, which holds that when consumers find a gap between their current and desired states, they become motivated by the anxiety that comes with that situation. This motivation pushes them to look for workable solutions (Solomon, 2018; Avery et al., 2013).

Again, Maslow's (1943) proposed human needs framework, which has long been used as the basis for explaining the theory of motivation, has a lot of manifestations in this result. The esteem needs, which are characterised by the desire for recognition and a sense of accomplishment, can be seen manifesting in this instance because when the community members search for hidden tips and updates, they are simply searching for advanced knowledge, which can have implications for their social status. Furthermore, psychological needs, which are characterised by the search for love and a sense of belongingness, can also be seen manifesting in this finding because the consumer's search for hidden tips and updates is

heavily reliant on social relations and personal networks, which they enjoy from the brand communities. This finding heavily reflects the communal decision-making attributes of the ordinary Ghanaian because they are more inclined to rely on friends and personal networks to seek hidden tips and updates about a product or a service as opposed to the manuals that are attached to the products or the official sources of information that may be available to them. The claim of communal decision-making is supported by Neequaye (2020), who argues that Ghanaian society exhibits a strong adherence to cultural values such as communalism, the extended family system, and reverence for elders, and these reflect in their consumption patterns.

Another result of this study is that when consumers are faced with a dilemma on which specific product or service to acquire, they become motivated to join brand communities. This is because they see the communities as an avenue for reviews and recommendations and a place where they can receive support in reducing the uncertainties that are associated with consumption. This discovery contradicts the general assertion that consumers join brand communities only because they already have an existing admiration and understanding of the offerings of the affiliate brand (Ouwersloot & Odekerken-Schröder, 2008; Zhou et al., 2012). However, some of the foundational assumptions under the theory of motivation are confirmed by this finding. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), humans are motivated to seek validation from their peers and reduce risks that are associated with their decisions, and this is exactly what has been unravelled by this finding. Again, this confirms the assertion that consumers are not only motivated by intrinsic factors but also external social factors (Chan, 2017).

Another popular assertion is that consumers join brand communities because of their admiration for the affiliate brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). This assertion has been challenged by the discovery that Ghanaian consumers are sometimes motivated by the quest to build social relations by joining brand communities and not necessarily because they admire the brand. This finding extends the core understanding of the brand community concept, especially in societies that are credited with enhanced social ties and communal living, like the case of Ghana (Whitfield, 2003). This finding also confirms the assumption of the theory of motivation as seeking to join brand communities is a sign of seeking a sense of belonging, which Maslow (1943) categorises as a psychological need.

It was also unearthed in this study that the search for rewards and offers by a brand is a huge motivation for consumers to join and participate in the activities of brand communities. This discovery is rooted in the principles of expectancy as postulated by Vroom (1964), who argued that when individuals perceive that their behaviours are likely to engender some desirable outcomes like rewards, they are motivated to indulge in them. This is because the revelation here is that Ghanaian consumers are driven by the hope for tangible and intangible rewards like discounts and coupons from joining and participating in the activities of brand communities. This finding also adds some new cultural and contextual dynamics to the existing literature in the sense that the Ghanaian consumer may be more driven by practical and transactional outcomes as opposed to the widely held opinion that consumers are motivated solely by their love for a brand to join brand communities (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Hoang et al., 2019). Again, this finding aligns with the core assumption of the social exchange theory, which claims that people enter into relationships, nurture and maintain these relationships with the view that it shall be beneficial and rewarding to them (Blau, 1968; Homans, 1958).

The quest to reduce consumer loneliness and the search for deep brand understanding are also some of the findings revealed in this study. This confirms existing knowledge that brand communities enhance the individual's sense of belonging and also reduce their perceived or real loneliness as they engage in several shared activities (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Sloan et al., 2015). Again, these findings align with the theory of motivation, as proclaimed by Maslow (1943), that humans are driven by social and cognitive needs. These discoveries also show that motivations can be multifaceted and symbiotic.

Again, in Ghana, claiming psychological ownership of the brand, sharing personal experiences, and wanting exclusivity and tailored services were the other motivating factors that drove consumers to join and participate in the brand communities under review. These findings are consistent with existing literature in the sense that consumers who have a strong and significant admiration for a brand tend to possess a strong sense of ownership of the brand, which in turn leads to their psychological empowerment and a search for other brand admirers with whom they are willing to share consumption experiences (Hsieh et al., 2022; Park & McMillan, 2017). Similarly, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) argue that brand communities provide an avenue for consumers to possess a certain amount of control and express their identities through the activities of the brand community.

The findings on the motivating factors that drive consumers in Ghana to join and participate in the activities of brand communities are profound in many ways. They provide a context-specific lens through which to view the activities of brand communities. Even though studies like Chan (2017) and Tseng et al. (2017) have generally highlighted that consumers are moved by their intrinsic and extrinsic motives, the lack of specificity in these motives may have some

practical and conceptual difficulties for academics and marketing and public relations practitioners. To cure this difficulty, this study unravels the specific motivations that can drive consumers to join brand communities in very communal contexts like Ghana. These findings also confirm the core assumptions of the theory of motivation, as explained in the preceding paragraphs, providing depth to the literature that the theory of motivation is prevalent in the discussions on brand communities and the interest of their members to join and participate in them.

## **7.2 Ritualistic Practices in Brand Communities in Ghana**

This study also uncovered the ritualistic practices that occupy the activities of the brand communities studied in Ghana. In all, the participants in the focus group discussions (members of the sampled brand communities) accounted for nine different ritualistic practices. This study uncovered through thematic analysis that the use of symbolic gestures as a ritualistic practice to communicate with each other in the brand communities was the most articulated and pronounced ritual. In the context of consumer behaviour, these symbolic gestures can be characterised as rituals that are knottily linked with the identity and values of the brand community. They also carry social and cultural meanings. This discovery is in tandem with the arguments of Kelley and Alden (2016) as well as Mousavi et al. (2017), who noticed that consumers are not merely in the market to consume products but also to construct their cultural identities through what they consume and this is reflected in the kinds cultural activities they are willing to participate in. Again, as a departure from some of the early marketing scholarship that postulated that consumers were only logical and rational in their consumption choices (Brown, 1996), this finding confirms the core assumption of the consumer culture theory, which maintains that consumers are revising and negotiating their cultural or social identities

in the marketplace in addition to just buying and consuming goods. This indicates that if a company gives its customers a chance to affirm their social identities, they are far more inclined to participate in its activities. This is especially true if the brand displays cultural components that align with the cultural aspirations of the consumer. For a context that is heavily culturally sensitive, like Ghana (Neequaye, 2020), this discovery is profound because it demonstrates the premium the Ghanaian consumer places on their cultural ideations in their quest to consume products and services.

