

Brand Communities in the Axis of Socializing Customers: Sample of Volkswagen Beetle Owners, Turkey

Sosyalleşen Müşteriler Ekseninde Marka Toplulukları : Volkswagen Beetle Sahipleri Türkiye Örneği

Selda Başaran ALAGÖZ¹, Nezahat EKİCİ², Mahmut Sami İŞLEK³

ABSTRACT

Alongside traditional media in which brands communicate with their customers, the platforms which provide interaction between customers and the brand come into prominence. In these platforms, mutual interaction is more considerable customers have chance to be closer to other customers by having conversation via these platforms. One of the most significant consequences of this case is brand communities. Brand communities are a kind of social group and these are the brand communication channels that ever socializing customers consider them as a tool of self expression. Beside this, it also provides a multiple relationship network between the brand and customers. This study intends to examine Volkswagen Beetle Turkey Organization that is one of the brand communities based on conducting relations between the brand and its enthusiasts as an essential point. Literature review and results of the survey applied to the community members have taken place in the study. For this purpose, first brand community concept has been addressed and then Volkswagen Beetle brand has been evaluated for what it brings to marketing communication by a questionnaire which contains statements about participation, identification with virtual community, satisfaction with virtual community, degree of influence, word of mouth, brand image, community loyalty and interaction preference.

Keywords: Brand communities, social customers, Volkswagen Beetle

ÖZET

Markaların müşterileri ile iletişim kurduğu geleneksel kanallar dışında, karşılıklı etkileşimin daha fazla olduğu, markanın müşteriler arası iletişimini ve birbirlerine daha yakın olmalarını sağlayan, onlara bir ürün ve hizmetin yanı sıra bir değer olarak "yaşam biçimi" sunan platformlar önem kazanmaya başlamıştır. Bu durumun en önemli sonuçlarından birisi marka topluluklarıdır. Marka toplulukları bir çeşit sosyal gruptur. Bu topluluklar giderek daha da sosyalleşen müşterilerin kendilerini ifade etme aracı olarak gördükleri, marka ve diğer müşterilerle çoklu bir ilişki ağı sunan marka iletişim kanalıdır. Bu çalışma, marka ve markanın hayranları arasındaki ilişkileri yapılandırma temeline dayalı marka topluluklarından birisi olan Volkswagen Beetle Türkiye organizasyonunu incelemeyi amaçlamıştır. Çalışmada literatür taramasına ve topluluk üyelerine uygulanan anket çalışmasının sonuçlarına yer verilmiştir. Bu amaçla, ilk olarak marka topluluğu kavramı ele alınmış olup, Volkswagen Beetle markasının pazarlama iletişimine getirdikleri; topluluk kimliği, topluluk tatmini, etkililik, ağızdan ağıza iletişim, marka imajı, etkileşim derecesi ve topluluk sadakati gibi alt yüzeylerden oluşan bir anket çalışması ile değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Marka toplulukları, sosyal müşteriler, Volkswagen Beetle

1. INTRODUCTION

The rise in quantities of production and number of consumers make consumers more conscious and they continually increasing their wishes and expectations. This situation obliges marketing to new quests. Marketing communication has become very significant to highlight some of the products which have the same quality, the same features, and the same price, even produced with the same technology. Hereby, with marketing communications how

companies are seen by consumers is becoming more important than how they try to be seen.

Nowadays, while companies are creating their communication strategies, they try to present preferred brands by taking the factors affecting consumers' behaviors into the account. Brands that have become nearly indispensable elements in our lives sometimes stand out more than the product; the consumer may prefer the brand rather than the product. For that reason, brand awareness, brand image

¹ Assist. Prof., Karamanoglu Mehmetbey University, Faculty of Business, Department of Business Administration, Production Management and Marketing Division, seldalagoz@hotmail.com

² Res. Ass., Karamanoglu Mehmetbey University, Faculty of Business, Department of Business Administration, Production Management and Marketing Division, nezahatekici@hotmail.com

³ Res. Ass., Karamanoglu Mehmetbey University, Faculty of Business, Department of Business Administration, Production Management and Marketing Division, samiislek@hotmail.com

and brand value concepts have gained importance. Brand image is the impression that connotations and perceptions leave in consumers' mind. It contains all beliefs and elements that add value to the brand (Altınışık, 2004). Today, many consumers evaluate products with their brand image and buy the image, not the product (Odabaşı ve Oyman, 2003 : 369).

In the very beginning, brand image is defined as what it associates in consumer's mind, what it reminds to the consumer and. Then it turns to be a purchasing act or not, in the long term it provides brand loyalty. At the present time, far beyond being just a name introduces the producer; the brand has become a lifestyle.

Brand image means all the impressions that the consumer has acquired for the brand. According to another definition, brand image is the identity or the appearance which the company tries to impose on the society (Öter ve Özdoğan, 2005 : 129).

