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**THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS LEADS TO ONE INFINITE LOOP:
AN INTROSPECTIVE ADVENTURE INTO APPLE COMPUTER
CUSTOMER EVANGELISM**

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on a literature review, conceptual development and an introspective narrative to explore “quintessence” and Customer Evangelism (CE). Quintessence, a mystical connection between the customer and a product, elevates a profane product experience to the sacred. This paper argues that the quintessential moment, the root of the Customer Evangelism conversion experience, awakens or redirects a propensity toward evangelistic behaviour. As the moment of conversion, quintessence is as pivotal as it is mystical. Tourism entities can attempt to nurture a seemingly religious experience, and for some entities quintessence is an unexpected by-product.

An introspective narrative, through one of the author’s experiences with Apple Computer products, commences exploration into quintessence and its relationship to Customer Evangelism. After a literature review, this paper outlines a Customer Evangelism model with quintessence, and then triangulates that model with the narrative data.

Key Words: Customer Evangelism, Service-Dominant Logic, Brand Cult, Brand Communities, Consumer Culture Theory, Word of Mouth Marketing

INTRODUCTION

Rich Marcotte travels frequently on business, usually several weekly round trips from Chicago with Southwest, a low-cost and no frills airline. Marcotte does not work for Southwest, nor does Southwest compensate him for his behaviour with other passengers. However, a friend nicknamed him “The Mayor of Southwest Airlines” because Marcotte evangelises to other passengers about his love of the airline (McConnel & Huba, 2007).

He calms upset passengers due to travel snafus and speaks to passengers about the frequent flyer program. Marcotte assists new Southwest travellers with the Southwest boarding system and discusses Southwest benefits to non-Southwest travellers. Marcotte estimates he lauded Southwest with about 9,000 people during his travel time (McConnel & Huba, 2007).

If Marcotte was simply satisfied with his Southwest experience, he may not have reacted with such brand passion. The Southwest experience clicked with Marcotte; Southwest airlines did more than get him from place to place safely. Southwest appealed to him on an emotional, even spiritual level. For Marcotte, Southwest was what an airline should be. His resulting behaviour resembles consumer religiosity—an essential aspect of customer evangelism and brand communities—in a tourism context.

Brand Communities and Customer Evangelists

Brand Communities (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001) and their members' behaviours are rising in importance as traditional media organisations lose their hold on public attention. Brand Community and Brand Cult research often looks at Apple Computer Customer Evangelists (CE) as a first stop (Belk & Tumbat, 2005). Macheads and their communities, usually called Macintosh User Groups or MUGs, fit the Brand Community description well.

Macheads consume the product, communicate with each other about the product, meet in real-time to share product experiences, spread positive word of mouth to sell the product to others, and maintain their Mac User identity as a point of pride and superiority over the general population (Kawasaki, 1991; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Academics describe them as a Cult and Religion, and compare Apple CEO Steve Jobs to a Jesus or Priest-like figure (Belk & Tumbat, 2005).

The most extreme and devoted Macheads are “Evangelists”, so named by Guy Kawasaki. Kawasaki worked for Apple in the 1980s and was the first person with a non-religious job with “Evangelist” in the title. His role was to convince third party software developers to create programs for a revolutionary computer with a compact design and graphical user interface, the Macintosh (Kawasaki, 1991).

Software companies in the 1980s were mostly small start ups, circumspect about where to invest their time. Kawasaki needed to convince them that Apple Computer—a powerful company with the majority of market share in home computing—had a winner with the Macintosh. What the software companies, Apple and Kawasaki did not anticipate was that Bill Gates and his Windows software would make a licensing agreement that knocked Apple from the top of the home computing perch. Apple and the Macintosh became the minority player in the computing market (Kawasaki, 1991).

Yet the Macintosh computer engendered such a loyal customer following that the word *Evangelist* came to mean a Brand Community member. These Customer Evangelists (CEs) spend their leisure time using, talking about and supporting the product – effectively unpaid product sales and technical support teams (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Kawasaki, 2009; Shelly, 2008). The volunteer sales force kept the message of the Macintosh alive through great changes in the company’s fortunes (Shelly, 2008).

