



**Global Connectivity, Knowledge and Innovation for
Sustainability and Growth: New Paradigms of Theory and
Practice**

Editors

**Vidya Atal
Ram Sewak Dubey**

Montclair, New Jersey, USA

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The influence of peers and brands in the skateboarding subculture: A Mexico and U.S.A comparison

Juan Antonio Vargas-Barraza
Jorge Pelayo-Maciel
Iris Zepeda-Gutierrez

*University of Guadalajara
Marketing and International Business Department, CUCEA*

Abstract

The paper shows a comparison about how peers influence the acceptance of brands in the skateboarding subculture, and how the marketing for use specific skateboarding brands is morphing this counterculture subculture into a consumer culture through the use of media and famous skateboarding people. The importance of their symbols is analyzed to see how they are an influence for choosing some of the brands that they wear and use. Two samples from two countries were performed, first in Guadalajara, Mexico, where the skateboarding is popular and still a representation of rebellion, and not fully allowed by the government, and second in Portland, Oregon in the U.S.A, where the city has policies open to the practice of the sport. Statistical analysis was performed to test the hypothesis.

Keywords: Branding, Consumer Behavior, Consumer Culture, subcultures, counterculture, sports marketing.

Introduction

The skateboarding subculture has been mutated from be considered some like "white suburban rebels" to a group of consumers who worth to invest in them. Since this subculture appeared in the 1970s, were from be considered something like a young fad, as the same way to the Hula Hoop, to a bunch of rebels and today's a extreme sport were sponsorships invest millions of dollars to have their brand on it (Atencio et al., 2013). People practicing this sport, or having it like a way of life spend millions of dollars in shoes alone: Between 1995 and 2002 only Vans, a classic skateboarding brand, quadrupled its sales to \$353 million dollars (Hamton, 2007). According to the data reported by the Surf Industry Manufacturers Association (SIMA) and published in the Web portal of the magazine Surfer Today (2008) the surf/skate industry is worth \$7.22 billion dollars in 2008. This sport and lifestyle has been steadily growing in numbers: from 1993 to 2000 in the U.S. the skateboarding industry increases to around 10 million, according to the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association (Dougherty, 2009). But not only the skateboarding has been growing alone; it has been also used to promote different products, from Cars to Soda brands

oriented to young audiences. At the beginning were only oriented to white teenagers but later they include females and minorities in the group (Atencio et al. 2013)

All these numbers have attracted the attention of the major sneakers manufacturing players such as Nike, who initially faced troubles to attract them because the company was perceived as a corporate monster (Hamton, 2007) but its efforts finally caught this subculture into them. The process was no easy, first Nike bought some independent skateboarding shoes companies such as Hurtle, and later performing a huge market research to find out which Nike model, the *DUNK*, a 1985 model very appreciated by the skaters. After those movements Nike finally becomes one of the main players in the skateboarding industry. The key was to communicate the proper image to the skaters of the company not like a giant trying to get their money.

Subculture as a consuming group

“If there is a youth oriented consumer market, then a subculture may be existing” (Feixa, 1998). The members of the subculture add their own style into items such as fashion style, clothes and ornaments (Dowd and Dowd, 2003), but it is not only a “copy and paste” way to adopted all the elements to look like a member of a specific subculture, it is a complex process that not only a marketing campaign would shape the members. There is a discussion about how the adoption process is made. Some researchers argue that the adoption of codes, dressing and other characteristics to fit into a subculture or into a group starts from a higher status role model and goes through the next level and so on until it becomes adopted by the group. Some others states that earliest adopters may not be necessarily in the top levels but they must be part of a network that have access to those innovations (Suzuki and Best, 2003).

Sometimes many fashion trends are originated in lower level subcultures, as was the case with punks, and then their codes of fashion spreads into higher level subcultures, or even they became part of the high fashion. Usually the adoption of distinctive objects go to a process were first a subculture adopts an object, changing their original use and giving it a new meaning: Punks wear Dr. Martens boots to look like a punk, not to use them for work, as those boots were originally intended to be.

