THESIS

CREATING BRAND COMMUNITIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON MEDIA

AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BRAND MAGIC

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

CREATING BRAND COMMUNITIES: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON MEDIA

AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BRAND MAGIC

Understanding the complexities of the consumer-brand relationship is an ongoing area of study in multiple fields. Stemming from the notion that brands convey cultural meaning, brand community studies focus specifically on the process of meaning creation. The traditional focus of brand community research has been on social interaction. However, newer research points to the psychological formation of brand communities in the absence of social interaction. The psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) model was created to account for this newer area of research. Mental models are the cognitive model individuals form to interact with the world around them. Based in psychology, mental model research postulates that individuals must first be able to internally represent their external world in order to interact with it. Mental model theory provides a foundation for insight to the individual's reality of the brand community relationship at the social and psychological level. Thus, this study will use a qualitative phenomenological approach to elicit and explore the expressed mental models of members that self-identify with a brand community when exposed to branded media. In particular, this study centers around the Disney brand and how Disney's use of video advertisements activates PSBC among a loyal following. By using a brand exemplar to study this phenomenon, common themes of the consumer-brand relationship are revealed that give insight to the types of internal representations of external reality elicited by branded media exposure. By gaining a better understanding of the difference between psychological and social brand communities, media

communication scholars can gain a deeper understanding of how the types of messages created

for a brand can foster a sense of relationship with the brand.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview and Rational

I grew up in a family that enjoyed annual vacations. My parents worked hard and saved all year to be able to expose my sister and I to as many places and experiences as possible. As soon as school let out for summer, we'd pack up and head out on a two-week adventure, usually in the family van. We explored the Wild West, drove along the western coastline, toured the east coast, visited historic sites we had learned about in history class, enjoyed 60's bubblegum pop music while driving Route 66, and more.

As the years rolled by, traditions emerged within our family excursions involving well-known brands. For example, we always ate and bought the branded t-shirt at any Hard Rock Café along the way. I don't know of any specific reason why owning a Hard Rock Cafe t-shirt with a logo, city and state is exciting or important, but it became a trademark of sorts for the Goodwin family vacation.

These annual trips started when I was four years old and continued through high school. My parents made every effort to expose us to as many areas of the country as possible, but our favorite destination seemed to always have Disney in the title. During 12 years of family vacations, six of the trips involved either Disneyland or Walt Disney World. Despite my parents' struggle with the high cost, it was part of the ritual. As a bright-eyed kid, I never was aware of the expense. My parents' enthusiasm for the magical experience that is the essence of the Disney brand was equal to, if not greater than, that of their children. I will never forget the sparkle in my dad's eyes when watching the parades, or the delight in my mom's voice when she sang popular resort songs.

It is among these most precious memories that I discovered and identified my fascination with branding. When looking back at these childhood experiences, my most vivid memories clearly circulate around brand experiences. I can't argue with the fact that the Disney brand had a strong impact on my life. When I graduated from high school, I dreamed of one day working for Disney and creating the magic for others that I had experienced as a kid. In fact, my senior year of high school I was voted "most likely to work for Disney" by my class. This dream became a reality when I was selected to participate in the Disney College Program as a Jungle Cruise Skipper at the Walt Disney World Resort during the summer of 1999.

At the time, every Disney employee was required to complete several weeks of mandatory brand training before they were ever allowed to interact with a guest. The process is called "Traditions," and in my case, I spent three weeks learning about the Disney brand, Magic Kingdom, and the Jungle Cruise. Before "earning my ears", I had to prove my knowledge and ability to live the Disney brand. It was an amazing experience and it was fascinating that a company would spend three weeks training an employee who would only be working on the property for three months. In retrospect, I believe this unusual dedication to employee preparation in the Disney College Program was the catalyst for my professional affinity toward branding.

As a part of the Disney College Program, I also had the opportunity to take courses in an internal education facility called the Disney Institute. After a review of the options available, I signed on to complete a "Ducktorate" program, with a focus on marketing and branding. At this point, I was so intrigued with learning about branding that I didn't even consider the extra time and hours spent as work. I shadowed, I studied, I worked, and I played…experiencing the true essence of the Disney brand from every angle possible.

Nearly two decades later, I can look back at my experiences with Disney as the inspiration for my professional career. My passion for branding, along with media and communication training, allowed me to create a niche professional background within the marketing discipline. I worked with clients to create engaging media to fit their growing brands. I evaluated brands and created templates to encourage growth. I created brand experiences in both corporate and tradeshow settings. Every single career opportunity I've had has been centered around branding. And yet, I discovered something I wasn't expecting. Many companies don't seem to truly understand branding or how to build a brand community. Everyone wants to have a brand with the same power and following as Disney, but there is a disconnect about what this truly requires in terms of implementation.

As a graduate student, I learned that there are research-related misconceptions and barriers about branding within the field of media communication. On more than one occasion, I was told that branding is a process, not a field of study. I've been told branding is simply logos and colors, well-placed advertisements, repetitive messages, and more. This disconnect with the true complexity of the branding process piqued my interest and led me to want to know more. For instance, if branding is simply a process, why doesn't every company have a strong brand community comparable to Disney? What makes an individual connect with a branded advertisement, or communication, with a clear affinity to be a part of something? What are the nuances required to create a psychological attraction to a branded product or entity? On a more personal level, I want to know why I feel an immediate connection with others who identify with the same brands that relate to me? Based on my experience, these reflections, and a close review of research approaches in this area of study, I utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach

to explore how individuals attach to brands psychologically, and how this attachment leads to a sense of community.

1.1.1 Statement of problem

Brand scholars view storytelling as an essential component to creating a representation that encompasses "everything that people know about, think about or feel about anything" (Fanning, 1999, p. 4). Advertising scholars believe that advertisements are "artful imitations of life" (Stern, 1994, p. 7). From reviewing these core foundations, it is apparent that there is a direct relationship between branding research in the business field and advertising research done in the field of media communication. While advertising reflects the creative concepts of the brand and is the vehicle for message dissemination to consumers, the brand is the long-term strategy, the component that is most affected by long-term changes in attitudes and behaviors. Studies on brand community take branding research one step further, evaluating the relationship between a consumer and the brand. Thus, studying brand communities within a media communication context has important implications for researchers and practitioners who hope to understand more about message creation and dissemination.

Traditional brand community research studies focus mostly on the social aspects of brand community. These studies emphasize how brands bring individuals together through a shared consumption of products and services. Based on recent research by Carlson, Suter, and Brown (2008), it is clear brand communities can also occur in the absence of social interactions. Referred to as psychological brand communities, these communities center around the relationship the consumer perceives to have with the brand, based purely on interactions and experiences with the brand. By classifying a difference between psychological and social brand communities, this new area of research is allowing for a deeper understanding of how the types

messages created for a brand can foster a sense of relationship with the brand (Carlson et al, 2008, p. 291).

In 1983, psychologist Philip Johnson-Laird expanded on previous work by psychologist Kenneth Craik in 1943, to create the theory of mental models. Commonly used in the fields of cognitive science and psychology, mental models can be summarized as an individual's "cognitive representations of an external reality" (Jones et al., 2011). The body of work on mental models asserts that an individual will pull from their unique experience to create a cognitive model to use as a "basis of reasoning and decision making". (Jones et al., 2011). For example, this theory postulates that individuals will pull from their past interactions with the Disney brand when deciding if they can afford a Walt Disney World vacation.

Based on the notion in mental model theory that individuals "must be able to represent the external world mentally to interact with it" (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Jones et al., 2014), it is important to explore and identify the mental models that lead an individual to identify with a brand, and thus, interact with a brand as a member of a brand community. Ultimately, by gaining a greater understanding of the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon, media communication scholars can gain a better insight into how to craft and deliver messages that will foster strong brand communities.

1.1.2   Rationale and significance of study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore, on a cognitive level, how users identify with a brand community when exposed to branded media. The focus of this study was to examine the mental models that occur when members of a brand community interact with a branded advertisement. In particular, this study centered around the Disney brand and how Disney's use of video advertisements activates a psychological sense of brand community

(PSBC) among a loyal following. By using a brand exemplar to study this phenomenon, I hoped

to reveal common themes to give insight to the types of internal representations of external

reality (Jones et al., 2011) elicited by branded media exposure.

This study aimed to (a) add to the literature on the PSBC phenomenon, (b) explore the

themes in mental models constructed by Disney brand community members, (c) search for

evidence of existence of psychological versus social brand communities, (d) search for evidence

of existence of brand versus group identification, and (e) see if the themes found can be

correlated with PSBC. It was difficult to postulate what outcomes would be uncovered through

the evaluation of human mental processes that occur in relation to brand exposure. The hope was

that this exploration would lead to a reiteration of at least one of the critical components set forth

in the PSBC model (Carlson et al. 2008). It might also uncover new areas of cognitive processing

that would be valuable for future research.

1.1.3 Potential contribution of research to the field

Brand communities have been studied for decades by academics in marketing, and in

corporations. They are accepted by the business community as an effective way to build long-

term relationships with customers. However, most definitions of brand community focus on

social brand communities (Carlson et al., 2008). They emphasize how brands bring individuals

together through a shared consumption of products and services. This study will evaluate the

idea of "imagined" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Anderson, 1983) brand communities. This

"imagined" sense of community focuses on the idea that communities can be formed

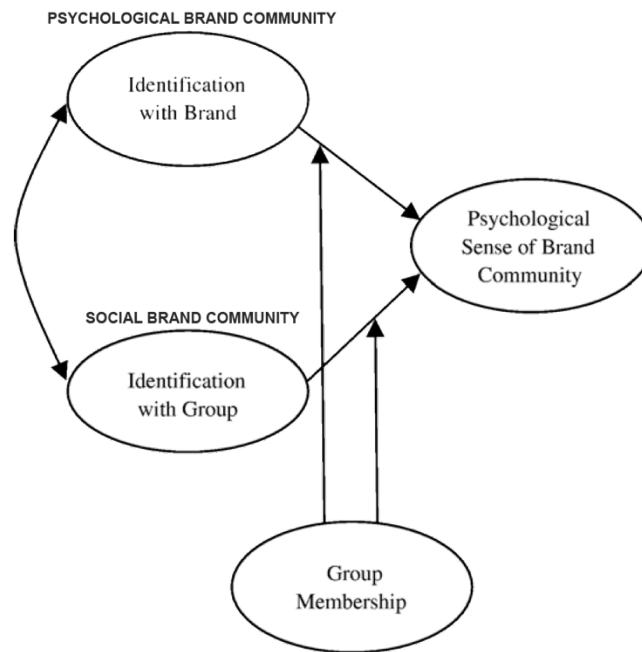psychologically in the absence of social interaction.

Recent brand community research has uncovered a new model for looking at the

psychological sense of brand communities (PSBC). The PSBC model was first developed in

2008 by Carlson, Suter, and Brown. In this study, the researchers used quantitative methods to study theme-park consumers and their psychological sense of community with other brand admirers (Carlson et al., 2008). The researchers understood that there are unobservable, psychological communities forming in the absence of social interaction. While a few studies have explored this model since its inception, it is a growing area of curiosity and research for brand community enthusiasts.

Mental models, as both a theoretical framework and methodology, have existed in psychology and cognitive science research for decades (Jones et al., 2011). In these fields, it is understood that researchers can learn a lot about an individual's cognitive processing of their external reality through the examination an individual's internal representations (Jones et al., 2011). While relatively new in the field of media communication, mental models have been used in recent studies to explore narrative engagement and narrative-processing (Sharma, 2016).