What is more, this study uncovered that social gatherings and philanthropic causes are some of the ritualistic practices performed in brand communities based in Ghana. The brand community literature has long conceived brand communities as platforms for enhanced cultural and communal efforts that strengthen the bond between consumers and the affiliate brand (Schembri & Latimer, 2016). As such, this claim plays out in this finding as it is apparent that Ghanaian consumers constantly seek out the opportunity to affirm their cultural identities in brand communities. This is a way of demonstrating their unflinching admiration for a brand. Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) claim that a core part of brand communities is the social interactions that tend to bond community members together, and this is reflected in the findings. Theoretically, this finding confirms the assumptions of the consumer culture theory as the “sociocultural, experiential, symbolic, and ideological aspects of consumption” are depicted in this finding and shaping the consumption behaviour of the Ghanaian consumer (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 868).

Another evidence of the consumer culture theory is rooted in the finding that member initiation is one of the activities the brand communities engage in to welcome, introduce and integrate a

new member into the group. Beyond the quest to socially integrate the new member, this ritual allows the member to demonstrate their commitment to the brand and the brand community. These dynamics, as found in the Ghanaian brand communities, underscore the nature of cultural and social processes in these communities and how they shape consumer behaviour, affirming the core assumptions of the consumer culture theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Additionally, by preserving the social and cultural integrity of the communities, this study found that abiding by the rules set by the community and resolving transgressions in the brand communities were also key rituals that were accounted for.

Furthermore, the use of symbolic memorabilia, the celebration of milestones and engaging in brand-initiated activities were among the ritualistic practices discovered in his study. These findings confirm the assertions of Schau et al. (2009) that ritualistic practices of this nature are a representation of the brand identity and that of the individual community members in a manner that strengthens the bond between the consumers and the affiliate brand. These findings are also rooted in the assumptions of the consumer culture theory that as a result of these cultural and ritualistic practices, consumers get to negotiate their identities and co-create the identities of the brand (Holt, 2002). Again, these findings are consistent with consumer culture theory's focus on the symbolic and communicative elements of consumption, whereby consumers negotiate their social identity and status within the community by possessing and displaying brand-related objects (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998).

### **7.3 Brand Community Benefits to Brands**

Another objective of this study is to explore the benefits the affiliate brands derive from the existence and activities of the brand communities. Through interviews with the brand managers

of the affiliate brands, seven benefits emerged from the data collected. As a way of triangulation, these benefits were also benchmarked on the claims of the brand community members on what they perceived as the benefits their existence and activities offer to the affiliate brands.

It was uncovered that affiliate brands can quickly and readily obtain consumer insights and feedback to enhance the quality of their products and services through the existence and activities of their affiliate brand communities. The brand managers contended that this is a huge benefit since it allows for the easy provision of feedback and consumer insights – something that would have been costly or difficult to obtain in the past – from the members of the brand communities. This confirms several assertions in the literature that organisations perceive customer feedback as an integral and beneficial part of their business strategy and, as such, allocate resources to get these insights, which go a long way toward improving service quality and delivery (Ardley et al., 2020; Chang et al., 2020). Again, this discovery confirms Muniz and O'Guinn's (2001) argument that brand communities provide a platform for communal exchanges and bonds between the community members and the affiliate brand, which is why getting feedback from the community to improve products and services is a significant possibility. Theoretically, these findings deepen our understanding of the social exchange theory, which holds that people enter into relations with the rational expectations of benefiting from these relationships and where the benefits do not exist, they are likely to exit (Blau, 1968; Homans, 1958).

Furthermore, this study unearthed commitment and loyalty as other benefits that affiliate brands derive from their brand communities. Per the findings, community members who

participate in brand communities experience a strong sense of belonging, which leads to a development of commitment and loyalty towards the brand and, occasionally, even oppositional loyalty towards the affiliate brand's competitors. This discovery confirms the scholarship of Lee and Hsieh (2021), who conducted a study to understand better how a person's identification with a brand and participation in the activities of a brand community might foster brand love, brand loyalty or commitment. The results showed that people who identify with a particular brand are more likely to be interested in interacting with it, which may be one of the first reasons they join brand communities. Another conclusion is that these interactions create group ties, eventually resulting in a strong affinity for the brand, which leads to the community members' intention to continue using the brand, positively referring it to others and their willingness to give feedback on the brand. So, this is seen as a huge benefit for the affiliate brands that continue to make efforts to retain customers. Again, this confirms the postulations of the social exchange theory as Miles (2012) argues that when parties enter into a social or economic relationship, the benefits they derive drive them to build trust and loyalty over time.

Another benefit accounted for in this study is that consumers who belong to these brand communities engage in positive brand evangelism, which in turn leads to courting new customers as a result of the activities of the brand communities. The brand managers have emphasised that new customers are drawn in by the excitement that permeates brand community events and, occasionally, drawn from competitor businesses. They claimed that the brand communities have developed into fertile environments for fervently adoring the affiliate brands. They have also witnessed this phenomenon fade into constructive brand advocacy, in which members voluntarily spread the word about the brand to non-members, resulting in numerous consumer conversions. According to Rudner (1966), the social exchange

theory explains the social or economic motivations that drive social exchange relationships and holds that before engaging in these relationships, the parties involved conduct a cost-benefit analysis to ensure that the benefits outweigh the costs and that as the parties in these relationships continue to reward one another over time, trust and cohesive bonds are formed. Rudner (1996) argues that the dynamics and norms of the relationships continue to develop with parties meeting them with ease. This theory explains why the members of the brand community will recommend the brand to new customers as part of their initiatives and, sometimes, unsolicited by the brand. There is an indication that the community members are benefiting from their association with the brand, and as explained by the theory, it will lead them to engage in positive brand evangelism.

Moreover, the opportunity to co-create the products and services of the brand is another key discovery in this study. From the interactions with the brand managers, it emerged that this phenomenon is one of the most important benefits that companies receive from the presence and activity of their affiliate brand communities. According to some of the brand managers, this phenomenon produced a wealth of information that served as the foundation for specific business improvements and maximised consumer happiness in the end. So, there was evidence that value is co-created. This discovery confirms existing research, which indicates that because brand communities unite people who have the same love for a brand and are willing to share their ideas, they can be excellent environments for co-creation activities (Füller et al., 2009). This discovery also provides substantial support for the Social Exchange Theory, which maintains that social interactions are based on the reciprocal exchange of valued resources in which both parties want to maximise their gains (Blau, 1964; Homans, 1958). Co-creation within brand communities can be viewed as a reciprocal relationship where individuals give their time, thoughts, and opinions in return for recognition, a sense of belonging, and the

satisfaction that comes from having an influence on brand results and even consuming the products and services of the brand. Novel ideas, increased customer loyalty, and a stronger sense of community ownership are all advantageous to the business. These transactions go on as long as both parties think the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, which is a core tenet of the social exchange theory.