Socialization has been a way to learn about brands inside a group of persons, being the consumer the learner and the group the socialization agent to choose a specific brand (Beaudoin and Lachance, 2006). Those teenagers, who are part or interact with a group of similar people, are more concerned about decisions for brands and styles, selecting clothes that represent them (Shim and Kho, 1997). A subculture has a lot with the socialization process in a group, fulfilling criteria among the members of a group (Dowd and Dowd, 2003):

1. The members often interact among them
2. They share a common view of the world around the characteristics that define the group by itself
3. They don't want or cannot be assimilated by a much larger culture, or a dominant culture, so they see as “normal” inside the subculture

During the socialization step the members of a group, especially in their teen years, acquires the attitudes that later will be relevant as consumers (Ward, 1974). The members of a subculture usually look for to reveal an image through the objects that they are using: garments, shows, haircuts, etc. showing their commitment with the subculture ideology. For them, is basic to acquire products related with their group (such as specific brands), it is in a certain way to be committed toward the group.

It has been found that influence over individuals is affected for demographic and socioeconomic factors but also by the environment around the person, so the members of a group may make purchasing decision based on their familiarity with the products or the place where they buy the item (Girard, 2010). When the person is not part of a group, but want to be recognized as a part of them, he or she will try to get the same items used for the members of a

group, but the impact of marketing advertising have influenced both groups (Weale and Kerr, 1970). The interaction among the members of a social group may influence in the choice of a brand, and influenced by peers the pressure to fit into the reference group affects in the economic demands for the teenagers to their parents to get access to the items that they want to be part of the group (Lachance et al., 2010).

The Skateboarding subculture

The skaters or skateboarding subculture had been overrated for many years, just perceived as a bunch of rebels no fitting into the society. But is important to state that a subculture is also a culture of consumption (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995), just like another culture, a subculture has their own personality reflected in their lifestyle, including consumer identity, where they reflect their sense of belonging (Fournier, 1998).

The politics about skateboarding are also different between the two cities, while in Portland, Oregon, is considered "the skateboarding capital" of the world, thanks to decades of citizen activism in pro of parks and areas for practicing the sport (Dougherty, 2009), other places such as Guadalajara, Mexico still perceives the skateboarding like a hobby for people who have nothing else to do, usually like a plague. There are not policies for support specific areas where people can use their boards, and sometimes they are persecuted under the idea they are vandalizing the public areas (El Informador, 2013; Prieto, 2013).

Anyway, skateboarding is a lifestyle where the members think about themselves like a rebels, and despite the government programs to give them space, they will look for what is forbidden or illegal (Dougherty, 2009). The skateboarding subculture has created their own norms and relationships, oriented more in open participation instead of what they considered "elite competition" or corporate bureaucratic forms of sport: baseball, football, etc. (Beal, 1995). Even more, there is a difference between what they perceived as bureaucratic skate, where the skaters buy commercial and mass-produced products related with skateboarding versus skater who resist the "professionalization" of their sport. When they buy commercially produced items such as skateboards and clothes, they personalize them in order to have their own expression reflected on it, and make a difference (Beal, 1995).

Working with girls who practice skateboarding, Kelly et al. (2005) identified three categories of skaters:

"The 'hardcore' or 'serious skaters', who consider themselves as skaters, frequented skate parks, had mastered a number of tricks, and knew how to assemble their own board.

The 'skaters' (the biggest category), liked the 'lifestyle' but skated more infrequently, and they had usually mastered only the basics, although some knew a few tricks.

The 'skater affiliates', identified as, or were known as, skaters mainly because of their friendships with other skaters, an affinity for skater culture, or both..."

The two late groups are more oriented to be followers than trendsetters but gave value to the fact to be considered different or alternative. Their clothing styles were oriented to the wear by the serious skaters, and have a concern that skater style had become a 'cool' commodity (Kelly et al, 2005).

As happened with other subcultures, like surfing, punk, gothic, etc, skateboarding went from suburban youths to the rest of the world, and other aspects of consumption related with skateboarding became part of the industry: music, movies, clothes, etc. (Moye and Ritz, 2009), today skateboarders and their culture are used by the industry as trendsetters influencing adopters.