By using mental models to evaluate the Disney brand community, this study aimed to add to the literature in two fields. First, this study aimed to extend the literature surrounding the concept of the PSBC. This study was not designed to prove the PSBC model. Rather, it sought to uncover clues in an individual's mental models that point to areas of distinction in the PSBC, such as: psychological versus social brand community (Figure 1). Regardless of the findings, a better understanding of the consumers' cognitive structures in relation to brand community is valuable for media communication scholars and marketing academics involved in message creation and dissemination. Second, this study explored the value of mental models, as both a theoretical framework and methodology, in media communication research. Given the importance of evaluating cognitive structures in the media communication field, expanding the

literature on branded media exposure through mental model constructs will aid in the understanding of how to create effective communication tactics.

PSYCHOLOGICAL BRAND COMMUNITY

Identification with Brand

Psychological Sense of Brand Community

SOCIAL BRAND COMMUNITY

Identification with Group

Group Membership

Figure 1. Identification and the Psychological Sense of Brand Community (PSBC)

1.1.4 Scope and method

The scope of this study used Johnson-Laird's (1983) mental model theory as a lens for exploring the types of internal representations that can be elicited from members of a brand community when they are exposed to branded media. Using Carlson, Suter, and Brown's (2008) model for the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) to guide my research, a qualitative phenomenological study was conducted in order to examine the shared experience of members of the Disney brand community. This study specifically looked for themes that represent: (a) social versus psychological brand community, (b) group versus brand identification, and (c) visual versus verbal response.

A diagrammatic-oral interview procedure of eliciting mental models (Jones et al., 2014) was conducted, using the PSBC research as my guide (Carlson et al., 2008). Based on the

phenomenological nature of this study, I used a criterion-convenience sample of adults that self-identified as having a pre-established affinity towards the Disney brand. This study involved one-on-one elicitation procedures with eight participants. To implement the diagrammatic-oral interview procedure of eliciting mental models, each participant was shown the selected Disney television commercial, asked to draw a representation of how the commercial made him/her feel, and participated in a set of open-ended interview questions. I then looked for themes by performing an analysis of the drawings, the interviews, and the drawings mixed with the interviews. These themes were then compared to the PSBC research in order to add to the literature on brand communities.

1.1.5 Definition of key terms

To follow the logic set forth in this research, it is important to have an understanding of key terms used throughout. For the purposes of this study, and ease of reference, the following terms will be identified within three main categories: (a) Brand Community - brand, brand community, imagined community, psychological sense of brand community, social brand community, and psychological brand community, (b) Identification - identification, identification with the group, identification with the brand, and (c) Mental Models.

1.1.5.1. Brand Community

The term brand can encompass a variety of definitions depending on the field and focus of research. This study mostly follows the idea that "a brand represents the attributes, identity and positioning of a product of a company, and how that product is perceived by consumers" (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45). However, this definition will be expanded to include not just product brands, but the overall company brand as well. In our consumer-driven society, products are a symbol, representing more than just their intended use or the expense. This symbolism

creates a cultural significance for brands in that they become a vehicle to "bear communicative power to convey cultural meaning" (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45). This meaning is created by the "interpersonal relationship between the consumer and a brand" (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45). The concept that encompasses this relationship is known as brand community.

As first introduced by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), brand communities are defined as a "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (p. 412). There are a few key factors to evaluate in this definition. First is the use of the term "specialized." In this definition, the community is specialized because it centers around a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). Due to the advent of digital media, and the consumer's ability to be the mediator and moderator of a message, the "non-geographically bound" identifier is the second important distinction in this definition. The final area for evaluation is that brand communities have "social relationships." This is the area of the traditional brand community definition that was the impetus of Carlson, Suter, and Brown's psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) model (2008).

It's important to note that brand communities are readily understood as "imagined" communities (Anderson, 1983; Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). In this context, imagined communities exist when consumers understand "there are other members of the community, just like them, in other far-away places" (Anderson, 1983, p. 419). However, most brand community research has been focused strictly on social interaction. To better encompass the true meaning of an imagined community, research on the PSBC is focused on breaking down the term brand community. This breakdown is necessary in order to better define the way consumers form relationships with each other in relation to the brand, through social interaction or "in the mind of the individual" (Carlson et al., 2008).

Carlson, Suter, and Brown proposed the PSBC as a better way of encompassing the full reality of the relationship between the consumer and a brand. Formulated as an adaptation to community psychology, PSBC is defined as "the degree to which an individual perceives relational bonds with other brand users" (Carlson et al., 2008). The PSBC offers a way for researchers to evaluate brand community in the absence of social interaction. The important distinction to understand is that the PSBC encompasses two newly defined areas of brand community: social brand community and psychological brand community. The PSBC accounts for the idea that consumers may identify with the brand, and/or they may identify with other brand consumers, at varying levels when forming interpersonal relationships (Carlson et al., 2008).

Within the PSBC, social brand community is defined as a "social community of brand admirers who acknowledge membership in the community and engage in structured social relations" (Carlson et al., 2008). The engagement aspect of this community may occur in a face-to-face encounter or in a computer-mediated environment. The distinguishing factor of this form of brand community is that social interaction must occur. This definition encompasses most of the traditional research on brand communities.

The psychological brand community is also noted as a distinct type of community within the PSBC. It is defined as "an unbound group of admirers, who perceive a sense of community with other brand admirers, in the absence of social interaction" (Carlson et al., 2008). This is a harder concept for some researchers to grasp, as "they do not fit within the traditional sociological norms that define community" (Carlson et al., 2008). However, if we look back at the idea of imagined communities, psychological brand communities are the essence of "a community that exists in the mind of an individual" (Anderson, 1983).

1.1.5.2. Identification

For the purposes of this research, identification will be used in the cognitive sense of the word. In this regard, identification is "the degree of overlap between an individual's self-schema and the schema s/he holds for another target object" (Carlson et al., 2008). Stemming from social identity theory, identification is used in brand research as a way to make sense of how consumers "categorize themselves and others into groups" (Carlson et al., 2008). As the driving component of the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) model, identification can occur with a group and/or with a brand.

Identification with the group occurs when consumers identify with the characteristics of "other consumers who purchase the brand" (Carlson et al., 2008). In the PSBC model, identification with the group is more likely to be the primary driver of the PSBC when consumers have the opportunity to interact socially in some format. This interaction can take place in various forms such as face-to-face interactions, or online discussion groups. Group identification is the perceived overlap of an individual's self-schema with another individual's self-schema in relationship to the brand, creating a strong foundation for social brand communities. Thus, to effectively target social brand communities, messages should center around community-related efforts (Carlson et al., 2008).

Identification with the brand occurs when consumers identify with the "desirable characteristics of a particular brand" (Carlson et al., 2008). This form of identification is a driver of the PSBC model when consumers self-identify with brand attributes in the absence of social interaction. Brand identification is the perceived overlap of an individual's self-schema with the attributes of the brand, creating a strong foundation for psychological brand communities. Thus,

to effectively target psychological brand communities, messages should focus on building brand image (Carlson et al., 2008).

1.1.5.3. *Mental Models*

The term mental models is used in a variety of fields, and in some cases, different contexts. This study focused on Johnson-Laird's version of mental models, in which they are seen as both a theoretical framework and methodology. For the purposes of this study, mental models are defined as an individual's "cognitive representations of an external reality" (Jones et al., 2011). To create these cognitive representations, individuals will pull from their unique experience of the world. These internal representations are theorized to be at the core of an individual's "basis of reasoning and decision making" (Jones et al., 2011). Essentially, mental model theory asserts individuals must create an internal representation of their reality to interact with the external world around them (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Jones et al., 2014).

The body of literature on mental models suggests researchers can learn a lot about an individual's cognitive processing of their external reality through the examination an individual's internal representations (Jones et al., 2011). By nature of the location of mental models, it is not practical for researchers to have direct access to these internal representations. Thus, mental model elicitation procedures are used to motivate the participant to "externalize a mental model" for the purpose of analysis (Jones et al., 2014).

1.2 Goal and Research Question(s)

Guided by mental model theory and the research on the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC), I postulated that distinct characteristics of social brand community and psychological brand community will be uncovered through the elicitation and analysis of mental models of self-identified brand community members. I also expected to see evidence emerge to

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support varying degrees of identification with the brand and/or identification with the group. Overall, the goal was to examine the mental models of self-identified members of a brand community in order to provide support for the PSBC.

Based on this goal, I posed the following central research question: RQ1: What are the shared mental model expressions among members of the Disney brand community? To find the true essence of this study, I posed four subquestions for this research question: RQ1a: What expressions emerge to support psychological brand community and identification with the brand? RQ1b: What expressions emerge to support social brand community and identification with the group? RQ1c: What expressions emerge to support PSBC? RQ1d: What differences, if any, exist between the visual expressions and the verbal expressions during the mental model elicitation?

1.3 Organization of Proposal

Keeping with the standards set forth by the graduate school at Colorado State University, this thesis will adhere to the following structure. Chapter 2 – Literature Review, covers the important background information on brand communities and mental models as a theory. Chapter 3 – Methods, reviews the background of the qualitative methodology this research employed, along with the process for recruitment of participants and the associated procedures. This chapter also covers the research steps and timeline for this study. Chapter 4 – Findings, includes the uncovering of the themes in this study through a phenomenological reflection, as well as the discussion of how these themes tie back to the initial central research question and subquestions. Finally, Chapter 5 – Conclusion, provides a thorough overview of the conclusions of this research, including study limitations and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an explication of the two core components of this study: brand

communities and mental model theory. To gain a better understanding of the essence of the

brand community phenomenon, I will discuss: branding and consumer-brand research, the

development of the term brand community, an overview of consumer-brand research and

models, and the need for further refinement of brand community research based on the

psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) model. Next, I will explore mental model

theory and the idea that individuals create internal representations in order to make sense of their

external reality. To better understand why mental models are an appropriate theoretical

framework in media communication research, I will discuss what mental models are (and are

not), the epistemology of mental models, and some of the key criticisms of mental model theory

among researchers today. The explication of these two core components will uncover the

necessity of the use of mental models as the theoretical framework for exploring PSBC.

2.2 Branding and Brand Communities

The term brand can encompass a variety of definitions depending on the field and focus

of research. Gardner and Levy captured the depth and essence of branding in an article published

in the Harvard Business Review in 1955:

> A brand name is more than a label employed to differentiate among the manufacturers of
> a product. It is a complex symbol that represents a variety of ideas and attributes. It tells
> the consumer many things - not only by the way it sounds (and its literal meaning if it has
> one), but more important by the body of associations it has built up and acquired as a
> public object over a period of time. (Harvard Business Review, 1955)

This study recognizes the importance of the feeling elicited from this description. In this

regard, the term brand almost becomes a living, breathing thing that consumers interact with and

form attitudes and opinions about. Using this understanding as a foundation, a simpler definition

for the purposes of this research is, "a brand represents the attributes, identity and positioning of

a product of a company, and how that product is perceived by consumers" (Kilambi et al., 2013,

p. 45). It's important to clarify that this definition points to a brand as being the "product of a

company". This definition will be expanded in this research to include the overall company

brand as well.