Accordingly, resembling parts of consumers and brand identity or characteristics that willing to acquire are becoming important. Brand identity can be explained as accommodation of features peculiar to human (friend, popular, young, conservative, organized, actuator, dominant, depended, aggressive) with the brand. Aaker, also, develops dimensions like candidness, excitement, sufficiency, durability in the brand identity scales (Köktürk et al., 2008: 26).

In today's global markets, if we consider that the products do not become different, one of the most important ways of being preferred is raising the preferability by creating a brand image. The consumer who makes a relation between the brand image and the product identifies himself/herself with the brand image and thus the brand image becomes more important. In other words, a brand like this provides additional value to the consumer together with the product and the service.

Today, brands are no longer the elements which make promises just about the performance. The consumption process is mostly based on brands. From this point of view, except the brands' economic role; their social, cultural and psychological roles come into prominence. Brands undertake roles like determining consumers' identity, manifesting individual differences and providing integration with society.

The way how an individual defines himself/herself gives shape to their purchasing habits. (İslamoğlu, 2003:138). How an individual identifies himself and what impressions he has for himself are called as

individuality. Personality has two dimensions depending on the individual's own perceptions. While the real personality looks for the answer to the questions of "who am I" and /or "how I consider myself", the ideal personality looks for the answer to the questions of "who I want to be" and/or "how I would like to see myself" (Odabaşı and Barış, 2002: 204). Undoubtedly, the individual would like to turn his real personality to his ideal personality. The good, the service and the brand are the extensions of the consumers' personality. Consumers want to buy a good/service or a brand when they think that it is appropriate for their real or ideal personality or when they believe it can be improved and for some of the consumers; the things they own have become a part of their personalities. For these kinds of consumers, popular brands are so important, because they consubstantiate their own personalities with the brands' popularity. This direct relationship between the personality and the brand image ensures consumers to prefer the brand which is more coherent to their own personality perception.

As Maslow indicates; being together with other people and contact social relationships is a need for people. During the purchasing process, consumers consider to meet this expectation as well. Occasionally, being a customer of a store, a client of a brand or a member of a community can be an actual reason of consumption. To explain postmodern consumers' behaviors, we should start with the assumption that they liberalize themselves, concurrently they look for goods and services which are able to connect them with a community. In other words, apart from personalizing the product, marketers should also try to create an emotional connection by which these personal products will bring about a collective behavior(Kayaman and Armutlu, 2003: 41).

2. SOCIAL CUSTOMER AND BRAND COMMUNITIES

In present day; companies which enable customers to communicate with each other and to be closer with one another –except from the mutual communication between the firm and the consumers– should support consumers to get in contact with each other by taking the community connection. Employees, products and the service fields of the business should have the supportive quality for this subject(Kayaman and Armutlu, 2003: 41). These communities which are formed by loyal customers of a certain brand constitute very important customers of that particular brand. Firms should also utilize the

feedbacks of these communities very well. Besides, for the aim of increasing the customer loyalty, firms can provide some special sales and campaign offers for these communities' members. Thereby, the firm can both develop long term customer relationships and have very important feedbacks and also would have chance to cooperate with its loyal customers. But, of course there is another side of the coin. It can be perceived as risky for many brands to bring these kinds of communities together and provide consumers to share their opinions and experiences about the goods and/or services. This method is only good for the companies which trust the quality and all values offered to the consumers. These communities generally form around the brands which threaten their rivals, have a long and rich history and have a powerful image.

In brand communities, what really matters for the customer is to have a powerful connection with the brand. Brand communities ensure that the customer forms a strong relationship with the brand and he/she makes long term investments to the brand. Besides, it constitutes positive word of mouth communication, brand loyalty and a powerful market for the licensed products. In addition to this, the brand-fests are also an important plot in the process of participating in the brand community (Mc Alexander, 2002 : 51).

Today's choosy, easily bored consumers would like the brand images of the products that they consume to support their own personalities. While introducing themselves to outer world, they also want to get benefits from those images. Because, in today's global markets, although, for a brand, it is very difficult to be admired and approved by consumers, there are consumers who are enthusiasts of brands – just like movie star fans. Creating a brand community is the most effective way to manage communication with the enthusiasts for the brands which have enthusiasts in this manner.

It could be seen that such communities grow like a snowball. Some of the members in these communities become members just because they are the enthusiasts of the brand, and some of them may use brand just to be involved in the community.

Strong community relations can be established in four phases: between customer and product, customer and brand, customer and company, and finally customer and customer (Fournier et al., 2005:17).

Brand communities are the communities that are configured and privatized by the social relations of

the consumers who are the admirers of the brand and which do not have geographic boundaries. According to Bender (1978), communities cannot any longer be restricted by geography, because both the brands and the media have gone beyond the geography. This situation has made communities more widespread and efficient (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001:413).