Big companies started to pay attention on them, and trying to assimilate the skaters, some like Nike even purchased front companies oriented to skateboarding such as Hurley and Savier but it prove to be a mistake, until

they got into a model who was accepted by the skaters (Hampton, 2007). Companies like Adidas understand the value of authentic, self-expression and originality and start to work in collaboration with artist to project an idea of an “real” company (Bai et al., 2009), companies traditionally oriented to the skateboarding market started to follow what the big names made, and Vans also launched a campaign for artist collaborating in their shoes design.

Hypothesis and experimental design

To see how much the skaters are influenced by their peers, by the media, and how much are brands are important to them, our research focused in items dealing with fashion awareness and dressing codes and was based in the works of Sha et al., (2007) dealing with consumers inside the so called “pink market”, oriented to the gay consumers and with a high importance of brand awareness. Additionally we incorporate the influence of peers and Internet on brand sensibility, based in the work of Lachance et al. (2003), but modifying the original item of TV, and not using the family as influence. The proposed hypotheses are as follows:

H1: The impact of the brand depends on the influence of idols

H2: The influence of the brand depends on the influence of the Internet and the brand awareness

H3: Brand Impact depends on the brand awareness, the influence of the internet and the influence of friends

The Items for each dimension are built as:

Dimension for “brand impact”:

- I use brands made for skaters
- I use brands I consider for skateboarding
- I identify myself as skater wearing skating-only brands
- Real skaters only use skater brands
- I am part of the skateboard movement if I use skateboarding brands
- It is important to use the right brands for practice skateboarding

Dimension for “peers influence”:

- My friends wear brands made for skateboarding
- I wear brands recommended by my friends
- Friends use skate brands

Dimension for “skate symbols influence”:

- I buy my clothes only in skateboarding stores
- I wear in the same style the whole week
- I like the brands wear by famous skaters
- I know which brand are used by my favorite skaters
- I like to dress like my favorite skaters
- I am what I wear

Dimension for “brand awareness”:

- I care about my clothes brand
- I care if my clothes are original brands and not a copy
- I only wear original brands
- I wear imitation brands
- I buy my clothes in shopping malls
- I buy my clothes in flea markets

Dimension for “Internet influence”

- I like the clothing brands that I see on Internet
- Brands that I see on Internet influence my clothing style

The survey was performed in two steps: first in Guadalajara, Mexico, between May and June of 2013, visiting skate parks and in the area known as “Chapultepec”, a bohemian zone of the city, were young skaters meet and practice their sport. The second part was made in Portland, Oregon, during the month of August, were the skaters were interviewed in the skating zones of the city. To develop this research an exploratory factor analysis was developed for the needed latent variables to apply the method of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) as part of hypothesis testing.

Data Analysis

The basic assumptions of factor analysis are conceptual rather than statistical type. You can ignore the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity and linearity, being aware that its failure causes a decrease in the observed correlations. It is desirable to have some degree of multicollinearity, since the objective is to identify sets of interrelated variables (Hair et al., 1999). But in cases of structural equation model is required to have a linearity test data.

To develop the factor analysis, first an inspection must to be performed in order to ensure that the matrix of correlation among the variables is significant. From the 252 variables there 78 were significant at 0.01 level; 71 with a significant level of 0.05; 59 with a significant level of 0.1; and 44 without any significant level. In total there are 208 interrelationships above the 0.10 significance level, so we can continue with the factor analysis.

The next step is to assess the correlation matrix with Bartlett's spherical test, which measures the statistical probability that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. In this case we have that correlations that were taken together, and significant at the 0.01 level (Table 1 and 2), which is pretty good. Also for this research must have a value of statistical Kaiser - Meyer - Olkin (KMO) of 0.810, so it is appropriate to develop the factor analysis.