Research has shown that brands are about more than just a product or company. At the

most basic level, "everything is a brand" (Fanning, 1999). Individuals can readily identify a

company and/or a product as having a brand. For example, when looking at the Apple Watch,

most consumers will readily identify Apple as the company brand and the Apple Watch as the

product brand. However, it's important to note that consumers place meaning and value on every

experience, interaction, and touchpoint. Going back to the Apple example, the employee the

customer interacts with has a perceived brand. Apple understands this, and has thus created the

title of "genius" for their store employees. Staying with the Apple theme, the store itself has a

brand. The experience at an Apple store has been deemed important, and as such, the company

has replicated the same layout and interaction strategy for every location. This example could be

extended to include several other areas: the store location, the city, the county, the state, the

country, and more.

While everything is considered a brand when referencing Fanning's definition, not every

brand is controlled by a company. Corporate control of a brand is an illusion. Corporations can

only try to manage a brand by paying attention to the importance of the consumers' interactions

with it. Ultimately, consumers formulate the idea of the brand on an individual level, based on

their own experience, interaction with, and impression of the brand (Fanning, 1999). The process

is "intensely creative" (Bullmore, 1991). Every interaction a consumer has with the brand will add to the way that one consumer perceives the brand. Thus, brands exist regardless of any action taken by a company to produce them (Fanning, 1999). Companies with strong brands recognize the importance of the consumer in building the brand and take care to provide a consistent and relevant experience at every touchpoint. The most well-managed brands look to storytelling as a key element of success and thus, "are constantly telling stories about themselves" (Fanning, 1999, p. 5).

Brand research is typically considered to fall within the domain of the business field. A review of the literature points to the belief that brand scholars view storytelling as an essential component to a company creating a representation that encompasses "everything that people know about, think about or feel about anything" (Fanning, 1999, p. 4). Advertising scholars believe that advertisements are "artful imitations of life" (Stern, 1994, p. 7). From reviewing these core foundations, there is a direct relationship between branding research in the business field and advertising research done in the media communication field. In this view, advertising is the vehicle for message dissemination to consumers and the brand is the long-term strategy, the component that is most affected by long-term changes in attitudes and behaviors. Thus, in order to better understand message creation and dissemination, brand research is relevant and important in the media communication field.

2.2.1 Development of Brand Community Research

Most brand research circles back to importance of the consumer-brand relationship, a dynamic long studied in relationship marketing research (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45). When discussing the consumer-brand relationship, it is important to note that the idea of brand community existed before the term was officially identified. In our consumer-based world,

products have become a symbol in society that represent more than the dollar amount paid or their overall utility. This symbolism creates a cultural significance for brands in that they have become a vehicle to "bear communicative power to convey cultural meaning" (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45). This meaning is created by the "interpersonal relationship between the consumer and a brand" (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45). The concept that encompasses this relationship is referred to as brand community.

Muniz and O'Guinn were the first researchers to introduce the term brand community (2001). In their research, a brand community is defined as a "specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Based in the construct of community in social thought, the idea of community covers an immense area of research across a variety of fields (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). Muniz and O'Guinn sought to bridge the gap in brand research on consumption and consumer behavior with the addition of the term brand community (2001, p. 412). To understand the importance of this term in the field of brand research, a deconstruction of the definition is imperative.

The first word in the brand community definition is "specialized". Brand communities are specialized in that they focus on the consumer-brand relationship. In essence, the communities are formed around the brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412). If the brand didn't exist, the community could not be formed. Thus, it is the phenomenon of a shared experience with the brand that creates an environment for the brand community to occur. Muniz and O'Guinn correlate brand communities with other communities in that they are "marked by a shared consciousness, rituals and traditions, and a sense of morality" (2001, p. 412).

The next area of value in the brand community definition is the phrase "non-geographically bound". Sociologists historically viewed the idea of community as being in direct opposition with an advancing, modern society (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 412-413). In a pre-modern world, communities were formed to create a centralized bond among people sharing the same geographical location and experience. As mass production and new technologies spread across an increasingly modernized society, communal bonds became less about geographical location and more focused on the shared experiences of an increasing consumer consumption culture (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 413-414). The more communities began to form around consumption as the shared experience, the less geography played a role in the creation of communities. Due to the advent of digital media and technology in our current society, as well as the consumers' ability to be both the mediator and moderator of a message, the "non-geographically bound" distinction is a critical component of the brand community definition.

The final area for evaluation is the idea that brand communities are "social relationships". The social aspect of brand communities is the impetus for most of the research surrounding this field. Traditional brand community studies emphasize how brands bring individuals together through a shared consumption of products and services (Carlson et al., 2008). The use of words such as "community", "social", and "shared" creates a sense of group belonging. The assumption is that the relationship is occurring among consumers based on their shared experience with a brand. Essentially, "members feel an important connection to the brand, but more importantly, they feel a stronger connection toward one another" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 418). This shared experience surrounding brand consumption ultimately leads to members socially negotiating the meaning of the brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 414).

When looking at the history of the formulation of brand communities, it's important to note that brand communities are readily understood as "imagined" communities (Anderson 1983, Muniz & O'Guinn 2001). In this context, imagined communities exist when consumers understand "there are other members of the community, just like them, in other faraway places" (Anderson, 1983, p. 419). This notion of imagined communities both supports, and calls into question, the definition of brand communities proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn. The need for brand communities to be specialized is supported by the mention of the members being "just like them". In addition, pointing to "faraway places", imagined communities fit the brand community criteria of being non-geographically bound. However, the imagined communities definition states that members understand that there are other members just like them while brand communities are currently defined as a social relationship. The idea that members can form an "imagined" brand community in the absence of social interaction leaves room for further exploration. Muniz and O'Guinn admit "members feel that they 'sort of know each other' at some level, even if they have never met" (2001, p. 418).

Since their origination, brand community studies have strengthened branding research by providing a deeper evaluation of the relationship between a consumer and the brand. In our consumer-driven society, products have become a symbol of cultural significance for brands in that they have become a vehicle to "bear communicative power to convey cultural meaning" (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45). By gaining a better understanding of how the consumer-brand relationship has evolved, future work can add to the literature on the complexities of brand communities.

2.2.2 Previous Consumer-Brand Research

Since the brand community concept was proposed by Muniz and O'Guinn in 2001, research regarding this phenomenon has been vast and varied. Most researchers have focused on the social relationship component of brand community, thus intensely studying the consumer-brand interaction at various levels and stages. Notably, the discovery of brand community occurred during the same time period as the advent of digital media, in particular, the internet. The increased ability for consumers to be both the mediator and moderator of the message created a need for researchers to expand their focus from not only the consumer-brand relationship, but also on the consumer-consumer relationship that was occurring as a result of a brand experience. Kilambi, Laroche, and Richard refer to these studies as adhering to the consumer-brand-consumer model (2013, p. 45).

The consumer-brand-consumer model is an elaboration of the research on the consumer-brand relationship. Traditional consumer-brand relationship studies attributed the formation of the relationship to the expression of brand values (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45). This exchange of values takes place based on one of two value types: rational values (Aggarwal, 2004; Kilambi et al., 2013) and emotional values (Aaker, 1997; Kilambi et al., 2013). Rational values are defined as the tangible benefits a consumer receives from the brand relationship (Aggarwal 2004). Emotional values can be attributed in a variety of ways. Essentially, this is the way a consumer perceives an alignment of their beliefs with the brand (Aaker 1997). Using Schembri's work in 2008 on the theory of consuming as play, the consumer-brand-consumer model illustrates that consumers form relationship bonds with other consumers based on the shared experience of their emotional and rational attachment to the brand (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45-46).

Various studies have emerged over the last decade evaluating the consumer-brand relationship. For example, Rossiter created a "brand love measure", focusing on measuring the depth of the consumer-brand relationship as a predictor of brand loyalty (2012). Kilambi, Laroche and Richard extended the consumer-brand-consumer model by blending it with Stern's revised communication model for advertising (1994) to create the brand community formation model (2013). The brand community formation model was the researchers' attempt to better understand the process of how brand community is formed in a digital world where the consumer plays both a mediator and moderator role in the process (Kilambi et. al, 2013).

The topic of brand community has enough depth and breadth that several journals and books now exist to explore this field of study. The field has evolved to a point where in 2013, the Consumer-Brand Relationship Association (CBRA) was formed in order to promote the field, and "advance knowledge, facilitate the exchange of information, and encourage collaborations" among academics and practitioners (www.consumerbrandrelationships.org). Thus, researchers continue to explore the essence of the brand community phenomenon, using a variety of theories and methods to try and get to the core of the symbiotic, consumer-brand relationship.

2.2.3 Development of the Psychological Sense of Brand Community (PSBC) Model

Recent brand community research has uncovered a gap in previous studies. While most research has focused on the social relationship component of the definition, there is a noticeable disconnect with the accepted idea of brand communities being "imagined" (Anderson, 1983; Carlson et al., 2008). Carlson, Suter, and Brown aimed to address this gap with their proposal of the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC), defined as "the degree to which an individual perceives relational bonds with other brand users" (2008, p. 286) (Figure 2). The researchers understood there are unobservable, psychological communities forming in the

absence of social interaction (Carlson et al., 2008). Thus, they propose the use of two terms when referring to brand community: social brand community and psychological brand community (Carlson et al., 2008, p. 284-285).
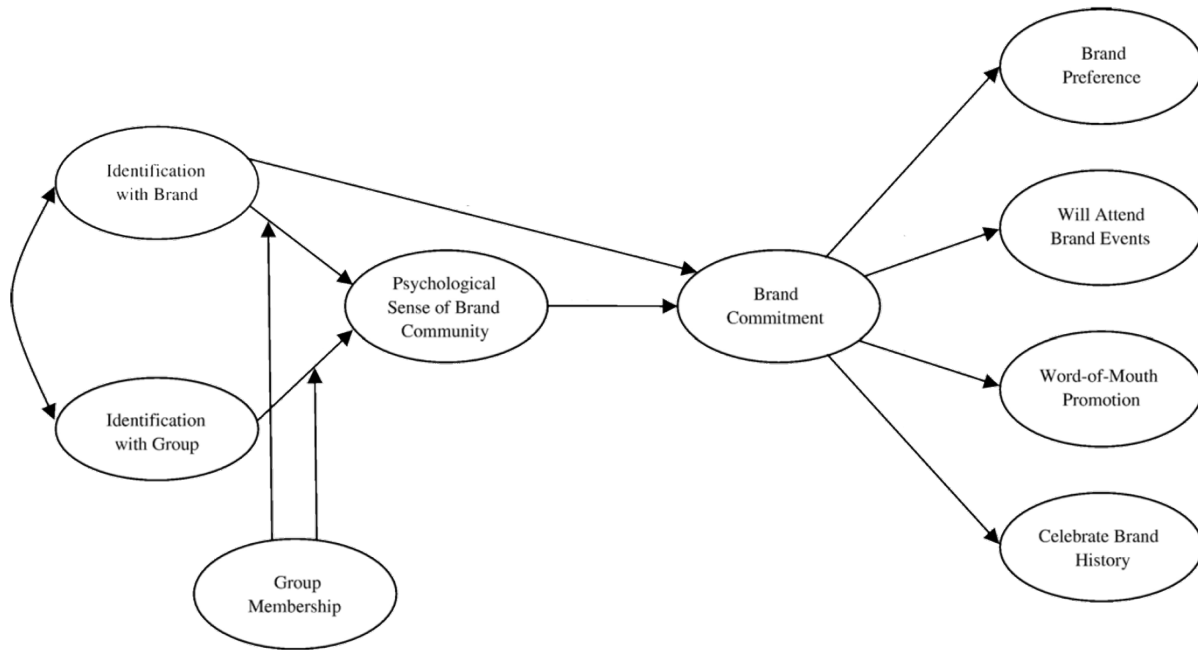
Figure 2. Psychological Sense of Brand Community (PSBC) Model

The PSBC model was created by Carlson, Suter, and Brown to focus on the way consumers form a brand community through varying degrees of identification with the brand and/or identification with the group (2008). Using the lens of social identity theory, the researchers used quantitative methods to study theme-park consumers and their psychological sense of community with other brand admirers (Carlson et al., 2008). The goal was to provide evidence for the PSBC, as well as to correlate how the PSBC facilitates certain psychological factors leading to stronger levels of brand commitment (Carlson et al., 2008). While the brand commitment variables identified in the model may be correlated with the mental model elicitations in this study, the focus is to gain a better understanding of the relationship distinction

between members of a brand community, including social brand community and psychological brand community (Carlson et al., 2008).