Bender (1978) states that community concept is a network of social relations marked by mutuality and emotional bonds (cited by Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001:413). There are some rules to regulate the interaction among members. The frequency level of relations between the group and members affect the level of abiding by the rules. When communion in the group increases, the responsibility of the members to one another also rises. In these kinds of groups, consumers' relationship with the brand comprises the consumer's relationship with the brand, the use of the product and with the other consumers who also use the brand.

It can be said that the brand community is a consumption sub-culture. Consumption subcultures can be defined as "the social groups in which a certain brand, product or consumption activities are shared" (Schouten and McAlexander , 1995 : 43).

Appearance of the sense of "us" rather than "me" increases the commitment and association of the community. Comfort and trust generating from being inclusive of a group increase the value that communities provide for individuals.

Mutually helping between members, participation to performed activities and accepting other members' values voluntarily are the issues in brand communities(Algeshoimer et al., 2003 : 21).

Hedonic values of the products that indicate the consumer's identity and the community he/she belongs to are becoming more significant than functional values of the products. In other words, the connection value which represents "what product means" is more into prominence than the product's usage value (Cova and Cova , 2001 : 67).

Connection value is the value that is formed by the consumer with product and brand and the environment that he/she can communicate with. This value may arise from the brand itself, and also areas that this brand is on selling or being in usage may help to develop community consciousness and stories about brand. Community membership arises from existed and shared experiences and it is more than

just following the fashion or trend (Yeygel , 2006 : 223).

Brand communities have consciousness just like in other forms of communities. Members identify themselves with the community and behold themselves as a part of the community. This situation brings social identity to community members.

Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) who have carried out a lot of studies about the brand communities focus on the three important elements of brand communities;

a-Consciousness of Kind

Collective consciousness is about strong connection feeling between community members. Members feel like they know each other, although they have never met. Legitimacy and oppositional brand loyalty concepts are important in collective consciousness. Legitimacy is about usage of the brand with the "right reasons". For instance, the community members do not find the reason of "using the brand just because it is popular" legitimate. Oppositional brand loyalty is about the thought that possession of that certain brand makes members special and different. Brand loyalty is so critical for continuity of collective consciousness (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001: 418).

b-Shared Rituals and Traditions

The rituals and traditions are also among the elements, important for the collective consciousness to develop and continue. These are generally formed by "celebrating the history of the brand" and "shared brand stories".

Stories about brand and celebration of noteworthy days of the brand contribute to create and hear shared values amongst community members. One of the stories about the brand history is logo or label of the brand. While current logo or label has a commercial value, older one has a nostalgic value. Stories in exchange are the elements that is shared and talked about by community members.

c-Moral Responsibility

To insure the long-term survival of brand communities, it is necessary to retain old members and integrate new ones. To provide this, responsibility consciousness should be developed. A brotherhood sense is created and the idea of "if you use another brand, you betray the community" is developed. In this process, if some errors occur, community members try to overcome them by helping each other. In this respect, brand communities perform limited and

specialized moral responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001: 415).

3.VOLKSWAGEN AND VOSVOS

In spite of the fact that there is an agreement with Hitler during the foundation, Volkswagen is an automobile company which has one of the most interesting foundation stories. After some prototype practices, Volkswagen's first factory was founded in 1938. The factory was badly damaged during the World War II, but it had a significant role on healing war effects. Volkswagen that entered in American car market in 1950s had many changes and it earned fame and got across with "Vosvos" model. The prod out in 2003 and "Vosvos" model has its own place in history as a real legend (Çobanlı, 2007: 5-41). "Vosvos" has different names in every single country like "Bug" in the United States, "Beetle" in England, "Maggiolino" in Italy, "Belly Button" in Mexico (because everyone has one), "Fusco" in Brazil, "Tosbağa" or "Vosvos" in Turkey. They got the name "Vosvos" in Turkey, because Vosvos owners claim that "Vosvos" is the sound they hear from the exhaust of the car (Çobanlı, 2007: 1-4).

Vosvos owners have organizations all around the world. It is assumed that there are more than 500 Vosvos organizations (foundation, community) in Germany. In Turkey, there are organizations in Ankara, Bursa, Antalya, İzmir, Trakya, Eskişehir, Gaziantep, Kütahya, Mersin and İstanbul. First established Vosvos community in Turkey is "Volkswagen Fan Club – İstanbul". This organization has announced its foundation to public with this statement: "This organization's foundation goal is to gather Volkswagen-Tosbağa, -which is the most popular car since 1945(the year of the end of the Second World War)-drivers and their relatives. With this gathering, it is intended that recalling of love, peace and solidarity which are becoming a yearning and being missing year after year. This recalling will start first with community members and then it will outspread to Turkey and the entire world. Our basic statement is to concretize "yearning to past" symbolized with VW identity in the level of love-peace-solidarity and green to the people who miss good old days of İstanbul and this country. Accordingly, VW Fan Club-Istanbul is targeting all kinds of activities for greener, more decent and more filled with hope and peace Turkey and world." (Çobanlı, 2007: 125). Vosvos drivers always greet each other on the roads with lighting headlights of their cars. Also, if they see a Vosvos driver is stranded on the road, they will stop and help

him/her without, unquestionably. Every member, surely, has that kind of stories. Cross-roads with Vosvos, supporting or protesting some political or social actions, organizing acquaintance and merging meetings, planting, waste collecting, fairs are some of the activities that organized by Turkish Vosvos communities (Çobanlı, 2007: 4). Vosvos community members communicate with each other thanks to their foundations and also e-mail groups on internet. With these communication channels, they always keep in touch and ready to find solutions to their questions or their cars' problems.