Additionally, this study uncovered that the ability to easily manage issues and crises that threaten the brand's reputation is one of the core benefits the brands enjoy from the existence and activities of the brand communities. The brand managers claim that due to their prior relationships with the community members, the members become helpful in reducing any challenges or crises that emerge. They assert that brand community members act as their companies' first line of defence when problems or crises arise, enabling them to identify and address these issues quickly before they worsen. This confirms Adjei et al.'s (2009) arguments that brand communities often become supportive towards their affiliate brands in times of crises by offering immediate feedback to the brand managers and mitigating against negative sentiments that may arise within or outside the community. This means that due to their affinity to the affiliate brand, brand community members are more likely to forgive the brand for its transgressions leading to the crises (Elliott et al., 2005). This is also an indication of a reciprocal exchange between the consumers and the brand, and these are the tenets of the social exchange theory. This is because, per this discovery, brand community members exchange their unwavering support for the brand in times of crisis in exchange for brand community benefits like rewards, social capital, and a sense of belonging, among others.

Last but not least, saving the costs associated with the promotional activities of the brand, albeit the least articulated, is another benefit found in this study. The brand managers contend that by establishing an organic platform for marketing and promotion, these brand communities have allowed them to cut back on their advertising spending. These observations confirm the arguments of Bruns et al. (2017), who contend that when customers are in love with a brand and demonstrate that on loyalty platforms like brand communities, they are more likely to spread the word about it, pay a premium price, and stick with it. This will then lead to them poaching others for the brand, which goes a long way to reduce the brand's efforts in scouting for new consumers. These observations are also predicted by the social exchange theory because there is a clear interplay of social and economic benefits between the community members and their affiliate brand.

#### **7.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter discusses the key findings in detail and explains how they relate to the existing literature and the theories that underpin this very study. The three themes that emerged from the data (*Motivations for Joining Brand Communities in Ghana*, *Ritualistic Practices in Brand Communities in Ghana*, and *Brand Community Benefits to Brands*) were discussed in this chapter. Nine different codes emerged to respond to the factors that motivate people to join and participate in the activities of the brand communities. They include the search for hidden tips and updates about the products and services of the brand, the ability to make purchase decisions with ease, the quest to build social relations and the search for rewards from the brand. Others include the quest to get an in-depth understanding of the brand, the quest to reduce consumer loneliness, the interest in sharing personal experiences, claiming ownership of the brand, and the desire for exclusive and tailored services. These findings confirm several prior studies with

a few instances of contradictions, which have all been accounted for in this chapter. The theme was also largely viewed through the lens of the major variations of the theory of motivation.

Similarly, a total of nine codes emerged to make up the various ritualistic practices that are undertaken by the brand communities in Ghana. They include the use of symbolic gestures to interact with one another, several social gatherings to foster unity and communal bonds, member initiation activities, and engagement in philanthropic causes. The rest are safeguarding community rules, using symbolic memorabilia to affirm their communal association, resolving community transgressions, celebrating key milestones and engaging in brand-related activities. These findings have all been thoroughly discussed, rooted in the consumer culture theory, and have also been benchmarked on prior literature.

Last but not least, a total of seven sub-themes have emerged from the data to respond to the benefits the affiliate brands derive from the existence and activities of the brand communities. Some of the benefits that have been uncovered in this study include getting consumer insights and feedback readily and speedily, gaining maximum consumer loyalty and commitment, having the ability to court new customers through the recommendations of the brand community, and gaining positive brand evangelism. Others include the ability to co-create value, the ability to manage issues and crises with ease, and the opportunity to save costs associated with promotional activities of the brand. These findings were also affirmed by previous studies and well accounted for in this chapter. They also helped this discussion by gaining a deeper understanding of the assumptions and postulations in social exchange theory. The next chapter focuses on the key conclusions, recommendations, theoretical and practical implications, as well as the post-study framework that has emerged from this study.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 8.0 Chapter Overview

This is the last chapter of this study. As such, it recaps the major findings that have emerged from this scientific endeavour, makes inferences from them, discusses the implications they have for theory and practices, and suggests avenues for similar future endeavours. Particularly, the chapter evaluates the important findings from the research and talks about the key contributions that have been made to scholarship in the area of brand communities and what they mean to corporate and practical policies, especially in emerging markets. Beyond these, the chapter also presents the post-study framework that has been proposed as a result of the key findings of this research.

#### 8.1 Summary of the Major Discoveries

The primary goal of this study is to create a formative framework for public relations professionals, brand managers, and even gatekeepers of brand communities within emerging markets to guide the formation and nurturing of brand communities and their benefits. In addition to examining how these activities might enhance and optimise marketing and public relations efforts for businesses in Ghana and other emerging countries, the study intends to investigate the unique meanings that members of the brand communities attach to their varied community activities. This overarching goal of the study was predicated on several gaps that have emerged from the systematic literature review (*see Chapter Three*) that was conducted in this study. Through the systematic literature review, it emerged that the stream of research available on brand communities hardly addresses the question of the formative frameworks of brand communities, including the specific factors that motivate consumers to join and

participate in the activities of brand communities, the kinds of rituals and traditions that are practised within the communities, and how the existence of these brand communities benefit their affiliate brands.

Again, through the systematic review of the literature, it was uncovered that the majority of the studies under review (79.2%) were undertaken on online brand communities at the expense of the offline ones, and these studies were heavily condensed in the technology and automobile industries. Therefore, the choice of which brand community to sample was predicated on these gaps identified. What is more, methodological, contextual, and theoretical gaps were identified through the systematic literature review. The studies under review were heavily driven quantitatively, emanating from very advanced economies, leaving the insights from the emerging markets heavily marginalised. Therefore, the aim, objectives and research questions that undergirded this research were all derived from these gaps that have been articulated in the preceding chapters of this study. Three research questions emerged as a result. They include the following.

1. What are the various motivations behind brand community members' interest in joining and participating in brand community activities?
2. What are the rituals and traditions performed in these brand communities?
3. What benefits do the represented brands derive from the existence of the brand communities?

In lieu of the research questions above, three major thematic areas emerged from the data to respond to the objectives of the study. They include *Motivations for Joining Brand*

*Communities in Ghana, Ritualistic Practices in Brand Communities in Ghana, and Brand Community Benefits to Brands.* The computer-assisted qualitative analysis software MAXQDA aided these thematic analyses.

It emerged that nine different factors accounted for Ghanaian consumers' motivation to join and participate in the activities of the brand communities. They include the search for hidden tips and updates about the products and services of the brand, the ability to make purchase decisions with ease, the quest to build social relations and the search for rewards from the brand. Others include the quest to get an in-depth understanding of the brand, the quest to reduce consumer loneliness, the interest in sharing personal experiences, claiming ownership of the brand, and the desire for exclusive and tailored services. The theory of motivation played a critical role in explicating these findings. The core tenet of the theory of motivation, particularly as it pertains to the literature on consumer behaviour, is that certain demands prompt consumers to act or make decisions. The theory's numerous iterations have produced a wide range of needs and reasons why consumers act. Since the purpose of this study was to determine what motivates members of brand communities to become involved in their activities, the theory offered a crucial framework for discussing the results.