The notion of identification as a primary driver of brand community is an important part of the PSBC model, better accounting for the full reality of the relationship between the consumer and a brand (Carlson et al., 2008). Consumers may identify with the brand, and/or they may identify with other brand consumers, at varying levels when forming these relationships (Carlson et al., 2008). The overlap of the consumer's self-identity with other consumers of the brand, and/or with the brand itself, has proven to have a positive association with the PSBC. (Carlson et al., 2008). Thus, understanding the consumers' form of identification that results in brand community gives academics and practitioners better insight into how to nurture and grow brand communities. For example, consumers that identify with the group should be more responsive to branded messages focused on community-related efforts. However, consumers that identify with the brand will be more likely to relate favorably to messages focused on brand image.

2.2.3.1. *Social Brand Community*

The term social brand community is used to define the traditionally studied route of brand community formation. Social brand community is "a social community of brand admirers who acknowledge membership in the community and engage in structured social relations" (Carlson et al., 2008, p. 284). These "structured social relations" can occur in a variety of settings: face-to-face, computer-mediated, and more. The most important distinction is that social interaction must take place and community members must acknowledge their membership (Carlson et al., 2008). The form of identification also has an impact on the PSBC in relation to social brand communities. To develop stronger PSBC in social brand communities, brands should focus on

efforts that enhance identification with the group. As stated previously, this includes community-related efforts (Carlson et al., 2008).

2.2.3.2. *Psychological Brand Community*

Some consider the idea of psychological brand communities to be counterintuitive, as it does "not fit within the traditional sociological norms that define community" (Carlson et al., 2008). However, the term psychological brand community better accounts for the previously discussed idea of "imagined" brand communities (Carlson et al. 2008), in which consumers understand "there are other members of the community, just like them, in other faraway places" (Anderson, 1983, p. 419). Psychological brand community is "an unbound group of brand admirers, who perceive a sense of community with other brand admirers, in the absence of social interaction" (Carlson et al., 2008, p. 284-285). This new distinction allows for research on the idea that "members feel that they 'sort of know each other' at some level, even if they have never met" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 418). It also is necessary in order to better define the way consumers form relationships with each other in relation to the brand, through social interaction or "in the mind of the individual" (Carlson et al, 2008).

The way an individual formulates a psychological brand community is not the same as the way they form a social brand community. Instead the brand is "the impetus behind their sense of community," not the "communal relations" or "shared consciousness" (Carlson et al., 2008, p. 285). Going back to previous brand research, the foreshadowing for psychological brand communities can be seen in Fanning's notion that every interaction a consumer has with the brand will add to the way that one consumer perceives the brand (1999). This new research is taking Fanning's notion and adding the relationship component to the process. This also coincides with the major finding in the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC)

research that consumer awareness of other consumers is not the foundation for the sense of community. Thus, psychological brand community members are not identifying as part of a group, they are identifying with the brand (Carlson et al., 2008, p. 285).

Similar to social brand communities, the form of identification has an impact on the PSBC in relation to psychological brand communities (Carlson et al., 2008). To develop stronger PSBC in psychological brand communities, brands should focus on efforts that enhance identification with the brand. Thus, focusing on "brand image-related attributes" (Carlson et al., 2008) should be the goal for developing and maintaining psychological brand communities.

The research on the PSBC has several implications. First is the notion of two distinct types of brand community: psychological and social. Second is the notion that the route of identification can play an important role in the degree of PSBC (Carlson et al., 2008). By understanding the type of brand community and the route of identification, creating strategies and messages in order to help build the consumer's sense of community will ultimately lead to stronger brand commitment. Carlson, Suter, and Brown postulate that brands should foster the creation of the PSBC and psychological brand communities when trying to attract new customers, while nurturing social brand communities when customer retention is the goal (2008, p. 291). While more research is needed in order to understand the complexities of the PSBC, adding to the literature will allow for a deeper understanding of how the types of messages created for a brand can foster a sense of relationship with the brand (Carlson et al, 2008, p. 291).

2.3 Mental Model Theory

Research scholars have a long tradition of trying to gain a better understanding of how individuals form relationships, identify, or create meaning in their life experiences. While mental model theory has been used in the psychology and cognitive science fields for several decades, it

is a newer area of research in the media communication field. Mental models can be summarized as an individual's "cognitive representations of an external reality" (Jones et al., 2011). The body of work on mental models suggests an individual will pull from their unique experience to create a cognitive model to use as a "basis of reasoning and decision making". (Jones et al., 2011). In essence, mental model theory asserts that individual's must create an internal representation of their reality in order to interact with the external world around them (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Jones et al., 2014). For example, when selecting Walt Disney World for a family vacation destination, the internal representations I have from my experiences as a child, and as a Disney College Program employee, will be used as the foundation for my reasoning.

2.3.1   Introduction to Mental Model Theory

The idea of individuals creating internal images of their reality as a way of interacting with their external world can be traced back several decades. While most research points to psychologist Philip Johnson-Laird (1983) as being the father of mental model theory, his work can be traced back to notions that emerged from psychologist Kenneth Craik's work in 1943 (Jones et al., 2011). While rudimentary in its initial form, the work done by Craik and Johnson-Laird in the twentieth century created the groundwork for future research in various fields focusing on the human experience as being one of multiple realities.

When referencing mental models, it is important to understand the difference between the theory and the "expressed mental model" (Jones et al., 2014). For the purposes of this study, mental model theory is the idea that individuals "must be able to represent the external world mentally to interact with it" (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Jones et al., 2014). In this respect, mental models can be more simply viewed as a "basis of reasoning and decision making" (Jones et al., 2011). Expressed mental models are the "cognitive representations of an external reality" (Jones

et al., 2011). These expressed mental models are elicited during the methodology portion of a research study using a variety of different methodological designs. The goal is for researchers to examine these expressions in order to gain insight to an individual's internal processing when exposed to the phenomenon being studied.

Mental models are complex structures used by individuals as a basis for reasoning and decision making (Jones et al., 2011). Based in the notion that every individual has a unique life experience, mental models are singular representations of one person's experience of, and interaction with, the world (Jones et al., 2011). Expressed mental models are not merely visual images or textual descriptions, but instead three-dimensional embodiments of an individual's internal representation of the outside world (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Sharma, 2016). These unique representations are dynamic and context-dependent, as they may change given the stimulus and environment in which they are used (Jones et al. 2011). The dynamic nature of mental models is important to note, as this allows for the idea that they can evolve over time (Jones et al. 2011, 2014). As a component of this, by nature of being context-dependent, mental models are "incomplete representations of reality" (Jones et al., 2011). Given the nature of mental models as an evolving structure that rely on an individual's ability to accurately represent the world as they see it in their mind, the body of literature surrounding mental model theory acknowledges the limitations of eliciting consistent, accurate images (Jones et al., 2014). Thus, mental model theory aims to provide researchers with a deeper understanding of the individual's experience with the phenomenon of study, with the understanding that the results are limited to that particular situation and environment. Johnson-Laird understood this when he described mental models as having two distinct levels: level one is the theory and level two is the need for a mental model elicitation methodology (1983, p. 10).

At the first level, human beings understand the world by constructing working models of it in their minds. Since these models are incomplete, they are simpler than the entities they represent. In consequence, models contain elements that are merely imitations of reality that are merely imitations of reality. At the second level, since cognitive scientists aim to understand the human mind, they, too, must construct a working model. (Johnson-Laird, 1983, p. 10)

In order to gain a better understanding of what mental models are, it is important to understand what they are not. Mental models are not schemas (Jones et al., 2014; Sharma, 2016). While seemingly interrelated, there are notable distinctions. Originating in work done by cognitive psychologist Sir Frederic Bartlett in 1932, schemas are defined as "cognitive structures built up as people interact with the environment in order to organize their experience" (Baran & Davis, 2015, p. 236). The "built up" designation in this definition provides the basis for an important distinction. Schema theory argues that individuals construct connected experiences over time, each interaction with a phenomenon building upon the past knowledge structure (Baran & Davis, 2015, p. 236). A simplified way of viewing the relationship is that schemas can be "used as building blocks" for mental models (Sharma 2016). In this view, schemas are more static, and while they can be built upon, they are not context-dependent. This definition of schema also points to cognitive structures that occur in long-term memory and are based in verbal explication. As a comparison, mental models are symbolically-based dynamic structures that can occur in short-term and long-term memory. Jones, Ross, Lynam, and Pascal refer to a figure created by Johnson-Laird to illustrate the differences between mental models and schema (2011) (Figure 3).

Author	Basis of Differentiation	Schemata	Mental Models
Rutherford and Wilson (2004:312)	Static vs. dynamic structure	"...A procedural data structure in memory".	Use procedural data "in a computationally dynamic manner".
Holland et al. (1986:13)	Representational flexibility	Inflexible knowledge structures stored in long-term memory provide "predictive knowledge for highly regular and routine situations".	Flexible knowledge structure that combines multiple schemata to represent or simulate an unfamiliar situation.
Brewer (1987:189)	Generic vs. specific knowledge	"...Precompiled generic knowledge structures."	"Specific knowledge structures that are constructed to represent a new situation through the use of generic knowledge of space, time, causality, and human intentionality".

Figure 3. Differences Between Mental Models and Schema

Mental models are also not interchangeable with the term cognitive structures (Christensen & Olson, 2002, p. 477). As pointed to by researchers Christensen and Olson (2002, p. 477), the mere use of the term cognitive structures implies that "all representations are cognitions (beliefs)." However, mental models are understood as an effective vehicle for imbuing meaning for a variety of representations beyond mere beliefs, such as: "attitudes, emotions and feelings, symbols, actions, goals, personal values, images, memories of past consumption events, consumption visions of anticipated experiences, and representations of sensory experience such as touch, taste, and smell" (Christensen & Olson, 2002, p. 477). Similar to schemas, cognitive structures are based in verbal explications of the internal representation, whereas mental model research allows for the symbolism in the image and visuals to aid in the explication (Christensen, G. & Olson, J., 2002).

The final important distinction is to understand that mental models are not simply an application of metaphors to describe an external reality. However, recent brand studies are using mental models to explore the idea that "corporate brands are cognitively structured by a metaphor" (Koller, 2009, p. 44). Based in cognitive metaphor theory, brands come to life

through the association of human traits with brand abstractions. Using this view, mental models are the internal process where the "human mind conceives of one usually abstract entity in terms of another, usually a more concrete one" (Koller, 2009, p. 44). Multimodal metaphor research posits that companies use metaphoric abstractions, such as logos and branded language, in order to elicit mental models. For example, multimodal metaphor research would look at the use of the iconic castle at the beginning of Disney movies as a metaphoric abstraction of the Disney brand experience. In this example, the abstraction of the castle has become a known symbol for the Disney brand. While multimodal metaphor research has roots in mental model theory, the goals are inconsistent with the PSBC phenomenon focus of this study.