This peer-to-peer product recommendation, Word of Mouth (WOM) marketing, has inordinately high credibility to the message receiver. The person delivering the WOM message is seen as authentic; they have no inducements to promote the product. Passionate WOM generators have been called Opinion Leaders, Customer Advocates, Mavens and the like (Rogers, 1983; Walsh, Gwinner, & Swanson, 2004). CEs are not necessarily leaders, experts, credible or particularly influential. And at times CEs seem crazy, biased, fanatical zealots (Shelly, 2008). However, CEs are persistent and devoted to

the cause, and therefore effective, especially in groups. Their conversion rate may be low, but to an evangelist, every soul deserves salvation.

Evangelism: More than a metaphor

For thousands of years, the word Evangelist denoted a religious context, specifically Christians who preached the “good news” of Christianity as their central unpaid vocation. Unless a clergyperson, an Evangelist generally receives no financial compensation. Driven by their belief, Religious Evangelists should adhere to the value system they espouse: a “life and lip” approach. The Evangelist’s power is through his or her credibility (Green, 1970).

This “life and lip” approach was revolutionary with early Christians. In a world where religious, political and economic life was bound tightly into a social structure, religion was an affiliation that could shift and flow as much as one’s fortunes. Romans were tolerant of most religions, especially other polytheistic ones. The Roman approach adopted gods from other cultures and their own pantheon, which they had adopted from the Greeks. However they considered monotheistic religions odd and rare, as the only such religion known to the Romans were the Hebrews, or Jews (Green, 1970).

The Romans tolerated the Jews and considered them as an ethnic or racial group; acceptance into the Jewish community required a Jewish mother (Esler, 1995). A monotheistic religion with access to everyone was unheard of and outside the realm of imagination. When Christianity began to spread, Romans considered this new religion as a threat to the social, political and economic order.

Christianity and religious Evangelism became widespread through the experiences and work of Paul of Tarsus, a Jew and Roman administrator. Paul was an unusual figure: both a Jew and a Roman citizen, and fluent in many languages with a Greek and Hebraic education. He worked for the Romans prosecuting Christians, the central mission of his life. One day, on the road to Damascus, he experienced an epiphany and heard the voice of Christ. His experience was physical, emotional, spiritual and quintessential. Paul then reoriented his life’s work and went from being one of the most effective Christian prosecutors to the first, and some argue, the most significant Evangelist in history besides Billy Graham (Green, 1970).

Several key Evangelism features stemmed from Paul's seminal experience. These key features, present in both religious and customer evangelism, create a parallel that gives *Evangelist* semantic value and an appropriate metaphorical comparison.

Nurturing Evangelists

Strongly defining acceptable and non-acceptable beliefs and behaviours is a large part of forming an Evangelist identity. First, Paul instructs his fellow Evangelists to encourage others to forsake all other gods and strictly adhere to the Hebrew's monotheistic approach (Esler, 1995). Paul, a monotheist from birth, observed that polytheists who attended Christian rituals were not authentic Christians.

Being a Christian was as much about what one was not: a polytheist or a Jew. Rejecting the overriding social, economic and religious mores of the time was dangerous and, in Paul's view, a requirement for embracing Christianity. Authenticity was extremely important. Christians in the early church were an exclusive and minority group defined in opposition to the majority (Green, 1970).

Apple founder Steve Jobs bound exclusivity and authenticity together in his drive to create computers that were aesthetically pleasing, simple to use and accessible to the emerging creative class. He had Apple espouse totems of opposition. At various times, Apple flew the pirate flag above their headquarters. Similarly, Apple developed an advertising campaign visualising themselves as sly, athletic, young and revolutionary (Belk & Tumbat, 2005). In a world of (Microsoft founder Bill) Gates-like conformity, rather than a slogan, Apple featured an ode to non-conformity in their advertising:

Here's to the crazy ones.

The misfits.

The rebels.

The troublemakers.

The round pegs in the square holes.

The ones who see things differently.

They're not fond of rules.

And they have no respect for the status quo.