Furthermore, in response to the question of the ritualistic practices that are performed in Ghanaian brand communities, this study uncovered that nine different rituals were predominant among the communities. They include using symbolic gestures to interact with one another, organising several social gatherings to foster unity and communal bonds among members, member initiation of ritualistic activities, and engagement in philanthropic causes. The rest are safeguarding community rules, using symbolic memorabilia to affirm their communal

associations, resolving community transgressions, celebrating key milestones and engaging in brand-related activities. These findings were discussed through the lens of the consumer culture theory (see Chapter Seven). The consumer culture theory holds that consumers are not merely purchasing and consuming products in the marketplaces but also reworking and negotiating their cultural or social identities in the marketplace. This means that consumers are highly likely to engage in brand activities if they offer them the opportunity to validate their social identities and traditions, especially through the brand's display of cultural elements. As such, this theory became relevant in explaining why brand community members may be deeply engaged in the various ritualistic practices that have been unearthed and why these practices may sustain their interest in the activities of the brand communities.

Additionally, this study unearthed seven different benefits that brands derive from the existence and activities of their affiliate brand communities. They include quickly and easily obtaining consumer insights and feedback, maximising customer loyalty and commitment, courting new customers through brand community recommendations, and generating positive brand evangelism. The capacity to co-create value, the ease with which problems and crises can be predicted and handled, and the chance to reduce expenses related to brand promotion are the rest of the benefits unearthed in this study. These findings were also discussed through the lens of the social exchange theory, which is hinged on the principle of exchange and reciprocity. The theory helped explain why brand managers may find it prudent to engage and sometimes invest in the brand community because they derive some tangible and sometimes intangible benefits.

All of these major findings mentioned above are deemed to be context-specific insights derived from consumer-to-consumer and consumer-to-brand interactions that manifest in the brand communities. These findings also demonstrate consumers' deep emotional attachment to their admired brands. The benefits that have been uncovered in this study are enormous and speak to the relevance of creating an all-inclusive brand experience for consumers.

## **8.2 Theoretical Contributions and Implications**

From a theoretical standpoint, this study has contributed to the discourse of the theory of motivation in several ways. The several motivating factors that were uncovered by this study show that consumer motivations are diverse, multifaceted and sometimes complex. Some of the core assumptions under the theory of motivation were confirmed because this study discovered social, economic, and even psychological factors driving consumers to join brand communities (Maslow, 1943). Whereas the theory sufficiently explains the phenomenon of motivations uncovered in this study, it is engulfed with certain limitations. The idea that motivations must be attained in strict hierarchical order (basic needs – physiological and safety needs; psychological needs – love and belongingness as well as esteem; the self-fulfilment needs – self-actualisation needs) (Maslow, 1943) has been debunked by this present study. This is because, within the context of brand communities, consumers' motivations to join and participate in its activities are multifaceted and are not restricted to a strict hierarchical order. Therefore, the theory has been extended to explain how consumer motivations are nuanced in a collective culture like Ghana.

Furthermore, the theory of motivation emphasises intrinsic motives (Turner, 1987) as the driving force for people to take certain actions. This position totally ignores the possibility of

external factors that could motivate consumers, leading to a uni-dimensional view of human behaviour. However, in this study, it was uncovered that extrinsic and tangible factors, such as the search for rewards and the search for tailored services, are some of the external driving forces for consumers to join and participate in brand communities. These discoveries provide some extensions to the theory of motivation, especially in the brand community discipline, by demonstrating that human behaviour is multi-dimensional, as corroborated by Richards et al. (2003). Again, it is unclear if these consumer motivations to join and participate in brand communities remain static over time. Neither the theory of motivation nor the findings in this study have answered this question. As such, future research can extend the theory of motivation within collective cultures by explicating whether consumer motivations for joining brand communities remain static over time. This can be attained through a longitudinal study.

What is more, in this study, the theory of motivation, which is heavily hinged on Westernised cultural values (Baker, 1982) has been extended to explain how consumer motivations manifest in collective and communal cultures like that of Ghana. This implies that the theory of motivation should be utilised in different cultural contexts to drive context-specific insights that are relevant for strategy building.

Additionally, the consumer culture theory helped explicate the ritualistic practices that were found in the Ghanaian-based brand communities. Beyond showing that cultural practices significantly shape consumer behaviour, the discoveries in the study have proven the postulations of the consumer culture theory by showing that, indeed, consumers look out for brands that align with their cultural and social identities. It also means that in emerging markets where cultural practices differ significantly from those in the advanced world, there is a need

to utilise the consumer culture theory to explore the implications of these ritualistic practices on consumer-brand and consumer-consumer interactions. This will lead to a deeper understanding of the tenets of the theory and how they apply in different contexts. However, the consumer culture theory is largely based on studies in Western contexts and may not fully capture the unique consumer behaviours, cultural norms, and values in developing economies like Ghana (Joy & Li, 2012). The assumptions around individualism, affluence, and consumer sovereignty as the major cultural values that underlie the theory (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) were not reflected in this study. This is because the discovery of ritualistic practices in brand communities in Ghana, such as the use of symbolic gestures by community members and the organisation of several social gatherings, demonstrated collective social identities as opposed to the display of individualistic tendencies. These discoveries provide an extension of the consumer culture theory.

Furthermore, the finding that brand community members engage in the brand's-initiated activities to show support to the brand in return for certain rewards could be a demonstration of their functional and utilitarian consumption patterns as opposed to the symbolic consumption needs that are heavily trumpeted in the literature on the consumer culture theory (Brown, 1996). The theory has also overlooked the role group influences play in forming consumer cultures (Holt, 2002). This study has addressed this lacuna by demonstrating that whereas these cultural practices can be driven by individual identities, they are also collectively accepted and practised by members of the brand communities in Ghana.

Finally, yet importantly, the core tenets of the social exchange theories have been upheld by the findings on the benefits the represented brands derive from the existence and activities of

the brand communities. The community members' willingness to continue staying in the brand community and contributing to its activities vis-a-vis the benefits the brand managers have accounted for indicate strong mutually beneficial relationships. This reinforces the applicability of the social exchange theory to the concept of brand communities in emerging markets. This demonstrates the importance of perceived value to sustainable relationships. The strategic motivations for brand managers to invest resources into the activities of brand communities to achieve specific business objectives can be explored using the social exchange theory.

However, the social exchange theory overemphasises rational motives for engaging in social exchanges (Emerson, 1976). Indeed, the findings of this study revealed an overwhelming reliance on rational and tangible benefits as the foundation for the social exchanges between the brand communities and their affiliate brands. Even though this is the case, the discovery that one of the major and most articulated benefits brands derive from the existence and activities of the brand communities is loyalty and commitment challenges the core tenets of the theory. Again, the social exchange theory is largely rooted in Western, individualistic contexts, where autonomy and self-interest are prioritised (Hofstede et al., 2010). However, in this study, it has been demonstrated that this tenet of the theory may not apply in collectivist cultures because community welfare, networking, familial obligations, and social harmony outweigh individual gains (Hofstede et al., 2010).