4.THE RESEARCH

4.1.The Objective of the Research

The basic objective of the research is to study the Vosvos community, one of the brand communities, and its members in details of the points of view of the community members to the community, contributions of members to the community, expectations of the members and the viewpoint differences between the members about the community.

4.2.The Method and Sampling of the Research

In data collecting, survey method has been used. The scale which was developed by Woisetschläger, Hartleb and Blut (2008) was used. In the survey, there are 30 statements formed in 7 subgroups. Because of time and cost restrictions, internet survey method is used in research. Therefore, the survey form was prepared in Google Documents software program. E-mail groups of Vosvos communities were reached on internet and the surveys have been conducted on the net by sending e-mails to members' e-mail addresses. Sample size was determined 150 surveys by using "Budget and Time Possibilities Method" (Gegez, 2007:262). 134 assessable surveys were evaluated after e-mails sent. The classification of the survey questions is formed with regard to fivefold Likert Scale. (1=totally disagree, 5=totally agree).In the process of measurement of the data; SPSS for Windows 16.0 software program was used. After making validity and reliability analysis, correlation and regression analysis were used.

4.3. Hypothesis of Research

H1 : Participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community is positively associated with identification with community.

H2 : Participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community is positively associated with satisfaction derived from community.

H3 : Participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community is positively associated with degree of inf-

luence.

H4 : Participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community is positively associated with word of mouth marketing (WOMM).

H5 : Participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community is positively associated with brand image.

H6 : Participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community is positively associated with interaction preference.

H7 : Degree of influence between community members is positively associated with word of mouth marketing (WOMM).

H8 : Degree of influence between community members is positively associated with brand image.

H9 : Degree of influence between community members is positively associated with interaction preference.

4.4. Findings of Research

Demographic features of the participants are as follows: In respect to gender status; 118 (88,1 %) male and 16 (11,9 %) females; in respect to marital status; 62 (48,5 %) married, 65 (46,3 %) single and 7 (5,2 %) divorced; in respect to educational status; 2 (1,5 %) primary school graduate, 21 (15,7 %) high school graduate, 18 (13,4 %) vocational school graduate, 83 (61,9 %) bachelor degree graduate and 10 (7,5 %) master degree graduate. In respect to age; 33 (24,6 %) members are in between 18 – 25 years old, 63 (47 %) members are in between 26 – 35 years old, 26 (19,4 %) of them are in between 36 – 45 years old, 10 (7,5 %) members are in between 46 – 55 years old and 2 of the members are in between 56 – 65 years old. There are no members more than 65 years old in the community. In respect to income status; 14 (10,4 %) of the members have income in between 0 – 500 TL, 44 (32,8 %) of them 501 – 1500 TL, 47 (35,1 %) of them 1501 – 2500 TL, 21 (15,7 %) of them 25001 – 5000 TL and 8 (6 %) of them have more than 5001 TL income per month.

Table 1 : Demographics of Participants

Variables	F	%	Education	F	%
Male	118	88,1	Primary	2	1,5
Female	16	11,9	High Sch.	21	15,7
Married	62	48,5	Voc. Sch.	18	13,4
Single	65	46,3	Bachelor	83	61,9
Divorced	7	5,2	Masters	10	7,5
Income	F	%	Age	F	%
0-500 TL	14	10,4	18-25	33	24,6
501-1500 TL	44	32,8	26-35	63	47,0
1501-2500 TL	47	35,1	36-45	26	19,4
2501-5000 TL	21	15,7	46-55	10	7,5
5001 TL and more	8	6,0	56-65	2	1,5

The question that “Do you have another car rather than Vosvos?” was answered as follows; 57 (42,5 %) yes and 77 (57,5 %) no.

Table 2 : Volkswagen Beetle Ownership Situation of Participants

Do you have another car rather than Vosvos?	F	%
Yes	57	42,5
No	77	57,5

Participants of research are asked statements about Volkswagen Beetle brand community and from the answers, it is reached results in Table 3.