You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify or vilify them.
About the only thing you can't do is ignore them.
Because they change things.
They push the human race forward.
And while some see them as the crazy ones,
We see genius.
Because the people who are crazy enough to think
they can change the world,
Are the ones who do.
("Ten years after "Think Different"," 2010)

Apple CEs, many of whom developed their Apple love during the late 1980s, identified strongly with the Apple messages. Their choice to consume Apple products marked their status, intelligence and rejection of the mainstream (Featherstone, 1991). Apple users tended to be more highly educated, of higher socio-economic status and more visual thinkers than other computer users. Steve Job's messages about rebellion and superiority justified Apple's small market share. By embracing pejorative terms for difference—rebels, crazy, misfits, troublemakers—Apple embraced its minority status and recast themselves as the one true way in the digital world (Belk, Ger, & Askegaard, 2003; Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

“Think Different” led to the “switch” campaign featuring an individual sharing his quintessential positive Mac experience against the darker Microsoft experience. This was the first evangelistic campaign, embracing the conversion experience and describing quintessence through actual customer experiences ("Ten years after "Think Different"," 2010).

“I'm a Mac” commercials visually represented the Apple computer as a young, creative, friendly, educated and hip person—a Steve Jobs type—as opposed to the PC that was a nerdier, less articulate, relatively in denial Bill Gates type ("Ten years after "Think Different"," 2010).

The development of the Apple brand as a status symbol of the creative class is strategic, with much of the brand equity communicating what Apple is not rather than defining what it is. Apple is innovative, and their effective strategy garners attention

through its unique product look and feel. The result is a growing appeal as the company dominates product categories beyond computers such as mobile phones, music players, tablet computers, and, most profitably, music, film and book distribution (Kawasaki, 2009).

Yet at times Apple leans on or ignores their Brand Communities and Cults. These groups can be vocal, attention getting, embarrassing and awkward depending on the positioning of the Apple brand (Shelly, 2008). So what makes the Apple Evangelists stay so loyal? The answer has as much to do with evangelists themselves rather than the message.

The propensity toward Evangelism

A model of CE posits that Evangelistic behaviour is predictive (Collins & Murphy, 2009), using indicators from literature in marketing, philosophy, sociology and religion (Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007). In the CE model, formative indicators must be present in order to predict one's propensity toward evangelism (Collins & Murphy, 2009). In a formative scale, indicators weights can differ (Bucic & Gudergan, 2004) but the indicators are essential and exhaustive. Although they may vary in importance, all indicators must be present in a subject.

Simply put, this model says that people tend or do not tend toward evangelism. If they do, a quintessential experience with a product creates an evangelist. Someone not predisposed toward evangelism can have a quintessential experience but will not share it with others in quite that way. The model indicators follow.

Experience Driven: Evangelists seek transformational experiences. (Baumann, 2008; Belk, Wallendorf, & Sherry, 1989; Gilmore & Pine, 1999; Kawasaki, 2009; Lusch, Vargo, & Wessels, 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2000).

Idealistic: Evangelists desire to connect with something better, higher, more perfect than themselves (Green, 1970; Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007).

Gift Economists: Evangelists participate in free exchanges of information and knowledge, particularly in communities that bestow status to individuals who give much (Carse, 1986; Pitt, Watson, Berthon, Wynn, & Zinkan, 2006).

Socially Driven: Evangelists enjoy and seek interaction with others, which enriches their experiences (Belk et al., 1989; Hanlon, 2006; Kawasaki, 1991; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Rogers, 1983; Walsh et al., 2004).

Authentic: Evangelists value consistency between belief and behaviour in themselves and others (Belk et al., 1989; Gilmore & Pine, 2007; Sweeney, Soutar, & Mazzarol, 2008).

Cultish: Evangelists “Think Different” and revel somewhat in the elite status that minority views bestow upon them (Belk & Tumbat, 2005; Green, 1970; McConnel & Huba, 2007; Muniz & Schau, 2007).

Epistemologically Driven: Evangelists enjoy learning and connect knowledge, skill and ability with status. Knowledge brings them spiritually closer to the root of the divine experience (Baumann, 2008; Belk et al., 1989; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Popular business literature is prescriptive and provides case studies and formulas to create a product or a message that create CEs (Kawasaki, 1991; McConnel & Huba, 2007). Kawasaki, 18 years after his initial book, stands by this claim (Kawasaki, 2009).

Somewhat different from Kawasaki, the Collins and Murphy model (2009) resembles the Paul of Tarsus story. Paul was a zealot before and after his conversion experience; what changed was the focus of his missionary work. While their conceptual model requires triangulation through empirical testing, an unexplored aspect of the model is the role of quintessence—the catalyst of the conversion experience.