### **8.3 Practical Contributions and Implications**

The findings discussed above provide several practical implications for both brand managers and gatekeepers of existing or future brand communities, especially in emerging markets. The

discovery that consumers are motivated by the search for hidden tips and updates about a brand shows that manuals, which usually accompany products, are not perceived by these consumers to be sufficient sources of information or tips. Additionally, official sources of information that host general tips on brands are also not perceived to be sufficient sources of information. As such, these consumers are pushed to join these brand loyalty groups, where they are assured of meeting other like-minded consumers who may be more knowledgeable about the products and services and wield tricks and tips that will be useful to them. Perhaps this discovery may be an indication of the reliance on peer trust that exists in these communities and how Ghanaian consumers may prefer peer-to-peer interactions and education when it comes to uncovering the hidden tips and updates about their cherished products and services. This means that to retain community members in brand communities, brand managers, community gatekeepers, and influencers must be deliberate about the kind of interactions they have in the communities. The conversations should include hidden tips and updates about the products and services of the affiliate brand.

Similarly, brands should curate marketing communication strategies that leverage lessons from these insights about consumer motivations to join and participate in the activities of brand communities. They can do this by focusing on the specific needs and desires of the consumers, which will, in turn, encourage joining brand communities. Brands can create and share hidden tips and updates about their products and services and share them with the brand community members in a manner that engenders interactivity. This will also help them in making critical purchase decisions – something discovered in this study as one of the crucial motivating factors. These platforms should also give members room to share their personal experiences about a product or service they have enjoyed from their admired brand in a manner that triggers

a sense of belonging. That way, they can claim psychological ownership of the brand, which will trigger positive consumer-brand behaviours.

Additionally, the discovery that consumers seeking rewards will join the brand community is culturally nuanced. This implies that brands and brand community gatekeepers must create this opportunity to retain members in the community. Brands can make special offers either directly or through the community gatekeepers to the members of the brand community to show exclusivity and engender satisfaction and loyalty on the part of the consumers. The brand managers and the community gatekeepers should also consider organising several events that will involve the brand community members as patrons to reduce consumer loneliness and trigger a strong emotional bond with the brand and the members alike. Implementing these strategies can trigger advanced forms of positive consumer-brand relations and higher consumer retention, ultimately making the brands more profitable.

Again, from a practical standpoint, the discoveries about the ritualistic practices that are performed in these brand communities in Ghana present critical insights and perhaps strategies for brands to create a culturally acceptable and resonating image of themselves. In a culturally sensitive environment like Ghana, where consumers place a premium on their cultural beliefs, brands must be cautious and strategic in infusing these cultural elements into their marketing communication strategies. This will go a long way to help the brands deepen their connections with the consumers because, as postulated by Arnould and Thompson (2005), consumers are not merely purchasing and consuming products in the marketplaces but also reworking and negotiating their cultural or social identities in the marketplace. For example, brands should make symbolic memorabilia like T-shirts, Caps, and Car Stickers, among others, abundantly

available to the members of their affiliate brand communities. This way, their sense of social association with the brand can be enhanced, leading to a reduction in brand-switching behaviours. Again, the recognition and respect for community rules, as well as the resolution of transgressions, are all indications of social conformity in the brand communities. This means that community members yearn for structured communities with rules and regulations governing them as opposed to unstructured ones where there are no rules or where rules are disregarded without any consequence. Similarly, brands must venture into philanthropic causes either by themselves or through the brand community in a manner that aligns with the values of community members. This can enhance the brand's image and strengthen the existing relationships with the consumers.

What is more, this study discovered that community members get social benefits other than those of the brand from the brand communities. The temptation is that these peripheral benefits may become the core things consumers look out for in the community, making them lose sight of the core reasons why the brand communities exist – to show love to the affiliate brand. As such, brands must intensify their engagements with the community and present themselves as a social support system so that they will keep the brand in the minds of the community members at all times. Again, the brands must organise special periodic training for community leaders and influencers because they play many gatekeeping roles and answer questions about the products and their features. This will reduce the risk of misinformation about the brands' products and services.

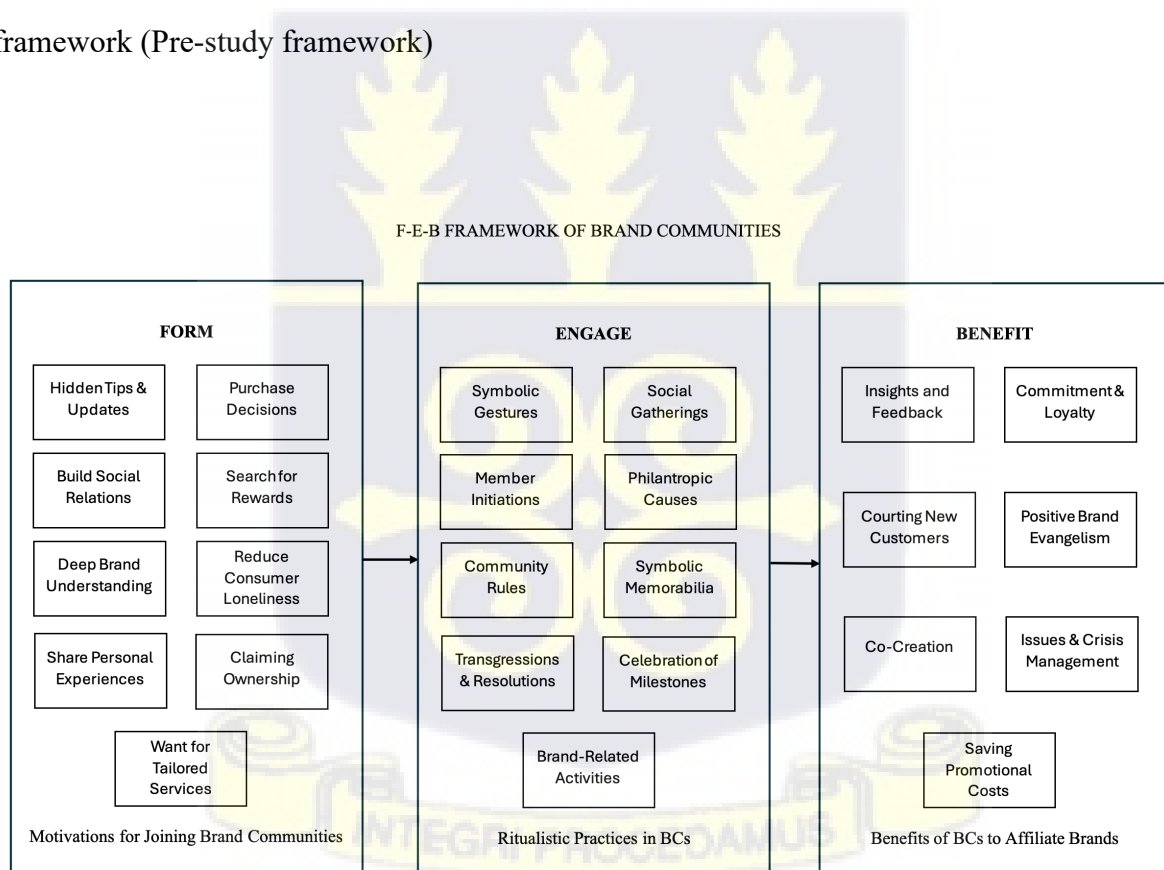
Finally, the study found several benefits that brands derive from the existence and activities of the brand communities. The ability to gain customer insights in a speedy and collective manner

is a significant advantage. This means that brand managers must create and strengthen channels of communication that serve as a conduit for consumer feedback to trigger innovation in products and services. The brand communities have also shown that they are emotionally resonant platforms because the brands get an advanced form of brand commitment and loyalty, which leads to positive brand evangelism. As such, brands must safeguard these benefits by creating rewards and exclusive values for these community members. This will not only retain them but also lead to word-of-mouth recommendations of the affiliate brand. These brands must also take up initiatives that co-create value with the community members. This will tap into the consumers' creativity and engender positive brand advocacy behaviours and repurchase intentions. The discovery that brands can manage issues and crises easily because the brand community members are willing to easily forgive them or even defend them could mean that brand communities will prove useful for service recovery. As such, brands are encouraged to safeguard and sustain the community at all costs.