2.3.2 Epistemology of Mental Model Theory

Mental models have a strong foundation in psychology and cognitive science. The epistemological roots of mental model theory can be attributed to psychologists Kenneth Craik (1943) and Philip Johnson-Laird (1983). Several researchers have added to the richness of the theory throughout the years leading to an increased interest by researchers in the media communication field. Due to the longevity of mental model theory and the complexities of being studied in various fields, the literature does not come to a consensus on all elements. One of the more contentious debates surrounds the hypothetical, physical location of the mental models: short-term versus long-term memory (Jones et al. 2011). In order to gain a better understanding of the evolution of mental models in the social sciences, I have examined the work of the key contributors to mental model theory, as well as some landmark additions to the original body of work throughout the years.

2.3.2.1. Kenneth Craik (1943)

British psychologist Kenneth Craik is acknowledged as being the first to translate the idea of mental models in 1943. While he did not use the term mental model directly, he postulated that individuals create mental representations to run procedural calculations (Johnson-Laird, 2005). These calculations are used as a predictive tool of sorts; a way for the human brain to make sense of the world. While rudimentary and unfinished, the work done by Craik was decades ahead of its elaboration in the psychology and cognitive science fields. It's important to examine Craik's exact words, in order to better understand the origins of mental model theory:

> If the organism carries a 'small-scale model' of external reality and of its own possible actions within its head, it is able to try out various alternatives, conclude which is the best of them, react to future situations before they arise, utilize the knowledge of past events in dealing with the present and the future, and in every way to react in a much fuller, safer, and more competent manner to the emergencies which face it. (Craik, 1943)

Craik's work notably focused on the use of qualitative thought experiments using symbolic models with a focus on the models being located in the long-term memory (Jones et al., 2011). Craik died in 1945, a few short years after his work on mental models was published (Johnson-Laird, 2005). While researchers referenced his work throughout the years, it would be forty years before another researcher focused on this area of study (Jones et al., 2011).

2.3.2.2. Philip Johnson-Laird (1983)

As previously noted, psychologist Philip Johnson-Laird is credited with being the father of mental model theory. In 1983, Johnson-Laird wrote a book simply titled *Mental Models* where he laid out the need and the reasoning behind both the theory and the method. Using 513 pages to illuminate the need for mental model research, he postulates that "a mental model has a structure that corresponds to the known structure of what it represents" (Johnson-Laird, 2005). He readily credits Craik's idea of humans having small-scale models to represent the external world as the foundation for his own work (Johnson-Laird, 1983, p. 11).

Johnson-Laird's foundations are in experimental psychology with a focus on human reasoning (Jones et al., 2011). Thus, in his original work, he focused on the idea of mental models being a reasoning mechanism that could be explored using a computational process (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Jones et al., 2011). The main limitation of Johnson-Laird's original work was the idea of mental models only being available in the working memory. However, Johnson-Laird has continued his work on mental models throughout the last several decades, and can be credited with much of the evolution.

It's interesting to note the computational nature and language of Johnson-Laird's original work in mental models. Even with the mathematical origins used in his original explanations and examples, he still showed a grasp of the dynamic nature and depth of possibilities that future work would uncover:

> Mental models play a central and unifying role in representing objects, states of affairs, sequences of events, the way the world is, and the social and psychological actions of daily life. They enable individuals to make inferences and predictions, to understand phenomena, to decide what action to take and to control its execution, and above all to experience events by proxy; they allow language to be used to create representations comparable to those deriving from direct acquaintance with the world; and they relate words to the world by way of conception and perception. (Johnson-Laird, 1983)

Work in mental models has evolved to include notions of analogical thinking, cognitive mapping, and working versus long-term memory (Jones et al. 2011). Johnson-Laird, and other researchers, tend to agree on the notion of analogical thinking (Jones et al. 2011). As is the case with Craik's work, Johnson-Laird's work focuses on the use of qualitative thought experiments using symbolic models. This has become a notable distinction in that most of the reasoning and prediction work by other researchers has been quantitative in nature (Jones et al., 2011). There is an interesting discrepancy between Johnson-Laird's work and that of Craik, and it originates in the divide among mental model researchers as to the location of mental models in an individual's memory (Jones et al, 2011). While he agrees that both long-term and short-term knowledge can

be displayed in a mental model, he has published evidence in support of mental models being a part of the working memory. His fear is that the long-term memory argument is more in line with schema theory than mental model theory (Jones et al., 2011; Johnson-Laird, 1983). In this respect, Johnson-Laird attributes schema to static mental structures and mental models to dynamic, short-term structures (Jones et al. 2011).

Work done by Nersessian (2002) is calling into question the separation between working memory and long-term memory (Jones et al., 2011). This newer understanding postulates that mental models exist in the long-term memory, but are used as a form of reasoning and problem-solving when formed in working memory (Jones et al., 2011). In this newer area of research, there is a relationship to theories of action: what people say is different from what people do (Jones et al., 2011). In this correlation, the working memory represents what people say and long-term memory represents what people do (Jones et al., 2011). The idea is that by extracting a mental model stored in the long-term memory, researchers will have a better notion of how the stimulus affects what people do (Jones et al., 2011). At this point, the research is still unclear as to how to isolate and elicit mental models which equate with decision and action (Jones et al., 2011).

2.3.2.3.   *Media Communication Research and Mental Models*

Mental models are considered to reside in a relatively new area of exploration for media communication research. Natural resource management communication scholars Abel, Ross, and Walker were among the first to use mental models as way to explore the "similarities and differences in stakeholders' understanding to improve communication" (Jones et al., 2014). Ross later partnered Jones, Lynam, Perez, and Leitch in 2011 to add to the literature on mental models as a theory and methodology in order to strengthen the argument for the importance of mental

models in the natural resource management field. Jones, Ross, Lynam, and Perez joined forces again three years later for a research project evaluating the best interview procedure for eliciting mental models for the natural resource management field (2014). While these more recent studies were created with the field of natural resource management as a focus, the researchers' roots in communication allow for a strong point of reference.

The most proliferate area of communication research utilizing mental models is risk communication. Most studies in this field over the last 15 years reference the book of work created by Morgan, Fischhoff, Bostrom, and Atman in 2002. Aptly titled, *Risk Communication: A Mental Models Approach* covers the history of mental models and the need for the approach in a risk communication context, as well as an in-depth evaluation of the applicable elicitation procedures for this field (Morgan et al., 2002). This book set the groundwork for risk communicator researchers to perform studies using mental models using techniques and procedures found to be the most useful for their particular field (Jones et al., 2014). While this groundwork is important, researchers outside the risk communication field have noted that the procedures set forth for this field and others, are not always applicable to outside fields (Jones et al., 2014). Thus, further research will need to be done on a field-by-field basis to explore the best elicitation techniques and analysis procedures. Until more bodies of work compile these best practices for each field, researchers will need to evaluate the merits of existing procedures in order to determine what best fits the complexities of their study (Jones et al., 2014).

While relatively new in the field media communication, mental models have been used in recent studies to explore narrative engagement and narrative-processing (Sharma, 2016). Traditionally, narrative research has roots in persuasion theory. Using similar elements to brand relationship studies, narrative researchers have explored what elements in a narrative will predict

a reader's connection to the story. Previous to the use of mental models in this field, studies involved concepts such as narrative transportation, identification, emotional involvement and variations of the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) (Sharma 2016). By using mental models as a way of exploring an individual's complex processing of a narrative, this field can move beyond the traditional boundaries of previous studies that focus on tangible story elements such as the characters and physical locations (Sharma 2016). The research in mental models and narratives lays more groundwork for mental models as an appropriate tool for other media communication studies.

2.3.2.4.   *Links to Historical Research Paradigms*

Given the depth of research that exists for a theory spanning seventy-five years across a variety of fields, there does not appear to be one direct research paradigm of reference for mental models. Using Craik and Johnson-Laird's position of mental models being best suited for qualitative thought experiments in order to evaluate symbolic models, for the purposes of this study, mental models fall within the social constructivist paradigm. Through the evaluation of an individual's subjective meaning of the world, social constructivists "seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2012, p. 24). By using a qualitative approach to evaluate the mental models of a participant in response to branded media exposure, this research is considered an inductive approach from which the shared experience leads to the development of a "pattern of meaning" (Creswell, 2012, p. 25).

2.3.3   Criticisms of Mental Model Theory

As mentioned previously, research based on the idea of mental models as a unique representation of an individual's experience of the world presents some difficulties. One major limitation to studies involving mental models is the elicitation process (Sharma 2016). Due to the

nature of mental models existing in the mind, they "are not available for direct inspection or measurement" (Jones et al., 2011). Thus, the elicitation of mental models is an imperfect process and the subsequent analysis is only useful when understood as simply a way to "gain insight into people's internal representations of the world" (Jones et al., 2011).

A second limitation of mental model research is the reliance of the process on one individual's life experience. While the models themselves are noted as being imperfect and difficult to elicit and analyze due to their existence in the mind, one individual's life experience cannot be considered an accurate representation of the world. With mental models having an intense focus on a unique experience, they are considered to be "incomplete representations of reality" (Jones et al., 2014). Thus, while useful in creating an understanding of what may be occurring in relation to a phenomenon, mental model studies are not generalizable.

A final limitation of mental models is their context-dependent, dynamic nature. As previously stated, mental model theory aims to provide researchers with a deeper understanding of the individual's experience with the phenomenon of study, noting that results are limited to that particular situation and environment. The issue is that a mental model "that fits the environment today may not be adequate tomorrow" (de Chernatony & Riley, 1998). Thus, mental models should be viewed as more of a snapshot in time in relation to one particular phenomenon, with the understanding that a change in environment, experience, and the type of media exposure could impact the result.

2.4 Refinement and Future Area of Research

Brand communities have been studied for decades by both academics and corporations. The proposition of the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) model (Carlson et al., 2008) has expanded the potential for researchers to gain a better understanding of how the

consumer forms a relationship with the brand through psychological and social interactions. By using mental models as a tool to explore a defined brand community member's internal representation of their external reality, researchers can gain a better understanding of how to create branded media and messaging that resonates with the defined brand community.

Given the dynamic nature of mental model studies, future research should explore the impact of media communication in a variety of contexts. By following the strategy set forth by the risk communication field, media communication researchers should also work to establish a framework of mental model procedures better suited to their field (Jones et al., 2014). Thus, performing research that utilizes different elicitation techniques and analysis procedures will be an important part of the work done in order to set a precedence for the use of mental models in the media communication field. For the purposes of this study, by using mental models as a way of gaining a greater understanding of the PSBC phenomenon, media communication scholars will have a better insight into how to craft and deliver a message that will foster strong brand communities.

2.5 Research Question(s)

A thorough examination of the literature on the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) and mental models shows a need to better understand the cognitive representations elicited when members of a brand community are exposed to branded media content. I sought to better understand the shared experience of self-identified members of a brand community. I postulated that distinct characteristics of social brand community and psychological brand community will be uncovered through the elicitation and analysis of mental models from self-identified brand community members. I also argued that evidence will emerge to support varying degrees of identification with the brand and identification with the group. Overall, the goal was

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to examine the mental models of self-identified members of a brand community to provide support for the PSBC.