The Role of Quintessence

Belk (1989) defines quintessence as a perceived rightness in form and function, which lends a sacred quality to the object. He describes it as a quality perceived by the customer that gives the object of his gaze sacredness, and elevates it above the profane. Collins and Murphy (2009) build on Belk's observations in a CE context, and position quintessence as the ignition of the Evangelistic experience. It is the post-conversion sustenance from which Evangelism draws strength. However, quintessence remains as illusive and mysterious as the flash of light that struck Paul on the road to Damascus.

Although details of Paul's conversion differ, the experience and its aftermath redirected Paul's evangelical focus. Paul embraced the religion he vilified, and his evangelism was largely responsible for many tenants of the Christian Church (Green, 1970).

Quintessence – the afterglow of the conversion experience – lingers and bonds the customer to the product, with a halo affect on the brand. Quintessence extends beyond those with a propensity toward Evangelism. However Evangelists in the grip of a quintessential product is a heady mix. They transform from a customer to an unwaged volunteer: spreading positive word of mouth, helping other product users, sharing stories and myths about the product and developing social connections around product use (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

Quintessence is an unexamined phenomenon. Although Consumer Culture Theory explores it somewhat, quintessence's origins and effects are unexplored beyond relationships to elevating the profane to the sacred. Quintessence turns a Macintosh into more than a computer. And it turns someone with a propensity toward Evangelism into an Apple Evangelist. As central as this quality is to the Collins and Murphy model, it deserves further exploration, commencing with half of the Collins/Murphy team—Nathalie Collins.

METHODOLOGY

This paper explores quintessence with an auto-ethnographic, introspective narrative by one of the authors. Nathalie Collins, using computers since 1983 and Apple products since 1987, has been an Apple Evangelist since the early 1990s. She is also researching CE and Customer Co-Creation of Value.

Auto-ethnography, a rare marketing research approach, serves several purposes. In relatively unexplored concepts, this approach can start a deep conversation. This methodology engenders further conversations rather than discovering an absolute truth. Auto-ethnography is particularly appropriate when exploring subjective emotions and experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), such as quintessence.

As a researcher examining CE, and a CE herself, the narrative experience is a tool for exploring the researcher/subject relationship, biases and views about CEs and

products that exemplify the studied behaviour (Denzen & Lincoln, 2000; Reid & Brown, 1996).

The following narrative outlines key moments in Nathalie's history with Apple Computer products, especially those relating to quintessence and subsequent evangelistic behaviour. The analysis draws comparisons amongst the narrative and the theoretical aspects and conceptual models. An emphasis on quintessential qualities of the user experience helps introduce discussion about quintessence.

Nathalie wrote this narrative over two days as a stream of consciousness document, with minimal editing. It then sat for a few days. The authors did not change the text when working through the analysis. The analysis was also sent to a few colleagues with expertise in this methodology for review. Her narrative is then analysed to elicit aspects of quintessence that lend themselves to further examination.

Nathalie's Story: My Journey to One Infinite Loop Computers

In 1983, I worked with my first computer. It was a Tandy model that required two five inch floppy disks and Basic programming. Although I loved the idea of computers and the future they promised, I was not technically proficient and mathematically minded enough to be able to program well. I not only liked using computers, but liked the kinds of people who liked computers. They seemed smart. And they were boys—coming from a family of girls I saw them as exotic and less scary than girls. And they were non-athletic boys. I hated sports.

However, without computer skills I was not able to hold my own in that social group. Much to my dismay I was artistically inclined, something that had no use in the computer culture of the 1980s. I had no ability to create anything significant on the machines or have another entrée into the social group of the “math and science” guys who seemed a lot cooler than me.

In 1987 I joined an art class in high school and was surprised to find a little computer there. I mean little. The Mac on the drawing table was one of the first models, with a tiny screen, handle on the top and a friendly and cute little mouse. It also had two drives, but the disks were 3 inch—a technological advancement at the time.