Table 3 : Frequency and Percentage Values of the Answers of the Statements

	Nr.		1	2	3	4	5	Average	S.D	
Participation	1	Members of the Vosvos community help each other.	N	3	1	7	36	87	4,51	,820
		%	2,2	,7	5,2	26,9	64,9			
	2	When I seek for advice, I am likely to find someone supportive in the Vosvos community.	N	3	0	8	32	91	4,55	,800
		%	2,2	,0	6,0	23,9	67,9			
	3	I have made new friends as a result of joining the Vosvos community.	N	4	1	4	25	100	4,61	,840
%		3,0	,7	3,0	18,7	74,6				
4	Friendships in the Vosvos community are important to me.	N	6	2	9	35	82	4,38	1,002	
	%	4,5	1,5	6,7	26,1	61,2				
5	Social contacts and friendships are supported by the Vosvos community's offers for interaction.	N	3	2	9	52	68	4,34	,851	
	%	2,2	1,5	6,7	38,8	50,7				
Identification with Community	6	I see myself as a part of the Vosvos community.	N	6	9	13	30	76	4,20	1,142
		%	4,5	6,7	9,7	22,4	56,7			
	7	The Vosvos community plays a part in my daily life.	N	7	13	28	44	42	3,75	1,153
		%	5,2	9,7	20,9	32,8	31,3			
	8	I see myself as a typical and representative member of the Vosvos community.	N	11	9	27	39	48	3,78	1,236
		%	8,2	6,7	20,1	29,1	35,8			
	9	The Vosvos community confirms in many aspects my view of who I am.	N	8	9	26	50	41	3,80	1,129
		%	6,0	6,7	19,4	37,3	30,6			
	10	I can identify myself with the Vosvos community.	N	15	11	30	47	31	3,51	1,249
		%	11,2	8,2	22,4	35,1	23,1			
	11	I have strong feelings for the Vosvos community.	N	8	6	16	48	56	4,03	1,124
		%	6,0	4,5	11,9	35,8	41,8			
12	I feel like I am bound to the Vosvos community.	N	7	10	20	40	57	3,97	1,163	
	%	5,2	7,5	14,9	29,9	42,5				

Satisfaction	13	Overall, the Vosvos community meets my expectations.	N	7	7	38	44	38	3,74	1,089
			%	5,2	5,2	28,4	32,8	28,4		
	14	The content of the Vosvos community matches exactly with my interests.	N	6	16	26	50	36	3,70	1,124
			%	4,5	11,9	19,4	37,3	26,9		
	15	The Vosvos community fulfills my needs.	N	8	17	21	51	37	3,69	1,179
			%	6,0	12,7	15,7	38,1	27,6		
Degree of Influence	16	As a member of Vosvos community, I can influence the whole community.	N	7	14	37	49	27	3,56	1,087
			%	5,2	10,4	27,6	36,6	20,1		
	17	I am quite influential in directing the Vosvos community.	N	14	18	37	36	29	3,36	1,253
			%	10,4	13,4	27,6	26,9	21,6		
	18	Any member has the chance to be an active part in the Vosvos community.	N	17	18	39	31	29	3,28	1,294
			%	12,7	13,4	29,1	23,1	21,6		
WOMM	19	I tell positive things about Vosvos community to other people.	N	3	3	18	48	62	4,22	,921
			%	2,2	2,2	13,4	35,8	46,3		
	20	I recommend the Vosvos community to people who ask my advice.	N	3	1	11	39	80	4,43	,854
			%	2,2	,7	8,2	29,1	59,7		
	21	I encourage the other people to join Vosvos community.	N	4	1	15	38	76	4,35	,928
			%	3,0	,7	11,2	28,4	56,7		
Brand Image	22	Vosvos brand is trustworthy..	N	10	2	13	40	69	4,17	1,152
			%	7,5	1,5	9,7	29,9	51,5		
	23	Vosvos brand is likeable.	N	5	4	7	28	90	4,45	,993
			%	3,7	3,0	5,2	20,9	67,2		
	24	Vosvos brand is a very good brand.	N	3	0	0	19	112	4,77	,671
			%	2,2	,0	,0	14,2	83,6		
25	Vosvos brand is a very attractive brand.	N	4	3	7	27	93	4,51	,924	
		%	3,0	2,2	5,2	20,1	69,4			
Interaction Preference	26	I am someone who enjoys interacting with other community members.	N	4	3	8	28	91	4,49	,932
			%	3,0	2,2	6,0	20,9	67,9		
	27	I am someone who likes actively participating in discussions with other community members.	N	4	3	16	50	61	4,20	,948
			%	3,0	2,2	11,9	37,3	45,5		
	28	In general, I am someone who, given the chance, seeks contact with other community members.	N	2	5	14	49	64	4,25	,899
			%	1,5	3,7	10,4	36,6	47,8		
	29	In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other community members.	N	4	12	19	46	53	3,99	1,083
			%	3,0	9,0	14,2	34,3	39,6		
Community Loyalty	30	It would be very difficult for me to leave the Vosvos community	N	3	5	10	54	62	4,25	,913
			%	2,2	3,7	7,5	40,3	46,3		

The results from Table 3 show that the majority of the participants agree with statements. To detail the results; if we examine the answers to "I have made new friends as a result of joining the Vosvos community." statement, which is located in "Participation" subgroup, we will see that participants totally agree with the statement in 74,6 % and agree in 18,7 %. When the answers of "Members of the Vosvos community help each other." statement are examined, it is seen that participants totally agree with the statement in 64,9 % and agree in 26,9 %. Again the answers of "When I seek for advice, I am likely to find someone supportive in the Vosvos community." statement are similar to earlier samples. Participants totally agree with the statement in 67,9 % and agree in 23,9 %. Finally, the answers given to "Friendships in the Vosvos community are important to me." statement are as 61,2 % totally agree and 26,1 % agree.