Based upon the analysis of literature on both the PSBC and mental models, I posed the following central research question: RQ1: What are the shared mental model expressions among members of the Disney brand community? To uncover the true essence of the phenomenon in this study, I posed four subquestions for this research question: RQ1a: What expressions emerge to support psychological brand community and identification with the brand? RQ1b: What expressions emerge to support social brand community and identification with the group? RQ1c: What expressions emerge to support PSBC? RQ1d: What differences, if any, exist between the visual expressions and the verbal expressions during the mental model elicitation?

CHAPTER 3. METHODS

3.1 Introduction

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the existence of the

Carlson, Suter, and Brown's (2008) psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) among

members of the Disney brand community. The main focus of this study was to use the PSBC as a

foundation for examining the brand community phenomenon through the elicitation of mental

models formed as a result of an interaction with a branded advertisement. Based on the notion

that "people must be able to represent the external world mentally to interact with it" (Jones et

al., 2014, p. 12), I elicited and analyzed mental models (Johnson-Laird, 1983) from self-

identified members of the Disney brand community in order to evaluate their shared experience.

I selected "The Magic Is Endless" television commercial as the branded media for this

study. Ranked by iSpot.tv as one of the top ten most engaging ads the week of October 17, 2016,

this ad showcases a new slogan for Walt Disney World, playing off the resorts physical size and

massive brand presence using just four words. While the visuals of the commercial present a

well-rounded representation of families from all walks of life experiencing the enjoyment offered

by all four theme parks, the title and script of the commercial create the magical ambience

consumers have come to expect from the brand. Overall, this commercial is well rounded in both

the visual and audio components, providing a strong foundation for studying the PSBC

phenomenon within the Disney brand community.

The scope of this study used Johnson-Laird's (1983) mental model theory as a lens for

exploring the types of internal representations that can be elicited from self-identified members

of a brand community when they are exposed to branded media. Using the PSBC to guide my

research, a qualitative phenomenological study was conducted in order to examine the shared

experience of members of the Disney brand community. This study specifically looked for themes that represent: (a) social versus psychological brand community, (b) group versus brand identification, and (c) visual versus verbal response.

A diagrammatic-oral interview procedure of eliciting mental models in a non-situated context (Jones et al., 2014) was conducted, using the PSBC research as my guide (Carlson et al., 2008). Based on the phenomenological nature of this study, I used a criterion-convenience sample of adults that self-identified as members of the Disney brand community. This study involved one-on-one, face-to-face mental model elicitation procedures with eight participants. To implement the diagrammatic-oral interview procedure of eliciting mental models, each participant: was shown the selected Disney commercial, drew a representation of their cognitive structures after viewing the commercial, and participated in a set of open-ended interview questions. I then performed a thematic analysis of the drawings, the interviews, and the drawings mixed with the interviews. These themes were then compared to the PSBC research in order to add to the literature on brand communities.

3.2 Theoretical Framework of the Method

When formulating the methodology for a research study, it was important to first understand the philosophy and interpretative framework of the researcher. For the purposes of this research, philosophy is defined as "the use of abstract ideas and beliefs that inform our research" (Creswell, 2012, p. 16). Qualitative researchers generally come from the philosophical stance that social reality is a human construction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). There are four philosophical assumptions that guide qualitative research: "ontology (the nature of reality), epistemology (what counts as knowledge and how knowledge claims are justified), axiology (the role of values in research), and methodology (the process of research)" (Creswell, 2012, p. 20).

A qualitative researcher: ontologically believes in the existence of multiple realities, has the epistemological stance that knowledge is formed through an individual's subjective experience, has an axiology of positioning personal values and bias as a part of the creation of reality, and believes in an inductive methodology (Creswell, 2012, p. 20-22).

Interpretative frameworks add a layer of complexity to the qualitative philosophical assumptions. Simply put, the interpretative framework of a qualitative researcher can be defined as the researchers "worldview". This study was designed using a social constructivist interpretative framework. Social constructivists "seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (Creswell, 2012, p. 24) through the evaluation of an individual's subjective views of the world. The exploration of seeing the world through the eyes of the individual as they experience the world creates an atmosphere appropriate for inductive research, in which the shared experience leads to the development of a "pattern of meaning" (Creswell, 2012, p. 25). In the social constructivist researcher view, to discern the participant's construction of the meaning of an experience, the researcher must engage with the participant in discussions using broad, open-ended questions to allow for the participant's unique experience to unfold (Creswell, 2012, p. 25). As a result of this interaction, social constructivist researchers interpret meaning, understanding that their life experience will shape the interpretation of the participant's life experience (Creswell, 2012, p. 25). Essentially, researchers that fall within the social constructivist paradigm believe that "reality is co-constructed between the researcher and the researched and shaped by individual experience" (Creswell, 2012, p. 36).

3.2.1 Qualitative Phenomenological Studies

While there are many definitions of the term qualitative research, for the purposes of this study it will be defined as:

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/ theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (Creswell, 2012, p. 44)

Creswell's definition emphasizes the importance of the research "process" (2012, p. 44) when undertaking a qualitative study. In regard to process, it is important to evaluate the researcher's philosophical assumptions and subsequent interpretative frameworks before deciding upon the procedure for the study (Creswell, 2012, p. 44). Using this view, the chosen procedure and form of inquiry should be a natural progression of the framework.

One of the key reasons for performing qualitative research is to "understand the contexts or setting in which participants in a study address a problem or issue" (Creswell, 2012, p. 48). In particular, a phenomenological approach to research aims to describe "what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon" (Creswell, 2012, p. 76). For the purposes of this study, a phenomenon is defined as "an 'object' of human experience" (van Manen, 1990, p. 163). This object may be the human experience itself or it "may include psychological concepts such as grief, anger, or love" (Creswell, 2012, p. 285). While the object is understood as the phenomenon of interest in a study, "the reality of an object is only perceived within the meaning of the experience of an individual. (Creswell, 2012, p. 78).

The goal of a phenomenological study is to capture the "universal essence" (Creswell) of a shared human experience (2012, p. 76). The essence is captured through: careful selection of a single phenomenon to be explored, data collection from a heterogeneous group that has experienced the phenomenon, and a data analysis process that allows for the participant's experience with the phenomenon to showcase "what they experienced (textural description) and

how they experienced it (structural description)" (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2012). Note, that the size of the heterogeneous group selected for data collection is not important in a phenomenological study. Thus, sampling for phenomenological studies are based on the criteria that all participants have experienced the phenomenon. Drawing on the themes that emerge from the textural and structural descriptions of the participants' experience, the final step is for the researcher to interpret "the meaning of the lived experiences" (Creswell, 2012, p. 79). This interpretation is considered to be the essence of the phenomenon.

3.2.2 Mental Model Elicitation

The theory of mental models adheres to the notion of individuals creating internal representations as a way of processing, understanding, and participating with their external reality (Jones et al., 2014). It is not practical for researchers to have direct access to these internal representations. Thus, in order to gain insight into this individualized process, researchers have developed techniques to elicit an individual's internal representations of their external reality (Jones et al., 2014). For the purposes of this study, the term elicitation refers to the methodological activities of the researcher in order to motivate the participant to "externalize a mental model" for the purposes of analysis (Jones et al., 2014).

Mental model elicitations in the research field have become known as "expressed mental models" (Jones et al., 2014). The expression occurs during the interaction between the researcher and the participant. While most of these expressions occur during one-on-one interviews, several methods have been identified as being appropriate for mental model procedures. Given the notion that expressed mental models are dynamic, the selection of the mental model procedure for each study should be thoughtful and based around the unique features of the study.

Jones, Ross, Lynam and Perez reviewed several types of mental model elicitation procedures and found two key dimensions: (1) situated versus non-situated and (2) oral versus visual (2014). The situated versus non-situated dimension refers to the physical location where the elicitation process occurs (Jones et al., 2014). In this respect, situated procedures occur in a location that is similar to the location of the phenomenon being studied and non-situated procedures occur in a neutral setting (Jones et al., 2014).

The oral versus visual dimension refers to the physical expression of the mental model. The oral dimension covers the language revealed during the interview process and is symbolically viewed as "a window through which to view the individuals mind" (Jones et al., 2014). However, not all researchers subscribe to the notion of language being able to represent a mental representation in and of itself. Kearney and Kaplan (1997) addressed this gap by combining oral with visual procedures in order to allow for a blending of two connected routes of accessing memory.

Visual elicitation procedures provide a solid foundation for oral elicitation responses. Visual procedures allow participants the chance to map their internal representations and oral elicitations allow participants' cognitive access to "deeply held beliefs" (Jones et al., 2014). When used together, the oral/visual dimensions create a powerful combination of human information processing, by uncovering "two distinct, though partly connected, (memory) systems" (Jones et al., 2014).

It is important to note that Johnson-Laird postulates that mental models are not exact representations of the phenomenon of study, but instead symbols of how a participant creates internal representations (2006). This understanding points to the idea of the mental models being a representation of the essence of the exposed content, not an exact representation (Johnson-

Laird 2006, Sharma 2016). Thus, the mental model analysis will involve contextualizing

"symbols or abstract images" (Sharma 2016) in relation to the phenomenon of study. Johnson-

Laird referred to these symbols and abstract images as the "essence" of the individual's internal

representation of their external reality (2006). These expressed mental models are noted as being

context dependent, highly dynamic structures that continuously evolve (Jones et al., 2011).

3.2.3   The Diagrammatic-Oral Interview Procedure for Eliciting Mental Models

The diagrammatic-oral interview procedure for eliciting mental models is a technique

first pointed to by Kearney and Kaplan in 1997 and further developed by Jones, Ross, Lynam

and Perez in 2014. The original procedure for eliciting mental models involved interviews.

Proponents of the interview-only elicitation procedure argue that the language used by a

participant during the interview process is a "full symbolic representation of the individual's

cognitive structure" (Jones et al., 2014). However, newer research points to the flaw in

interview-only elicitation procedures as only accounting for one mode of cognition. By

combining the verbal with the visual in the elicitation process, both the oral and the visual modes

of cognition can be explored (Jones et al., 2014). The addition of the visual component allows a

participant to explore their mental model "through the process of mapping it" while the

interviews allow participants to "access more deeply held beliefs" (Jones et al., 2014).

The first step to the diagrammatic-oral interview elicitation procedure involves the visual

elicitation, or the mapping process. After the participant is exposed to the defined media, they are

asked to draw what is in their mind in relation to the media (Jones et al., 2014; Sharma, 2016).

These drawings can take any form: illustrations, diagrams, text, and more. The researcher should

not give any guidance throughout the visual elicitation process. However, the researcher should

provide access to a variety of tools for the mental model visual creation (Jones et al., 2014). This

visual diagramming elicitation results in a tangible visual/spatial product that can be analyzed by the researcher. The diagrammatic portion of this elicitation procedure is considered to be "highly compatible with human information processing" (Jones et al., 2014).