No one in the room of artists seemed to be remotely interested in using the computer. I spent most of my time exploring the programs and was amazed by its intuitive graphic interface, the drawing programs, and the ability to be able to create different typefaces. The computer enabled me to create

drawings and artworks quickly and make perfect shapes that were hard to draw by hand. As the years passed, I spent a lot of time in that room on that Mac, creating posters, flyers, illustrated stories and drawings. The graphicness of the works I could create was appealing to me although they didn't look like what we were meant to be creating in art class—namely multi-media coloured works.

I began to create similar works by hand: graphic black and white drawings that imitated the flat, graphic look of what I could create on the computer. I became enamoured of typeset pages in magazines and books that seemed more accessible to me than finer works of art. And as someone who had been on student newspapers for many years and won awards as a student journalist, I was already enthusiastic about the printed word. The Mac made it somehow seem more accessible.

Going to Art School in the early 1990s was a shock. No Macs. No computers at all. I had to create type, shapes and graphics by hand. It was like going back in time. I was disgusted with the idea I couldn't use a computer to create perfect graphic shapes and text. I was also horrified at how bad I was at it without a computer. At about the same time I began working at a community newspaper as production manager, a job I scored through my knowledge of computers and graphics. No Macs, but still an improvement over school.

A few years later, at university, I joined the student publications office that produced an award-winning newspaper. Even though I wasn't a Journalism major, I was seeking some extra income and volunteering time to beef up my resume. The coordinator of the office and my Macintosh mentor for those years, Paul, was happy to see me. Someone with my experience made his job easier. He guided me through Mac love, showing me how to manage the network of Macs in the office, bragged about the superiority of Macs over PCs, and pointed out how people who used Macs were somehow superior, somehow more sophisticated, somehow...more evolved. I agreed. We were more evolved I thought.

I got my own first Mac, a IIsi, in my second year at university. I had to fight for it as my father saw it as a useless expense that was "just for games". It was ostensibly to do my schoolwork but essentially he was right. I was enjoying myself on it! A friend, Emily, also went out and bought a Mac. She knew less about computers than I. Helping her with her Mac made me realise how much I knew and how much fun computers could be. I felt I was bringing her something that was great and she was an enthusiastic recipient of my help. I loved the Mac stuff and I loved showing others the Mac stuff.

Apple Communities and Evangelising

While this was going on, online communities had started. Prodigy, the first popular graphical user interface bulletin board, was my first stop. Then America Online. But then Apple came out with eWorld.

eWorld was the manifestation of the elegance and ease of use in an online space. It was everything I loved about Apple: cute icons, a clickable interface, a well thought out virtual space with the comfort and intuitiveness as though I had always been a part of it. And it was full of Mac Users! Sweet!

eWorld folded after a while and although that was upsetting I moved back to AOL. In the real world I graduated from university and moved in with my future husband: a man with...no computer at all. He didn't see the need for a computer and wasn't familiar with Macs. Shortly thereafter I began working for a conglomerate of small hospitality businesses and an advertising agency. I ensured both companies bought Macs, and with my IIsi at home I developed a standard that I had to defend constantly in the small town where we lived with no Apple Resellers. As computers became ubiquitous, they were mostly PCs.

Within a few years, I joined a Mac User Group List, and when we moved towns I was put in touch with Reg, a local Mac Evangelist. Reg, myself, my husband (by now a Mac convert although conversant in Windows as well) and a few others put together a local user group.

We made T-shirts, had meetings and put on showcases where we would invite the public to view our computers in the local art gallery and have a play. None of this was supported by Apple but on many levels we didn't expect it. Apple themselves weren't that supportive of me personally—never had good service from them then (different now of course). Local Apple dealers were supportive, though, particularly Mike, the closest dealer who was a four hour drive from us.

Mike became my lifeline to Mac products. With a phone call I could order parts, get basic tech support and resell my old machines to upgrade to new ones. I am still buying computers from Mike; about ten years later. In the last ten years, my husband and I alone would have bought over fifteen computers from him and we would be directly responsible for more than 20 computers and accessories purchased from him by others.

When we moved towns again, my husband and I tried to generate interest in a local Mac group, but it didn't seem to stick. It seemed I wasn't evangelistic enough to keep something like that going without a passionate power source like Reg who was so much more devoted and connected than I was. I wasn't that kind of Machead.