"Vosvos brand is likeable" which is one of the statements about the "Brand Image" has a high percentage of agreement as 67,2 % totally agree. "Vosvos brand is a very good brand" statement shows similarity with a ratio as 83,6 % totally agree. Another statement about "Brand Image" which is "Vosvos brand is a very attractive brand" is totally agreed by 69,4 % and 20,1% of the participants agree. Another noteworthy point is about "Vosvos brand is trustworthy" statement. This statement has 51,5 % totally agreed and 7,5 % agreed participants.

One of the statements about WOM, which is "I have said positive things about Vosvos community to other people." has 46,5 % totally agreed and 35,8 % agreed participants and 13,4 of the participants answered this question as neither agree nor disagree.

"I have recommended Vosvos community to people who seek my advice." statement has 59,7 % totally agreed, 29,2 % agreed and 13,4 % neither agreed nor disagreed participants. The statement of "I have encouraged other people to join Vosvos community." has 56,7 % totally agreed, 28,4 % agreed and 11,2 % neither agreed nor disagreed participants.

When "Interaction Preference" subgroup was examined; the statement of "I am someone who enjoys interacting with other community members." shows 67,9 % totally agreed and 20,9 % agreed participants and the statement of "I am someone who likes actively participating in discussions with other community members." shows 45,5 % totally agreed and 37,5% agreed and 11,9 % neither agreed nor disagreed participants. "In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other community members." statement has 47,8 % totally agreed and 36,6% agreed participants.

Finally, the statement about community loyalty has 46,3 % totally agreed and 40,3 % agreed participants.

4.4.1. Reliability and Factor Analysis

Reliability of research is tested by Cronbach Alpha method and Alpha values are given at Table 4.. Alpha coefficient is valued between "0" and "1" and wished to be at least "0,7" (Altunışık at. al., 2005:114). It is seen that variable set has sufficient internal consistency at desired level. Factor Analysis was applied to analyze validity of the research and factor loads of the statements are given at Table 4 also. KMO value of factor analysis is 0,908 and declared cumulative variance degree is 75,709.

Table 4: Reliability and Factor Analysis Regarding Results and Reasons of Participating Volkswagen Beetle Brand Community

	Factor Loads	Alpha Value
Consumer Participation		0,900
Members of the Vosvos community help each other.	0,734	
When I seek for advice, I am likely to find someone supportive in the Vosvos community.	0,804	
I have made new friends as a result of joining the Vosvos community.	0,785	
Friendships in the Vosvos community are important to me.	0,814	
Social contacts and friendships are supported by the Vosvos community's offers for interaction.	0,804	
Identification with Community		0,938
I see myself as a part of the Vosvos community.	0,674	
The Vosvos community plays a part in my daily life.	0,797	

I see myself as a typical and representative member of the Vosvos community.	0,619	
The Vosvos community confirms in many aspects my view of who I am.	0,783	
I can identify myself with the Vosvos community.	0,802	
I have strong feelings for the Vosvos community.	0,800	
I feel like I am bound to the Vosvos community.	0,747	
Satisfaction		0,924
Overall, the Vosvos community meets my expectations.	0,713	
The content of the Vosvos community matches exactly with my interests.	0,749	
The Vosvos community fulfills my needs.	0,574	
Degree of Influence		0,751
As a member of Vosvos community, I can influence the whole community.	0,750	
I am quite influential in directing the Vosvos community.	0,762	
Any member has the chance to be an active part in the Vosvos community.	0,656	
WOMM		0,878
I tell positive things about Vosvos community to other people.	0,770	
I recommend the Vosvos community to people who ask my advice.	0,782	
I encourage the other people to join Vosvos community.	0,558	
Brand Image		0,803
Vosvos brand is trustworthy..	0,785	
Vosvos brand is likeable.	0,801	
Vosvos brand is a very good brand.	0,861	
Vosvos brand is a very attractive brand.	0,801	
Interaction Preference		0,861
I am someone who enjoys interacting with other community members.	0,806	
I am someone who likes actively participating in discussions with other community members.	0,816	
In general, I am someone who, given the chance, seeks contact with other community members.	0,757	
In general, I thoroughly enjoy exchanging ideas with other community members.	0,805	

4.4.2 Correlation and Regression Analysis

In the research before regression analysis, corre-

lation analysis is carried out to test whether there is a linear association between variables, or no