#### **8.4 Post-Study Framework**

The findings of this study have led to the development of a post-study framework, which is a formative frame – FEB (Form-Engage-Benefit) of Brand Communities. This three-stage framework details what brand managers and aspiring brand community gatekeepers should do to form brand communities, engage the community members, and benefit from the community's activities. This study avers that at the formation stage, marketing communication campaigns should be created with the motivations discovered in this study in mind. This will strike a connection with current and potential brand admirers, who will be attracted by these motivating factors and join the brand community. Again, this study contends that once the consumers find their motivations playing out, they will engage in the ritualistic practices of the

brand communities and will be retained as a result. This is the second stage of the framework. This study conceptualises the third stage of the framework as the benefits the brands derive from the activities of the brand communities. It is assumed that once the consumers are motivated enough to join the community, they will engage in the rituals of the community, and that will retain them. Due to their retention, they will engage in positive consumer-brand behaviours like positive advocacy and recommendations, which will benefit the brands eventually and make them more profitable. These assumptions are depicted in the conceptual framework below. This study is heavily hinged on inductive research principle which is a bottom-up approach where researchers begin with specific observations or data and develop broader frameworks (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As such, there was no predetermined framework (Pre-study framework)



**Figure 14.0 (Post-Study Framework – FEB Framework of BCs) Source: Author’s Creation**

### 8.5 Key Conclusions

This study highlights the key motivations that drive Ghanaian consumers' interest in joining brand communities. They include the search for hidden tips and updates about the products and services of the brand, the ability to make purchase decisions with ease, the quest to build social relations and the search for rewards from the brand. Others include the quest to get an in-depth understanding of the brand, the quest to reduce consumer loneliness, the interest in sharing personal experiences, claiming brand ownership, and the desire for exclusive and tailored services. These discoveries show the multifaceted nature of consumer motivations, most importantly in consumer markets where people rely heavily on social networks and the recommendations of people they know and interact with. With the help of the theory of motivation, these complexities in consumer motivations were explained.

Again, the ritualistic practices performed in the brand communities have been unearthed. They include using symbolic gestures to interact with one another, several social gatherings to foster unity and communal bonds, member initiation activities, and engagement in philanthropic causes. The rest are safeguarding community rules, using symbolic memorabilia to affirm their communal association, resolving community transgressions, celebrating key milestones and engaging in brand-related activities. The consumer culture theory played a critical role in explicating these findings and demonstrating how consumers negotiate their cultural and social identities in their interactions with brands.

Lastly, the benefits that brands derive from the existence and activities of the brand communities have also been unearthed in this study. They include quickly and easily obtaining consumer insights and feedback, maximising customer loyalty and commitment, courting new

customers through brand community recommendations, and generating positive brand evangelism. The rest of the benefits unearthed in this study are the capacity to co-create value, the ease with which problems and crises can be predicted and handled, and the chance to reduce expenses related to brand promotion. The social exchange theory played a critical role in explicating these findings by showing that mutuality is the principle undergirding these consumer-brand relations.

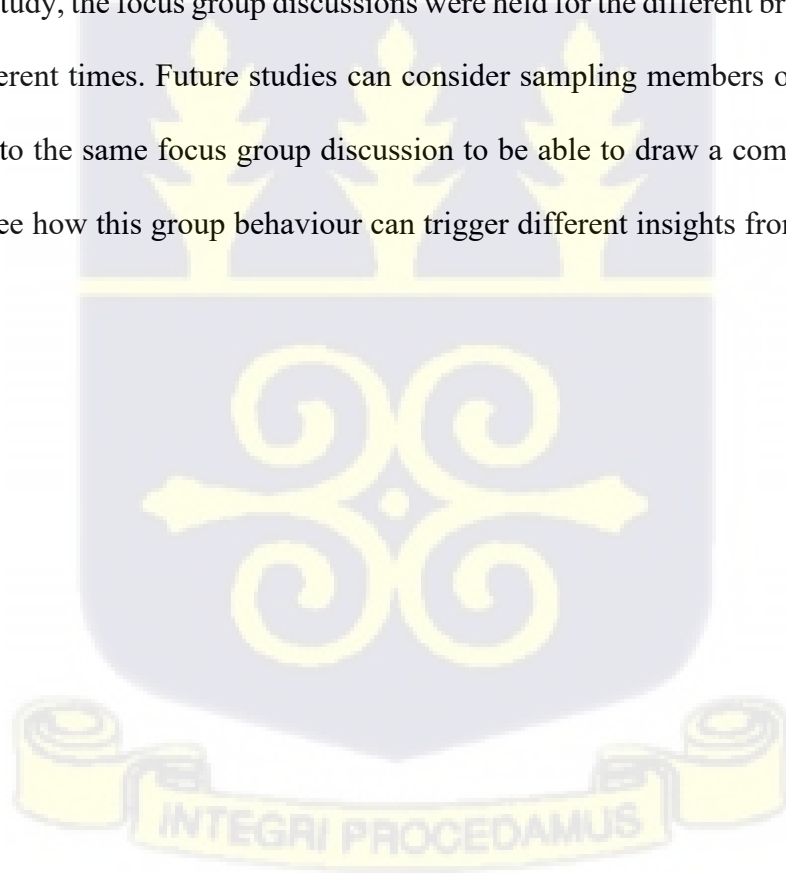
### **8.6 Limitations and Avenues for Future Research**

Just like any scientific endeavour, this study is not bereft of limitations. The first noticeable limitation is the context in which this study was conducted. The Ghanaian context is very communal and, as such, may become very fertile grounds for the maximisation of brand community benefits. As such, it is unclear if non-communal contexts would pose the same or similar findings. Therefore, future research can focus similar scholarly efforts on contexts that are non-communal to tease out some other context-specific insights. Again, whereas there are consumer-initiated brand communities, there are also brand-initiated brand communities. This study has not been able to respond to the thorny question of whether these two categories of brand communities behave differently and pose varied forms of benefits to their affiliate brands or not. Future research can focus on exploring the differences that may exist between consumer-initiated brand communities vis-a-vis the brand-initiated brand communities.