However, on the home front, I was engaged in some Mac Evangelism. My husband's family (six brothers and sisters and his two parents) were PC users. It is safe to say there weren't enough truly geeky

people in that group to have the Mac vs PC conversation; but his youngest brother was interested in entering into the graphics business. He got a duplicate of my setup at the time: 17" Powerbook with a full suite of graphics programs. He was the first in the household to go Mac, and after that, one of his sisters followed suit. Two down.

I started investing in Apple t-shirts. "iRock" after the iMac. "iPod therefore I am". And I scored a few free ones from Mike.

Emily, my early Mac convert friend, had gone back to PCs as the company she worked for provided them. Another friend, Traci, lived in Mac-heavy San Francisco but refused to "drink the kool-aid of the Mac cult" as she put it, no matter how highly I sang the praises. My father and sister were not computer-oriented enough to care but when my mother needed a computer....she got a Mac. Whether she liked it or not.

Everyone who remotely expressed interest in buying a Mac I sent to Mike. "Tell him Nathalie Collins sent you" I said—and Mike always gave them a good deal on a new or high quality secondhand machine. Another of my brothers-in law and his wife went out and bought a pair of Macs. And things then started to snowball after the iPod became popular.

Beyond computers

I bought an iPod as soon as it came out as I was someone who also has one of the first original Sony Walkman. I went through three or four different models. The iPod, and my iProd (prodding them to go Mac instead of PC) combined with deals from Mike made my husband's family fall like dominos--one after the other. Now, counting spouses, there are eight computers, four iPhones and a slew of iPods and iTouches amongst the eight direct relatives and their spouses on that side of the family. And on my side? My sister got a 24" iMac just this past year.

Others who have been converted along the way include about four friends, three work colleagues and one or two of my mother's employees.

I would start seeing people with Macs in airports, cafes and other public places more and more. If I was carrying my Mac we would acknowledge each other with a nod or a look. Sometimes we would share a charger. But as more people are using Macs this happens less and less. I am not thrilled about it but it is a trade off of sorts.

When friends and family would come into the fold and use Macs, there would be a kind of satisfaction—a high from turning someone on to the product. I am not sure if it came from being right—as

they were never disappointed—or if it came from being listened to. But I enjoyed helping people and I particularly enjoyed introducing people to the electronic world I loved, even though sometimes I could see they didn't get the buzz I did.

On a personal level though, each iteration of the Mac was an improvement, but didn't have the juice of the first "Aha!" experience until my work provided me with an iPhone.

I begged work long and hard to replace my Palm Pilot PDA with an iPhone and after about six months my supervisor signed the paperwork. From the day it was programmed for my email and I held the cool, light, sleek metal in my hand I was in love.

The touch screen interface allowing you to move things around with the drag of a finger was amazing. The utility of the utilities! The ease of syncing up and adding features. The "apps"—applications for everything from weight management to boredom. I could open PDFs. I could respond instantly to questions via email. I could watch movies. I could listen to podcasts. I could show everyone what I great company I worked for because they bought me an iPhone and were paying the bill.

I knew there were millions of other iPhones out there being used by millions of other people but it seemed to have been made just for me. It became, and is still, an extension of myself: clipped to my waist, hanging from a wrist holder or clutched in my hand it is always there. I might not have my wallet with me but I always have my iPhone. I record some of the most intimate details of my life—what I eat—on Lose it! A food diary. I store all my contacts, calendar items and most important emails on it And it is the source of hours of entertainment while I travel, listening to lectures, radio shows, podcast and audiobooks.

When, in 2008, I wanted to commence a PhD program, I told my supervisor that I wanted to study "Passion Transfer". Why were people so crazy about this stuff? How could we take someone's passion for a product and pass it on to someone else? Why are Customer Evangelists like me the way we are? I used the "Macintosh Mafia" as I called them sometimes as a case in point. Lots of people used Macs and didn't care either way. A computer is a computer. But what was it about those people who spent their own time and money promoting this stuff? How do people get that way?

Pilgrimages

In early 2009, my husband and I had the opportunity to go to MacWorld in San Francisco: the premiere Brand Community gathering in the world and hour's drive from Mac Headquarters in Palo Alto California on a "research trip" (grin). We went and, in the same trip, also met with Guy Kawasaki and visited One Infinite Loop: Apple headquarters in Palo Alto.