Table 5: Correlations between Dimensions

	Consumer Participation	Identification with Community	Satisfaction	Degree of Influence	WOMM	Brand Image	Interaction Preference	Community Loyalty
Consumer Participation	1	,681**	,693	,550*	,721*	,538*	,676*	,656*
		,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
Identification with Community		1	,755*	,713*	,675*	,574*	,654*	,646*
			,000	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
Satisfaction			1	,580*	,697*	,541*	,644*	,583*
				,000	,000	,000	,000	,000

Degree of Influence				1	,526*	,487*	,600*	,551*
					,000	,000	,000	,000
WOMM					1	,657*	,682*	,671*
						,000	,000	,000
Brand Image						1	,596*	,494*
							,000	,000
Interaction Preference							1	,799*
								,000
Community Loyalty								1

** p < .01

After correlation analysis, regression analysis had been done to identify relationships between community identities, interaction levels –which are de-

finied as reasons of participation to the community- and participation to community.

Table 6 : Association between Participation to Volkswagen Beetle Brand Community with Identification of Community, Satisfaction and Degree of Influence

	SS	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	38,184	12,728	50,084	,000
Residual	30,496	0,254		
R²	0,556			
Independent Variables	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Identification with Community	,365	,079		,000
Satisfaction	,206	,066		,002
Degree of Influence	,013	,066		,847

As a result of analysis R² is found 0,556 and H₁ ve H₂ hypothesis are accepted and H₃ hypothesis is rejected. Accordingly, there is a positive relationship between community identification, and community satisfaction and participation to community. There is no positive relationship between interaction level

and participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community.

Thereafter, regression analysis is done to identify relationship between WOMM and participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community and it is reached the results in Table 7.

Table 7 : Association between Participation to Volkswagen Beetle Brand Community with Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM)

	SS	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	42,726	42,726	137,147	,000
Residual	38,007	,265		
R²	,529			
Independent Variables	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Consumer Participation	,789	,067	11,711	,000

R² is found 0,529 and as a result of that, H₄ hypothesis is accepted. This result show that there is a positive relationship between WOMM and participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community

Again, regression analysis is done to identify relationship between brand image and participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community and it is reached the results in Table 8.

Table 8 : Association between Participation to Volkswagen Beetle Brand Community with Brand Image

	SS	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	27,141	27,141	74,333	,000
Residual	44,546	,365		
R²	,379			
Independent Variables	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Consumer Participation	,629	,073	8,622	,000

In consequence of regression analysis, it is seen that there is a statistically significant relationship between participation to the Volkswagen Beetle brand community and brand image. R² is found 0,379 and according to this, H₅ hypothesis is accepted.

To identify relationship between participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community and interaction preference, regression analysis is done and results in Table 9 is reached.

Table 9 : Association between Participation to Volkswagen Beetle Brand Community and Interaction Preference

	SS	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	50,424	50,424	101,990	,000
Residual	60,318	,494		
R²	,455			
Independent Variables	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Consumer Participation	,857	,085	10,099	,000

After the analysis, R² is found 0,455 and according to this, H₆ hypothesis is accepted. From this result, it can be said that there is a positive relationship between participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community and interaction preference.

Regression analysis is done to identify relationship between degree of influence of community members and word of mouth communication and results from Table 10 is reached.

Table 10 : Association between Degree of Influence of Community Members and Word of Mouth Marketing (WOMM)

	SS	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	43,071	43,071	139,515	,000
Residual	37,663	,309		
R²	,533			
Independent Variables	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Degree of Influence	,721	,061	11,812	,000

After the analysis, R² is found 0,533 and according to this, H₇ hypothesis is accepted. This result support that there is positive relationship between degree of influence of community members and

word of mouth communication.

Regression analysis is done to identify relationship between degree of influence of community members and brand image and results from Table 11 is reached.

Table 11 : Association between Degree of Influence of Community Members and Brand Image

	SS	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	31,422	31,422	95,205	,000
Residual	40,265	,330		
R²	,438			
Independent Variables	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Degree of Influence	,616	,063	9,757	,000

After the analysis, R^2 is found 0,438 and according to this, H8 hypothesis is accepted. From this result, it can be said that there is a positive relationship degree of influence of community members and brand image.

Finally, to identify relationship between degree of influence of community members and interaction preference, regression analysis is done and result from Table 12 is reached.

Table 12 : Association between Degree of Influence of Community Members and Interaction Preference

	SS	MS	F	Sig.
Regression	73,721	73,721	242,938	,000
Residual	37,021	,303		
R²	,666			
Independent Variables	β	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Degree of Influence	,943	,061	15,586	,000

After the analysis, R^2 is found 0,666 and according to this, H9 hypothesis is accepted.