The second step to the diagrammatic-oral interview elicitation procedure is the verbal elicitation, or the interview process. The interview procedure utilized in this form of mental model elicitation is based on the open-ended/semi-structured format (Jones et al., 2014). Once the participant has mapped their mental process, the researcher will ask questions about the mental model as drawn, as well as in regards to the participants' experience with the stimulus (Jones et al., 2014; Sharma, 2016). The questions are considered to be semi-structured due to their focus surrounding the participant's reaction to the stimulus (i.e. what did you draw and why). The researcher should have a list of questions prepared designed to aid in the overall elicitation process, but should also be prepared for the participant to guide the research down an emerging, unforeseen path (Qu & Dumay, 2011). The resulting data provides the researcher with a view of the participants' visual and verbal cognition of a shared experience. The analysis of this data will reveal emerging themes in: the visual, the verbal, and the visual and verbal combined.

3.3 Stimulus Materials

"The Magic Is Endless" television commercial is the branded media stimulus used for this study. The data and demographic focus for this commercial was considered for this selection. First airing during the Fall of 2016, this commercial was ranked by iSpot TV as number eight in the top ten engaging television commercials during the week of October 17, 2016 (Figure 4). Based on the 2015 Global Attractions Attendance Report published by the Themed Entertainment Association (TEA) and the Economics practice at AECOM, the Walt

Disney World (WDW) Resort in Florida accounts for four out of the five top attended theme parks in North America. At number two on this list is Disneyland in California, resulting in the Disney brand dominating the top five (Figure 5). The visuals in "The Magic Is Endless" commercial include images from all four WDW theme parks, as well as the resort property. It focuses on the family/shared experience within the resort, not on a singular landmark or character. By selecting a commercial with a well-rounded brand experience, the goal was to enhance the possibility of the elicited mental models being more about the brand community relationship versus a singular branded object.


Figure 4. iSpot.tv Ranking for "The Magic Is Endless" October 17, 2016

RANK	PARK Location	% CHANGE	ATTENDANCE 2015	ATTENDANCE 2014
1	**MAGIC KINGDOM** at Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, FL	6.0%	20,492,000	19,332,000
2	**DISNEYLAND,** Anaheim, CA	9.0%	18,278,000	16,769,000
3	**EPCOT** at Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, FL	3.0%	11,798,000	11,454,000
4	**DISNEY'S ANIMAL KINGDOM** at Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, FL	5.0%	10,922,000	10,402,000
5	**DISNEY'S HOLLYWOOD STUDIOS** at Walt Disney World, Lake Buena Vista, FL	5.0%	10,828,000	10,312,000
6	**UNIVERSAL STUDIOS** at Universal Orlando, FL	16.0%	9,585,000	8,263,000
7	**DISNEY'S CA ADVENTURE,** Anaheim, CA	7.0%	9,383,000	8,769,000
8	**ISLANDS OF ADVENTURE** at Universal Orlando, FL	8.0%	8,792,000	8,141,000
9	**UNIVERSAL STUDIOS HOLLYWOOD,** Universal City, CA	4.0%	7,097,000	6,824,000
10	**SEAWORLD FL,** Orlando, FL	2.0%	4,777,000	4,683,000
11	**BUSCH GARDENS TAMPA BAY,** Tampa, FL	3.0%	4,252,000	4,128,000
12	**KNOTT'S BERRY FARM,** Buena Park, CA	5.0%	3,867,000	3,683,000

Figure 5. 2015 Global Attractions Attendance Report

The second reason for "The Magic Is Endless" selection was due to the strong brand representation in both the use of visuals and audio (Figure 6). In a mere 30 seconds, this commercial shows images from all four of the WDW theme parks, as well as a few seconds of one of the water parks and resorts. While the water park and resort showcased are nondescript, the brand shines through in the theme park clips, using notable characters and landmarks. This broad display of resort options gives the viewer a visual sense of the magic being endless. Within this same visual context, this commercial also focuses on families with younger children from diverse backgrounds enjoying the Disney experience. The use of the happy family, and what that visually looks like in different formats, gives the viewers of this same demographic the visual illusion of the magic being attainable for all families.
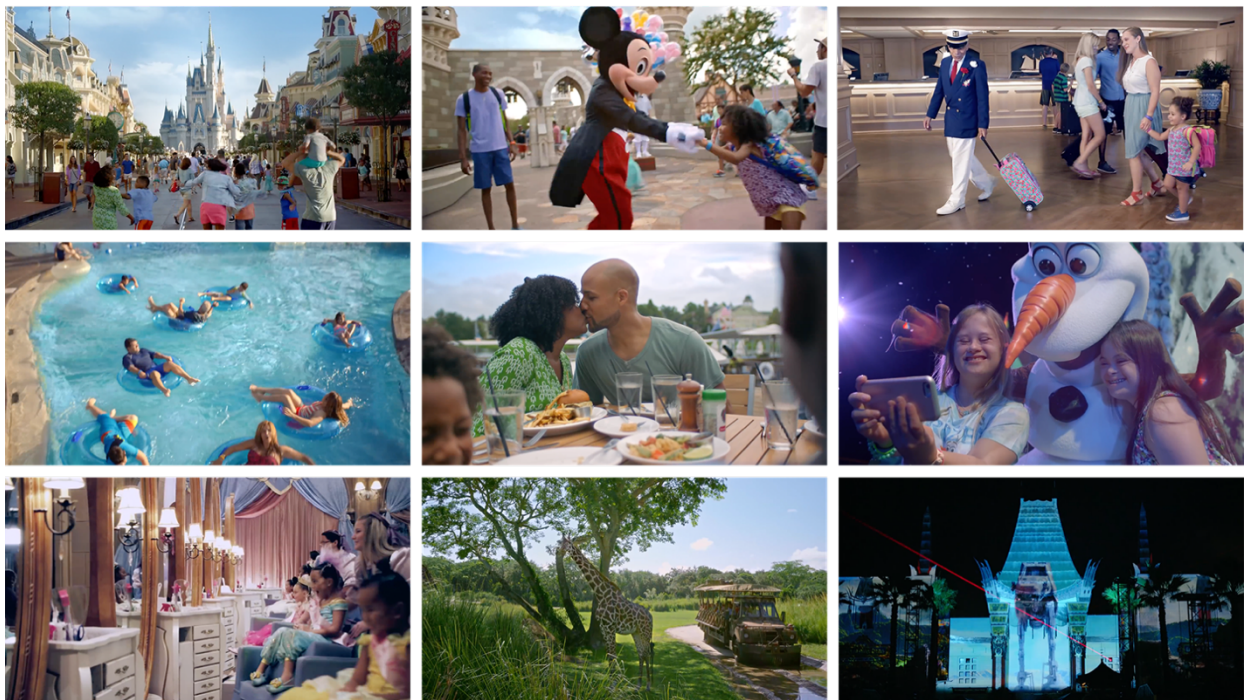
Figure 6. Screenshots Of "The Magic Is Endless" Television Commercial

Mixed with the visuals, the audio in this commercial enhances the illusion of the Disney experience being magical. The first item to note is the custom music bed playing throughout.

Simply titled "Magic", this music is a remastered version of Pilot's popular song of the same name in 1974. Starting with an instrumental bed that hints at youth and fun, the chorus "it's magic you know, never believe it's not so" is used towards the end to verbally enhance the visual message of Disney being magic. The narration for the commercial completes the overall audio and brand experience by tying nicely back in to the magic is endless message. Timed perfectly with the instrumental portion of the music bed, the narration brings the viewer into the experience:

> There is a world like no other world, where happiness can be found around every corner. Savory moments and moments to savor. Filled to the brim with memories and wonder. Because here the laughter has no limits. Here the magic is endless.

Overall, the visuals and audio in "The Magic Is Endless" commercial provide a strong foundation for studying the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon within the Disney brand community.

3.4 Data Collection and Management

Using the foundations of qualitative phenomenological research to drive my research, I collected data from adult participants that self-identified as members of the Disney brand community. Using a criterion-convenience sample of eight adults, I evaluated the essence of the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon by performing a diagrammatic-oral interview procedure for eliciting mental models. The data collection process adhered to the best practices set forth in a recent study in the media communication field by Neelam Sharma (2016). Using Sharma's work as a framework, I met with each participant in a one-on-one, face-to-face setting. During these meetings, each participant was: shown the selected Disney television commercial, asked to draw a representation of their mental models after viewing the commercial, and participated in a set of open-ended interview questions. I then performed a

thematic analysis of the drawings, the interviews, and the drawings mixed with the interviews. At any time, and for any reason, participants were given the option to opt-out of the study.

3.4.1 Sample and Recruitment

As previously noted, this study used a criterion-convenience sample of eight individuals who self-identified as members of the Disney brand community. To understand the reasoning behind this strategy, it's important to refer to the foundations of phenomenological research. Phenomenological studies are performed when a researcher wants to capture the "essence" of a shared human experience (Creswell 2012). To capture the essence, a researcher must carefully select a single phenomenon to be explored, and collect data from a heterogeneous group that has experienced the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell, 2012). This study sought to understand the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon through the elicitation and analysis of mental models collected from participants that self-identified as members of the Disney brand community.

The size of the sample in phenomenological studies is not the focus, the shared experience is. Thus, it was important that the selection of participants for this study was focused on the criteria of the shared experienced of being a member of the Disney brand community (Creswell, 2012). This drove the need for a criterion sample. Creswell notes that phenomenological studies can vary greatly in size, but most researchers use a sample range of 5-25 participants (2012). The importance in the sample size determination is for the researcher to be able to describe the phenomenon of study during the analysis. This study performed a phenomenological reflection for three layers of information: visual, verbal, and visual mixed with verbal. Given the complexity of the analysis process, this study used a smaller sample size of eight participants.

The second consideration for this studies sample selection was based on the location of the researcher and the timeframe for completion. Convenience samples are used to save "time, money, and effort" (Creswell, 2012), sometimes at the expense of information. The researcher is situated in Erie, Colorado and had a limited timeframe to complete this study. The requirement for participation was a one-on-one, face-to-face meeting with the researcher that took approximately 30-60 minutes to complete. Thus, the selected participants needed to be conveniently located to the researcher, defined for this study as being within a two-hour driving distance from Erie, Colorado. The participants also had to be able to give up to 60 minutes of their time for this study. Given the focus of phenomenological studies on the shared human experience, the criterion sampling helped to alleviate the concerns of missing information with convenience sampling.

The recruitment process was expected to be the one of the most difficult parts of this study. The first step was to acknowledge the limitation of using adults who self-identified as members of the Disney brand community. This process was the least scientific part of this study. With no formal scale in use to measure the level of brand community membership, this study relied on the identification of positive responses of potential participants when asked a series of questions in relation to the Disney brand. If the questions elicited any form of a negative reaction, the individual was not selected as a participant for this study. Negative reactions are subjective and include, but are not limited to: "but" statements, examples that include good and bad experiences, the use of sarcasm, and more.

The next consideration was how to find and recruit participants. Due to this studies use of a criterion-convenience sample, recruitment and consent were performed via Facebook with my immediate network of friends and family. As a second stage of recruitment, I allowed my

immediate network to send the recruitment information to members of their network. In some instances, this second stage was performed as an immediate response to my initial post. In other cases, I asked specific members of my network to reach out to members of their network. Emails and phone calls were used as follow-up communication measures. Once selected for participation, I set a time and location with each participant for the elicitation procedure. All recruitment materials were submitted to the IRB for approval before recruitment activities began. The study was declared as a category 2 exemption, and the waiver of documented consent was accepted on March 3, 2017.

3.4.2   Data Collection Procedures

Data collection began as soon as participants were recruited for this study. Given the nature of the thematic analysis to be performed, there was some overlap of the recruitment activities with the data collection activities for this study. The main consideration was to ensure that the participant had a one hour window for the elicitation procedure in order to give the researcher their undivided time and attention.