MacWorld was great and there was a kind of joy in the kinship and interest of the vendors. The participants and the displays were amazing. It was great to see Google, Microsoft and Apple there; although I knew this was the last year they would participate so it was tinged with sadness a bit. Meeting Guy Kawasaki was a buzz too as I had been reading his stuff for years. But I think the trip to One Infinite Loop was probably the most emotional. For years, with every Apple product I bought, every time I looked at the web site I would see One Infinite Loop. That address stayed static no matter how many times I moved.

My husband and I drove there and parked in the visitor parking lot near tour buses of Macheads there for the same reason. I walked into the lobby. I nodded at the receptionist. She acknowledged us with a smile. She could tell we weren't there on business; we were just fans. This was it. I felt good there. And although I have not always received the best service from Apple, although there were times when my hard drives died, my computer froze, my peripherals were not compatible, I lost information, I upgraded at the wrong time, whatever. Apple hadn't been perfect.

But when I was there I felt like this was the place. The people in this building understood me. They got me. They were making things for me. Every day. It was a pretty cool feeling. I felt like I wanted to thank someone for making this stuff. So I thanked the receptionist. She was pretty gracious. Then my husband and I took some photos and headed home.

ANALYSIS

The analysis has two parts. First, the authors examine the CE theoretical perspective and absorption of the brand and product into the Evangelist's identity. The second part of the analysis examines the quintessence experience, and feelings arising from the quintessential experience.

Evangelism: Although Nathalie does not address whether she was evangelistic about other products before the Mac, her narrative indicates all formative indicators of an Evangelist are present.

Experience Driven: The most enthusiastic elements of the narrative are when Nathalie experiences the product either alone or in conjunction with others. Her most enjoyable experiences are both aesthetically pleasing to her and easy for her to understand. It is not obtaining or learning the equipment she enjoys, it is using the equipment to achieve other ends.

Idealistic: Nathalie seemed to believe that the better Apple product was around the corner, consistently upgrading and embracing new products. From the narrative she is an early adopter (Rogers, 1983) and accepts the pitfalls of that position such as the high product price, the learning curve and the product that sometimes does not work as it should.

Gift Economists: Nathalie enjoyed helping her friends purchase a Mac and referring customers to her Apple Reseller, Mike. She drew help from others as well; it seemed she saw a give and take in the computer community. People help each other although the people giving and taking are not always the same people.

Socially Driven: Nathalie's desire to connect drove her interest in computers. Although she identified with the "science/math" crowd, she had no basis to broker the friendship. Being proficient at computers seemed an entrée into that group.

Authentic: Nathalie valued authenticity, defending her Mac choice through an unpopular Mac era and influencing others to purchase Macs in her workplace when she could. She wore clothes boasting about her choice, to label herself a "true believer" in the product.

Cultish: Nathalie enjoyed the cliquish-ness of Mac users and lamented the end of the era of the exclusivity of the Mac group. As Macs become more popular there is less of a connection between individual users, she observes. That her family and her husband's family have become Mac users seem to have enhanced their family relationship by providing a common ground. She also revels in her relationship with Mike, the Apple Reseller. The suggestion to "name drop" her for a better deal is a token of status with the reseller and one which seems to work as she has tracked how many have purchased from Mike.

Epistemologically Driven: Nathalie taught herself how to use a computer, and attended both trade school and university—two markers that she enjoys obtaining skills and knowledge. A highlight for her was university work on a Mac network with her "mentor"—that relationship seemed significant in that it was a successful transfer of knowledge in the workplace as well.

Yet her number "converts" is low. She had the most success with converts close to her: family members. In over twenty years, excluding her and her husband, she was

directly responsible for less than thirty computer purchases. A few purchases were forced: her mother and her husband for example. One friend has reverted back to a PC.

Nathalie, who has been through several jobs, moves and educational institutions would have come into contact with hundreds of people and yet she has, to her knowledge, been responsible for less than thirty purchases. This bears out that Nathalie's goal in evangelising has not been about selling Macs as much as interacting about them. This goal of interaction is consistent with research indicating that the goals of a commercial organisation and their Brand Community may not align (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001).