5. Conclusion

Brand is an important actor in consumption behavior and both consumption and brand are not only economic facts. They are also social, psychological and cultural facts of societies. Brands are in use to determine consumers' identity, providing integration to the society, implying individual differences by ever socializing consumers. These usages make brands multi-dimensional facts. With respect to these reasons, brands should be used in many fields from daily rituals to composition of society. These rituals have functions like creating meanings and give meaning to life. Here, brands are creating their own rituals by using brand communities and besides with being a part of existing ritual, they bring a different dimension to consumer behavior and brand concepts.

Brand communities which are created by its customers and enthusiasts are one of the important steps of keeping brand culture alive. Communities which are created by Volkswagen Beetle enthusiasts are one of the best examples of these kinds of orga-

nizations. From this point of view, results of research about Volkswagen Beetle Turkey organization are as follows;

- It can be said that the reasons of participation to Volkswagen Beetle brand community are social engagement that community provides, interaction that community members have, members' identification with brand community, and harmony of members' areas of interests and content of community.

- Individuals attended the Volkswagen Beetle brand community state that their expectations about directing community and being able to influence other members are satisfied at desired level.

- Participants of Volkswagen Beetle brand communities think that Volkswagen Beetle brand is very good and attractive brand. As a result of information and sharing provided by the community, commitment to the community is consolidated.

When average values of the answers to the statements are taken into the consideration, it is seen that participants choose the option of "strongly agree" at 50 % and more. These results are supporting the following statements;

- Community members are not only customers;

they become enthusiasts of the brand.

- Community members substantially internalize the identity of community
- Members of community find a place for themselves in the community
- Community has undeniable important place in members' lives
- Community gives members something to talk

about.

- Members of community feel a strong brand image
- Community provides interaction between customers
- Community members have a strong commitment to the brand.

REFERENCES

- Algesheimer, R. Dholakia, U. and Herrmann, A. (2005) "The Social Influence of Brand Community: Evidence from European Car Clubs" *Journal Marketing*, 69:19-34.
- Altunışık, U. (2004) "Marka Değeri Yaratmada Reklamın Rolü" *Marketing Türkiye*, http://www.marketing-turkiye.com/yeni/Yazarlar/Diger_Yazilar.aspx?id=295, (14.03.2010).
- Altunışık, R., Özdemir, Ş. and Torlak, Ö. (2007) *Pazarlamaya Giriş*, Sakarya Yayıncılık, Sakarya.
- Bender, T. (1978) *Community and Social Change in America*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, New Jersey.
- Cova, B. and Cova, V. (2001) "Tribal Aspects of Postmodern Consumption Research: The Case of French In-Line Roller Skaters" *Journal of Consumer Behaviour*, 1 : 67-76.
- Çobanlı, C. (2007) *Vosvos – Bir Kaplumbağa Yolculuğu (1931-2003)*, Tosbağ Yayın, İstanbul.
- Fournier, S., Sele, K. and Schogel, M. (2005) "The Paradoxes of Brand Community Management" *Thesis*, 3: 16-20.
- Gegez, E. (2007) *Pazarlama Araştırmaları*, Beta Basım, İstanbul.
- İslamoğlu, A. H. (2003) *Tüketici Davranışları*, Beta Basım, İstanbul.
- Kayaman, R. and Armutlu, C. (2003) "Postmodern Tüketici Davranışının Pazar Bölümlenme Kavramında Etkileri: Postmodern Klanlar" *Gazi Üniversitesi, Ticaret ve Turizm Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi*, 1:1-18.
- Köktürk Sümersan, M., Yaçın, M. and Çobanoğlu, E. (2008) *Kurum İmajı Oluşumu ve Ölçümü*, Beta Yayınları, İstanbul.
- McAlexander, J. H., Schouten, J. W. and Koenig, H. F. (2002) "Building Brand Community" *Journal of Marketing*, 66:38-54.
- Muniz Jr. A. M. and O'Guinn, T. C. (2001) "Brand Community" *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27 : 412-432.
- Odabaşı, Y. and Barış, G. (2002) *Tüketici Davranışları*, Mediacat Kitapları, İstanbul
- Odabaşı Y. and Oyman M. (2003) *Pazarlama İletişimi Yönetimi*, Mediacat Kitapları, İstanbul
- Öter, Z. and Özdoğan. O. N. (2005) "Kültür Amaçlı Seyahat Eden Turistlerde Destinasyon İmajı: Selçuk-Efes Örneği" *Anatolia: Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 16(2):127-138.
- Schouten, J.W. and McAlexander H. J (1995) "Subcultures of Consumption: An Ethnography of the New Bikers" *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22 (2) : 43-61.
- Woisetschläger, D. M., Hartleb, V. and Blut, M. (2008) "How to Make Brand Communities Work: Antecedents and Consequences of Consumer Participation" *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 7(3) :237-256.
- Yeygel, S. (2006) "Postmodern Toplumsal Yapının Pazarlamaya Getirdiği Yeni Boyut: Topluluk Pazarlaması (Tribal Marketing)", *Bilgi Türk Dünyası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 38 : 197-228.