TABLE 1. KMO AND BARTLETT’S TEST

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin.		.810
Bartlett’s sphericity test	Chi-square	1021.839
	Df	253
	Sig.	.000

For the derivation of the factors (latent variables), the principal component method was developed, obtaining six latent variables that analyzes a total of 59.27% of the total variance, a number acceptable by the criteria in the social sciences, moreover, the latent root criterion was applied and according to theory we should consider the factors having self values greater than 1 (Hair et. al. 1999). Developing the following factors is the formation of latent variables (table 3, table 4, table 5, table 6, and table 7):

TABLE 2. CORRELATIONS

Items	IT 1	IT 2	IT 3	IT 4	IT 5	IT 6	IT 7	IT 8	IT 9	IT 10	IT 11	IT 12	IT 13	IT 14	IT 15	IT 16	IT 17	IT 18	IT 19	IT 20	IT 21	IT 22	IT 23	
IT 1	1																							
IT 2	0.433**	1																						
IT 3	0.503**	0.515**	1																					
IT 4	0.269**	0.449**	0.380**	1																				
IT 5	0.264**	0.319**	0.461**	0.300**	1																			
IT 6	0.174*	0.279**	0.275**	0.246**	0.227**	1																		
IT 7	0.177*	0.208**	0.295**	0.312**	0.257**	0.295**	1																	
IT 8	0.148*	0.323**	0.324**	0.366**	0.415**	0.297**	0.333**	1																
IT 9	0.133*	0.153*	0.168*	0.224**	0.400**	0.084**	0.376**	0.469**	1															
IT 10	0.140*	0.159*	0.134*	0.118*	0.236**	-0.0505	0.239**	0.295**	0.339**	1														

Transformations were made to prove the hypothesis of each of the eight latent variables, using the method known as classification of variables, useful to eliminate the dependence regarding the measure units used. Classification of \sqrt{x} was made to press high values and expand the small ones. To test the hypothesis, an analysis of Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) was also performed, having the following results:

“Skater” identity is influenced by their symbols, we can see that the influence of the skate symbols is significant at a level of 0.10 to explain how brands can impact on urban tribes, if one observes the correlation coefficient (R²) is only just under 0.036, however the F statistic has a significance level of 0.10, which means that globally this model statistically explains reality.

The influence of the brand depends on the influence of the Internet and the brand awareness. The influence of the Internet has a significance level of 0.10, while the brand awareness has a level of significance of 0.05, plus they both have a positive relationship with the dependent variable. If the coefficient R² is analyzed, this is low, but the overall level of significance there is a significance level of 0.05, which you can say that this model explains 95% of globally influenced brand.

Brand Impact depends on the brand awareness, the influence of the internet and the influence of friends, it is observed that the influence of the brand has a positive and significant relationship with the concern for personal appearance but with respect to variable influence of internet friends and influence of these fail to be significant in explaining the dependent variable. It also has the model globally can explain up to 95 % personal appearance variable.

TABLE 8. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H1: dependent variable “skater identity is influenced by their symbols”

Influence of skate symbols	0.190347*
Constant	0.667572***
R ²	0.035672
F	4.919942*

H2: Dependent Variable “Brand Influence”

Internet influence	0.132413*
Brand awareness	0.254547**
Constant	0.491277***
R ²	0.094471
F	6.885609**

H3: Dependent Variable “Brand Awareness”

Brand Impact	0.242782**
Internet Influence	0.124448
Peer Influence	0.1875
Constant	0.519975***
R ²	0.093046
F	6.771044**

Conclusions

As we can observe, the influence on the skaters still is based in their symbols, such symbols are the skaters who appear in the media, and are considered as the top ones. It is important to point the several of them are already signed by big brands related to skateboarding, and they are presented in magazines and sponsored by companies in the skateboarding business.

The influence of their peers for choose a brand to wear and to be considered a “real” skater is not really significant, but it is important the influence of Internet and to know a brand to choose the “right” one. Internet here is having an influence for choose a brand, but not for to be aware of the brand. The name of the brand is still important, probably those are brands considered to be part of the skateboarding subculture, such as vans, or vision street wear, just to cite some names.

One of the main limitations of this paper was the size of the samples, especially in Mexico, where there were not enough participants. The American skaters were more positive to be interviewed than the Mexican ones, probably because the attitude of the people and the government against them. In Mexico the skaters are perceived as a young people who is just wasting the time and destroying the public property. Another limitation is that the work skipped a question to see which brands were considered authentic for them.

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