However, from a WOM perspective, one person responsible for roughly forty purchases (including her household) is a significant multiplier if it is the average Evangelist success rate around the world. Considering the Mac computer barriers to entry—price, access to stock depending on the country, and other restrictions like employer or institutional preference or habit—perhaps forty seems high.

Quintessence

The narrative provides insights into quintessence. The descriptions are crisp and vivid, and the specific memories are significant in Nathalie's mind. First, she describes how the look of Apple related products appeal to her. The "little" computer in the art room with the "friendly" mouse, the "cute" icons in eWorld and the "sleek" look of the iPhone. Apple generally appeals to a particular aesthete—someone with a developed sense of design. As echoed in the Apple campaigns, these computers look "different" to appeal to people who "think different": artists.

The most striking quintessential part of the experience was the feeling of completion. Unlike Belk's (1989) description of perfection in form and function, and similar to Rich Marcotte with Southwest Airlines, for Nathalie the Apple interface was perfect in form and function in that it seemed an extension of herself. The Mac was a unique solution to her problem of being able to participate in a digital environment. Without the Mac to aid in her professional life, she felt incomplete, helpless and frustrated with her inability to perform as well as she did with a Mac at hand.

Nathalie's appreciated the delight in being able to perform beyond her natural abilities. This was the user experience Steve Jobs intended, with the exact result (Lusch et al., 2008). Nathalie was so enraptured with what she could create with the Mac she would draw similar types of graphic artworks freehand for her art classes.

After the initial Mac experiences, the machine assimilated into her identity. The feeling of quintessence does not linger as much as it assimilated into her view of the product's importance to her life and her identity.

But when she manages to obtain an iPhone, she has the same rush and the same reaction. The iPhone becomes an extension of her hand, dangling on the end of her arm, more important to her than her wallet. The iPhone, however, is more ubiquitous than any other Apple product except the iPod. Even though she acknowledges its commonness and dominance in market share, Nathalie still adheres to the idea that sporting an iPhone makes her special and somehow signifies her status in the organisation where she works.

When she travels to One Infinite Loop she can only set foot in the lobby, but still feels an overwhelming sense of gratitude, so much so that she thanks the receptionist. The journey to One Infinite Loop, an address that has remained constant in her life, was a pilgrimage. The trip to One Infinite Loop and the feelings there are consistent with the feelings of pilgrims visiting sites of religious significance (Vukonic, 1996).

Nathalie's quintessential experience is more significant than her product experience. Her feelings are less strong when she demonstrates Macs to others or evangelises Macs as they are when she uses the product herself. Likewise, when she gets used to the product, the quintessential nature of the experience subsumes into the importance of the product.

In this sense, experiencing quintessence seems analogous to falling in love. First one feels the desire, then one experiences the adrenaline rush of the interaction. But once embarked upon the relationship, that first moment magic transforms into a day-to-day fit. Like the passion that subsides into a deep connection, Nathalie's quintessence burns strong on the initial rush, but then the product becomes part of her life and she feels wanting mainly in its absence.

CONCLUSION AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The authors of this paper investigated CE from an Evangelist's perspective to stimulate discussion about the quality of quintessence and to explore the CE model when researching Evangelistic behaviour. Parallels were made between religious Evangelists and CEs. Further research should compare these two groups. Are religious Evangelists simply CEs for a religious idea or concept? Is there a difference in Quintessence and behaviour when the product is faith and belief itself?

Nathalie's narrative also confirms to model. The model indicators are consistent with this snapshot of her experience. As she reflects on her experience in a context outside the model, her experience aligns closely with the model itself. As someone driven by an experience of her passion for a product, she is interested in finding out more about it and sharing it with others.

The discussion on quintessence suggests that it primarily occurs in a non-social setting, between the consumer and the product. The discussion also bears out that the product experience can be planned for a particular result: Jobs intentionally designed the Mac to appeal to non-programmers who nonetheless had a use for what a computer could do. Nathalie seemed the prototypical person for whom the machine was made, and it paved the way for someone artistically minded to participate in the world of science and computing.

There is much about Quintessence to discover and mine. For example, is it the same across all product categories? Is it based on a cultural fit? Is Quintessence, like Evangelism, something people may be predisposed to? Or is it like Paul's experience on the road to Damascus, completely unexpected and potent enough to last a lifetime?

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