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Exploring Emotional Branding and Online Brand Community by a Case Study of American Starbucks for Chinese

By

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Declaration

I declare that the thesis represents my own work, except where due acknowledgement is made, and that has not been previously included in a thesis, dissertation or report submitted to this University or to any institution for a degree, diploma or other qualification.

Signature_____

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Abstract

This thesis aims to explore the relationship between the Starbucks brand and its users. For most heavy coffee drinkers in China, Starbucks is not just about coffee in the traditional sense; it is about tasting coffee in a whole new way, which is embodied in an experience of a cup of coffee. People go to Starbucks not just for a drinking, but for a kind of feeling, which brings by Starbucks branch stores. Therefore, through a modified-life story interview and participant observation, the present research mainly attempts to explore how Starbucks connects their consumers with the brand name and how consumers maintain the relationship in brand community and online brand community. Interviews were conducted as a form of life story interview, then, their life stories were collected to illustrate the various connecting ways between Starbucks and its heavy coffee users. Online Starbucks China is the object for observation in order to analyze how the virtual communities' members attach to the Starbucks. Ultimately, this research identified that emotional branding is not controlled by the brand owner, but co-controlled by the brand users. For online Starbucks brand community members, their mainly aims are information value, maintaining interpersonal connectivity, self-enhancement and entertainment motive. Social identification was employed to identify the Starbucks brand community members.

Keywords: Chinese society, Starbucks, emotional branding, consumer-brand relationship, community, social identification

Table of Content

Chapter 1 Introduction 7

Chapter 2 Literature Review 10

Branding & Emotional Branding 10

Community & Brand Community 16

Online Brand Community 25

Consumer-brand Relationship 28

Social Identification 30

Chapter 3 Research Questions 34

Chapter 4 Research Method 35

Chapter 5 Research Results 41

Chapter 6 Original Data form Interviews 44

Chapter 7 Conclusions 58

Emotional-related Perspective 58

Consumer-brand relationship perspective 60

The brand as relationship partner 61

Relationships providing meanings in psycho-socio-cultural context 62

Analysis of Social identification 64

Suggestions for Future Research 65

Limitations 66

Bibliography 69

Appendix I 75

Appendix II 77

Tables of Content

Table 1
Brand community makers' reflection in Starbucks brand community…….48

Table 2
Five motives with Starbucks online users……55

Table 3
Clues stimulate customers' emotions……..59

Table 4
The win-win relationship of consumer and Starbucks…….60

Table 5
Consumer-Starbucks relationship in different contexts……...62

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