Furthermore, the question of whether brand communities that are affiliates of foreign brands and those that are affiliates of Indigenous brands behave differently has not been answered in this study. As such, future researchers can explore this phenomenon in detail. Additionally, the choice of the qualitative methodology to underpin this research has certain philosophical

limitations in the sense that the interpretation of the data is based on the understanding and subjectivity of the researcher. As such, it becomes difficult to extrapolate the findings to other contexts. Whereas the findings have substantially responded to the formative issues associated with brand communities, future researchers may embark on some confirmatory paths to objectively confirm these findings within a positivist research philosophy. Brand managers who operate in different contexts other than the ones studied may adopt some of the practical recommendations. However, they are cautioned to proceed with restraints on that tangent because of the methodological limitations posed by this study.

Finally, in this study, the focus group discussions were held for the different brand communities sampled at different times. Future studies can consider sampling members of different brand communities into the same focus group discussion to be able to draw a comparative analysis with ease and see how this group behaviour can trigger different insights from multiple brand communities.



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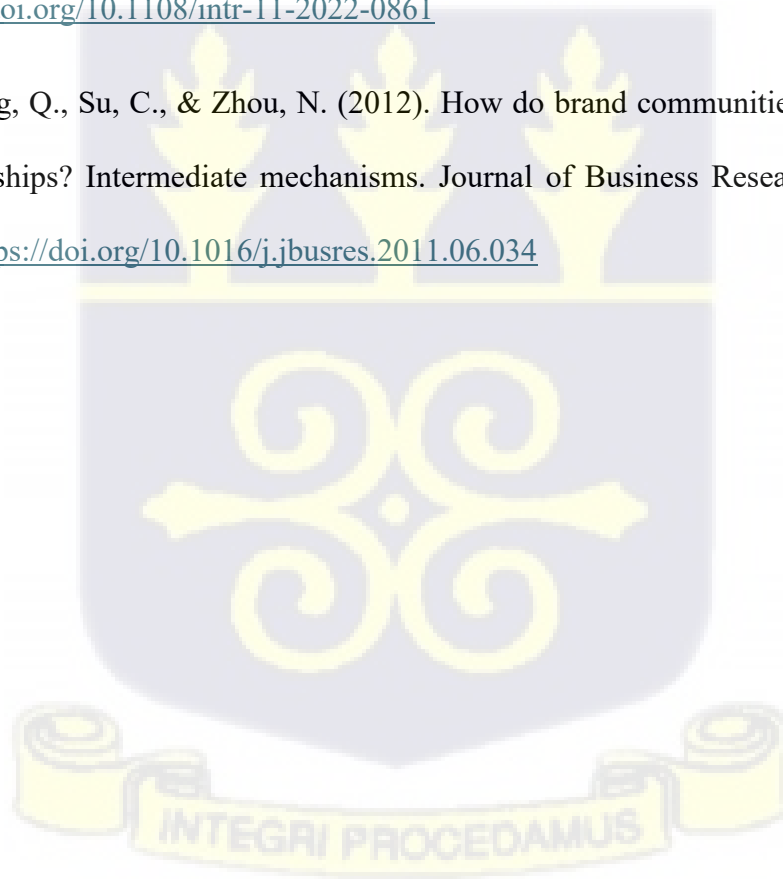
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**APPENDICES**

**Appendix 1.0 (Articles showing no specific geographical location for data gathered).**

(Weijo et al., 2019)	(Guimaraes et al., 2016)
(Relling et al., 2016)	(Vaux Halliday & Astafyeva (2014)
(Habibi et al., 2014)	(Lupinek, 2019)
(Hsieh et al., 2022)	(Marbach et al., 2019)
(Chen & Zhao, 2021)	(Martínez-López et al., 2021)
(Tseng et al., 2017)	(Thompson et al., 2018)
(Siuda, 2021)	(Zhao et al., 2019)
(Ardley et al., 2020)	(John et al., 2017)
(Burgess & Jones, 2020)	(Lee & Hsieh, 2021)
(Rialti et al., 2018)	(McLaughlin, 2016)
(Dessart & Veloutsou, 2021)	(Riley, 2020)
(Dessart et al., 2019)	(Carvalho & Fernandes, 2018)
(Dessart et al., 2020)	

**Appendix 2.0 (Articles showing no specific industry)**

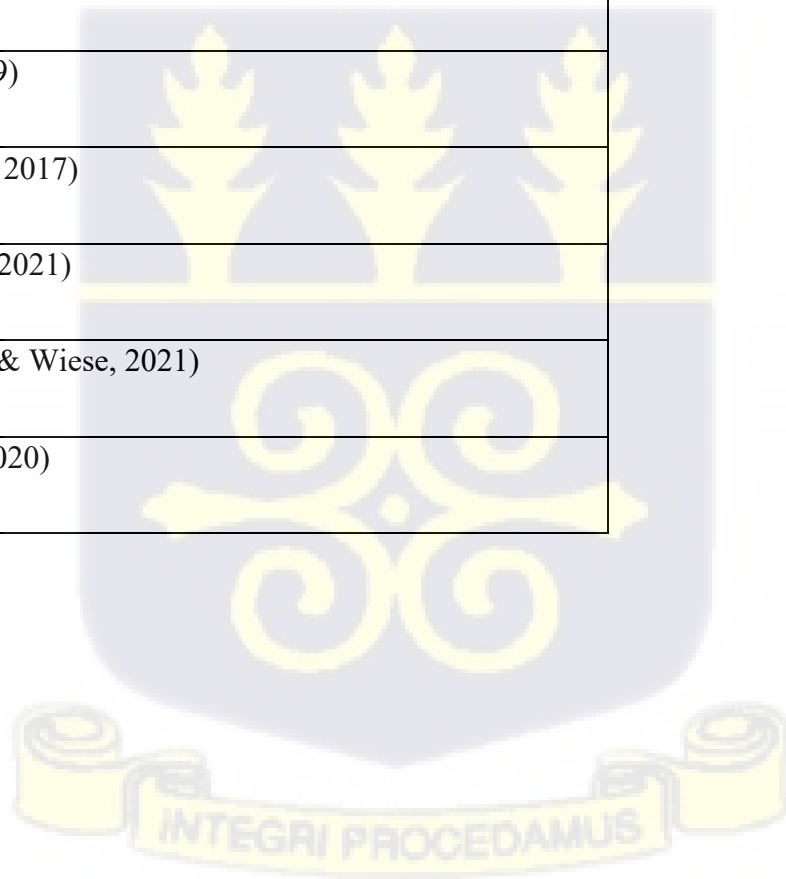
(Anaya-Sánchez et al., 2020)	(Jiao et al., 2018)
(Bruns et al., 2017)	(John et al., 2017)

(Carlson et al., 2019a)	(Kamboj, 2019)
(Carlson et al., 2021)	(Kaur et al., 2018)
(Carvalho & Fernandes, 2018)	(Kaur et al., 2020)
(Chen & Zhao, 2021)	(Kelley & Alden, 2016)
(Clark et al., 2017)	(Kumar & Kumar, 2020)
(Coelho et al., 2019)	(Kumar & Nayak, 2019)
(Cuomo et al., 2020)	(Kumar, 2019)
(Dessart & Veloutsou, 2021)	(Kumar, 2020)
(Dessart et al., 2019)	(Lee & Hsieh, 2021)
(Ferreira & Zambaldi, 2019)	(Lupinek, 2019)
(Haverila et al., 2020a)	(Marbach et al., 2019)
(Haverila et al., 2020b)	(Martínez-López et al., 2021)
(Haverila et al., 2020c)	(Mousavi et al., 2017)
(Islam & Rahman, 2016)	(Naqvi et al., 2020)
(Jahan & Kim, 2020)	(Relling et al., 2016)
(Snyder & Newman, 2019)	(Riley, 2020)
(Sorensen et al., 2017)	(Samuel et al., 2018)
(Valmohammadi et al., 2021)	(Sánchez-Casado et al., 2018)
(van Heerden & Wiese, 2021)	(Siuda, 2021)

(Wang et al., 2021)	(Zhao et al., 2019)
(Wiese & Akareem, 2019)	

**Appendix 3.0 (Articles that used the Uses and Gratification Theory)**

(Dessart & Veloutsou, 2021)
(Dessart et al., 2019)
(Haverila et al., 2020) B
(Haverila et al., 2020) C
(Kamboj, 2019)
(Chiang et al., 2017)
(Santos et al., 2021)
(van Heerden & Wiese, 2021)
(Kaur et al., 2020)



## Appendix 4.0 (Interview and Focus Group Discussion Guide)

University of Ghana Business School  
Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship

### Interview/FGD Guide

Dear participant,

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this research on brand communities and their formative frameworks. I am a PhD candidate at the Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship, University of Ghana Business School who has a keen interest in exploring the formative frameworks of brand communities by investigating the motivations that drive members' active participation, the rituals they engage in within these communities, and the benefits accruing to the represented brands. The findings from this study will be used entirely for academic purposes.

Please make each question a separate and independent judgement. Please do take care to answer the questions as fully and accurately as you can and remember that there are **no right or wrong answers** to the questions asked, as different people have unique experiences with brand communities.

You are guaranteed complete ***confidentiality*** and ***anonymity***. Only general findings from the study will be reported.

For further questions or queries related to this research or any injuries arising as a result of participating in this research, kindly contact the lead investigator:

Noel Nutsugah, Dept. of Marketing and Entrepreneurship, University of Ghana Business School, Accra. Mobile: +233 (0) 550 424 849 Email: [nnutsugah@st.ug.edu.gh](mailto:nnutsugah@st.ug.edu.gh)

Again, If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant in this study you may contact the Administrator of the Ethics Committee for Humanities, ISSER, University of Ghana at [ech@ug.edu.gh](mailto:ech@ug.edu.gh) or 00233- 303-294-0531.

### **Focus Group Discussion Guide**

#### **Motivations**

- How was the brand community formed?
- Why was this brand community formed?
- How did you know about this brand community?
- Why did you join the brand community?
- What special needs do you have that pushed you into joining this brand community?
- How is your participation in this brand community helping you fulfil those needs?
- What are your social aspirations?
- What are your consumption aspirations?
- Do you think those aspirations are being met in the community?
- Will you continue to stay in the community, assuming those aspirations are not being met?
- Will you continue to participate in the community, assuming those aspirations are not being met? If you will, why?
- Do you feel protected in the brand community?
- Are you able to share your problems freely and easily in the brand community?

#### **Traditions and ritualistic practices**

- What will you say is the general culture of the community?
- What will you say is unique about all the members of the brand community?
- What will you say is distinct from one member to another?
- How would you describe your personality?
- To what extent do you find similar personalities in the brand community?
- Are there any rules or norms?
- What happens if those rules and norms are broken in the community?

- Are there any symbols or artefacts associated with this brand community?
- What are the ritualistic practices in the community?
- How do you come by those practices in the community?
- How do they become acceptable and practised in the community?
- Are there any of those practices you enjoy the most? If yes, why?
- Are there any of those practices you do not enjoy at all? If yes, why?

### **Culture Congruity**

- How well do you know the culture of the brand?
- Can you describe the culture of the brand?
- To what extent do you consider the culture of the brand in coming up with your cultural practices in the brand community?
- Do you engage in your cultural practices to support the culture of the brand?

### **Brand Community Benefits**

- How are the activities of the brand community funded?
- To what extent do you engage officials of the brand?
- What forms of support do you enjoy from the officials of the brand?
- How satisfied are you with the support thus far?
- To what extent can you do without their support?
- In what ways do you think your activities in the community benefit the brand?
- Do you think the support you get from the officials of the brand is commensurate with the benefits they get from your activities?
- Do you engage in any analysis of their support before you engage in the activities of the community?

- If they withdraw or reduce their support for you, to what extent will that affect your activities?
- What is the current level of trust between the officials and the brand community?

### **Interview Guide (with the brand managers)**

#### **Brand Community Benefits**

- How well do you know of the existence of the brand community?
- To what extent do you engage the leadership of the brand community?
- What forms of support do you offer to the brand community?
- Is supporting them a part of your annual corporate strategy and budget?
- How satisfied are you with the support you offer the brand community?
- In what ways do you think the activities of the brand community benefit your brand?
- To what extent do you think the support you give the brand community is commensurate with the benefits you derive from them?
- To what extent do you engage in cost-benefit analysis in offering support to the brand community?
- Are there any potential threats to your brand you think can be posed by the activities of the brand community?



## Appendix 5.0 (Ethical Clearance from the University of Ghana)



### UNIVERSITY OF GHANA ETHICS COMMITTEE FOR THE HUMANITIES (ECH)

*P. O. Box LG 74, Legon, Accra, Ghana*

*My Ref. No: ECH 192/ 23-24*

April 22, 2024

Noel Nutsugah  
Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship  
University of Ghana Business School  
Legon

#### **ETHICAL CLEARANCE (ECH 192/ 23-24)**

The Ethics Committee for the Humanities (ECH) conducted a full-board review and approved your protocol titled:

#### **TOWARDS A FORMATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR THE UTILISATION OF BRAND COMMUNITIES BY MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTITIONERS IN EMERGING MARKETS: INSIGHTS FROM GHANA**

**PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: NOEL NUTSUGAH**

Please note that the final review report must be submitted to the Committee at the completion of the study. Your research records may be audited at any time during or after the implementation. Any modification of this research project must be submitted to ECH for review and approval prior to implementation.

Please report all serious adverse events related to this study to ECH within seven (7) days verbally and in writing within fourteen (14) days.

This certificate is valid until April 21, 2025. You are required to submit annual reports for continuing review.

Please accept my congratulations.

Yours Sincerely,

**Professor Akosua K. Darkwah**  
**ECH Vice-Chair**

Cc: Professor Bedman Narteh, Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship, UG  
Professor Kobby Mensah, Department of Marketing and Entrepreneurship, UG