The first step to a successful diagrammatic-oral interview procedure for elicitation of mental models was to select the location. For this study, the location was dependent on the participant. It was important for the participant to be studied in a location where he/she felt at ease in order to allow for open and honest responses to the questions being asked. This procedure required the participant to have an intense focus on their internal cognitive structures, so it was also important to have the location be as distraction free as possible. The ability to have an audio-visual setup was also necessary in order for the participant to watch the television commercial. All eight participants were exposed to the television commercial using the same technology: full screen viewing on an iPad2. The final requirement was for the location to have

enough space to draw the mental models. I provided the paper and the drawing materials: crayons, colored pencils, and markers.

The one-on-one, face-to-face process of elicitation was similarly structured for all participants. The first step was to expose the participant to "The Magic Is Endless" television commercial. Immediately after, participants were asked to draw a representation of the commercial and/or their feelings in response to the commercial using any combination of illustrations, diagrams, symbols or words. I did not give any additional cues as to what participants should draw. Next, I asked participants a set of in-depth, open-ended interview questions in order to better understand the mental models as drawn. While these interviews were semi-structured and did not fully adhere to the prescribed line of questioning, the following questions provided a framework for this stage of the research: (a) Please explain what you have drawn based on watching this television commercial. (b) What were your immediate thoughts/reactions to this commercial? (c) Did you have any specific memories surface during this exposure? (d) Were there symbols or images that immediately surfaced during this exposure? (e) What is your experience with Disney? (f) Did you identify with anyone/anything in particular in this commercial? (g) Is there any element of your drawing that tells me something about you? (h) Is there any call to action or desire for action on your part after seeing this commercial? (i) Do you currently belong to any social groups that center around the Disney brand?

Based on the idea that mental models are constructed in an individual's mind as a personal interpretation of reality, the mental models elicited from this process were influenced by the individual's goal and motives for constructing the mental model. Thus, the use of open-ended interviews were important in this mental model study to not only assess the individual's response

to the branded media, but to also gain a better understanding of what individual realities the participant was bringing to their reality. Other considerations such as the participants' background (long-term memory) and existing knowledge (working memory), were also taken into account during the open-ended interview procedure.

While nothing in this procedure was considered to be an immediate risk for participants, I upheld the best practices of human subjects research in order to protect participants from any undue harm. First, I disclosed all perceived risks for this study during the recruitment/consent process. All selected participants were provided with the known risks of this study during the recruitment phase and I debriefed each participant at the beginning of the elicitation procedure. Each participant was informed of their ability to opt out of the research process at any point in time, for any reason. Participants' names and likeness were protected throughout, and they remain anonymous in all final materials. For the recruitment process, this meant directing any public messages to my private email for the brand community litmus test. All comments on the Facebook post were removed after the initial recruitment phase was complete. All recruitment related emails will be deleted from the server at the conclusion of this study. During the elicitation procedure, I recorded audio to track the interview responses. This audio was transcribed after the elicitation procedure and each participant is simply referred to as a number. The audio and transcriptions were used as a reference point during the phenomenological reflection. Both the audio recording and the transcriptions are currently stored on my personal laptop. These will be deleted at the conclusion of this study. The images drawn, and some of the transcribed verbal responses, will appear in the phenomenological reflection section of the this research. I have taken the greatest of care to remove any identifying information from the published verbal and visual responses.

3.4.3   Pilot Study

This study is considered to be a pilot study for future research. Given the complexities involved with the method and thematic analysis, this study aimed to explore the value of mental model elicitation as a methodology for exploring the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon. To ensure the effectiveness of this phenomenological study, I created an "emergent design" (Creswell, 2012, p. 47). The elicited mental models were reviewed both during the one-on-one meetings and after in order to allow for necessary changes and additions to the data collection process throughout the study. To achieve the best results possible, this study followed the structure of the diagrammatic-oral interview procedure for elicitation of mental models set forth by previous research (Jones et al., 2014; Sharma, 2016).

3.5 Validity and Reliability for the Phenomenological Study

The terms validity and reliability are commonly used in quantitative social science research to assess the credibility of a study. For these purposes, validity is "the degree to which a test actually measures what it purports to measure" and reliability is "the property of a measure that consistently gives the same answer at different times" (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013).

Qualitative researchers also believe in the importance of credibility. However, given the complexities of the different types of approaches and goals involved in qualitative research, various terms and evaluation techniques can be used to showcase credibility (Creswell, 2012, p. 243). The decision for how to handle validity and reliability in a qualitative study should be based the individual study. For the purposes of this research, validity is discussed in terms of the process (Creswell, 2012) and reliability is viewed within the position of subtle realism (Silverman, 1993; Angen, 2000). I also discuss the importance of evaluating the quality of the

research within the phenomenological framework, an increasingly important measure in the qualitative field (Creswell, 2012).

3.5.1 Validation as a Process

This study refers to Creswell's notion of validity in qualitative work as a process (2012). For the purposes of this study, validation as a process is "an attempt to assess the accuracy of the findings, as best described by the researcher and the participants" (Creswell, 2012, p. 249). This view takes into account that any body of research is really just a representation of one author's work, an acknowledgement that illuminates the principles of qualitative research (Creswell, 2012, p. 249). To ensure the notion of "accuracy" within qualitative research, researchers should engage in a minimum of two of the following validation strategies (Creswell, 2012): (1) Prolonged engagement and persistent observation, (2) Triangulation, (3) Peer review or debriefing, (4) Negative case analysis, (5) Clarifying researcher bias, (6), Member checking (7) Rich, thick description, and (8) External audits.

This study uses three of Creswell's validation strategies in order to produce the most accurate and trustworthy results possible. The first validation strategy was peer review or debriefing. In this strategy, the researcher looks to his/her peers to review the method and interpretations in order to keep the "researcher honest" (Creswell, 2012, p. 250). By nature of the thesis process, my committee served as my peer review board, evaluating all stages of the research from the proposal through the final research process. To follow best practices for the peer review and debriefing validation strategy, I kept written notes of this feedback and a defining label for each peer review session. For this study, these sessions occur during the thesis proposal defense, the thesis defense, and one-on-one meetings.

The second validation strategy in this study is the negative case analysis. In this strategy, researchers may need to rework research questions or classifications and themes "in light of disconfirming evidence" (Creswell, 2012, p. 251). Essentially, not all evidence will match the themes or codes defined in the initial study design. Thus, researchers need to "report this negative analysis" in order to give a more "realistic assessment of the phenomenon under study" (Creswell, 2012, p. 251). There are two negative analysis reports for this study. Given the inductive nature of qualitative studies, I expected to uncover themes that were impossible to predict during the design phase of the research process. The findings for this study reflect the five themes that evolved based on the participant expressions, not from the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) model as initially postulated. The second negative analysis involves a change in the central research question and subquestions. After a thorough review of the mental model expressions and the themes uncovered during the phenomenological reflection, the research questions for this study have been consolidated to better reflect the universal essence of the PSBC phenomenon. It is important to recognize both the theme and research question negative analysis in order to give the full assessment of my experience in this process with the phenomenon of study.

The final validation strategy in this study was clarifying the researcher bias. Qualitative researchers acknowledge that their mere participation in the research makes them an instrument within the study (Creswell, 2012). However, researchers should make sure to clarify their position in a study to give the reader the full picture of how their bias could impact the study and the results (Creswell, 2012, p. 251). For the purposes of this study, I have identified myself as a member of the Disney brand community through the opening narrative in the introduction. While performing the elicitation procedure, I did not inform the participants of my experience with

Disney in order to minimize the impact on the results. During the thematic analysis, I have allowed the visual images and the verbal responses of the participants to tell the story. I took every precaution to limit the effect of my experience with Disney on the results, while understanding that the reader should have access to this bias to make their own determination of how this experience shaped my approach and interpretation (Creswell, 2012, p. 251).

3.5.2 Subtle Realism as a Basis for Reliability

There is a debate among qualitative researchers as to the importance of defining reliability separate of validity in qualitative work (Angen, 2000). For the purposes of this research, reliability is defined within the position of subtle realism (Angen, 2000, p. 382). Subtle realism is a position of compromise in qualitative research, recognizing the realist position "that there is a reality independent of our knowledge of it" and the interpretivists position "that we can only know reality from our own perspective in it" (Angen, 2000, p. 382). Using this position as a foundation for reliability, Silverman states qualitative researchers can address concerns of reliability by following the standardized documentation procedures set forth by the qualitative work (1993). For example, when performing an interview, the researcher should follow the standardized methods for taking notes, recording the interview, and transcription as set forth by the predicate research.

This study addresses reliability from the subtle realism position in a few ways. First, the framework for this study adheres to the best practices for phenomenological studies as defined by John Creswell (2012). Within the phenomenological framework, this study references the work of Neelam Sharma (2016) using mental models as a way of exploring narratives in the media communication field. By following the procedures set forth by Sharma for the diagrammatic-oral interview procedure for the elicitation of mental models, I used a mixture of

visual and verbal mental model expressions to perform the thematic analysis. Thus, Sharma's research was the predicate research for this study.

3.5.3   Quality of Research

An emerging notion among qualitative researchers is the idea of measuring the quality of the research. Creswell argues for the necessity of this element given the variety of definitions and disagreement for reliability and validity in the qualitative field (2012). Based on the work of Polkinghorne in 1989, Creswell identified five questions for the evaluation of quality in phenomenological studies: (1) Does the author convey an understanding of the philosophical tenets of phenomenology? (2) Does the author have a clear "phenomenon" to study that is articulated in a concise way? (3) Does the author use procedures of data analysis in phenomenology? (4) Does the author convey the overall essence of the experience of the participants? Does this essence include a description of the experience and the context in which it occurred? and (5) Is the author reflexive throughout the study? (Polkinghorne, 1989; Creswell, 2012).

This study adhered to, and acknowledged, the notion of quality of research in the initial design phase, during the implementation, and throughout phenomenological reflection. By following the best practices set forth by phenomenological research and predicate studies using the diagrammatic-oral interview procedure for mental model elicitation, this study was designed with the goal of quality in mind.

To showcase my understanding of the basic philosophical tenets of phenomenology, this study was designed to adhere to Creswell's best practices for phenomenological research (2012). By defining the specific phenomenon for this study, and designing the study to describe the

essence of the stated phenomenon, this study has all the necessary elements in place to perform a thematic-based phenomenological reflection.

To address the second question of quality, having a clear "phenomenon" to study that is articulated in a concise way, this study has repeatedly stated that the phenomenon of study is the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC). This study is careful to reference this phenomenon as often as necessary in order to be articulate and avoid confusion throughout.

The third question of quality relates to selecting the appropriate procedure of data analysis for phenomenology. This question is mostly addressed in Chapter 4 - Findings of this study. This study adheres to van Manen's (1990, p. 77) version of phenomenological analysis, identified in Chapter 4 as the phenomenological reflection. However, this question is also answered by the choice of the elicitation procedure used. Phenomenological studies typically use interviews, but they can also pull in other qualitative procedures as dictated by the phenomenon of study. To evaluate participants expressed internal representations of the outside world, this study combines the interview procedure with a visual approach.

The fourth question of quality is reflected in the writing style used in Chapter 4 - Findings of this research. To convey the overall essence of the participants' experience using descriptions of the experience and the context in which they occurred, the phenomenological reflection was written using the words and the images of the participants as much as possible. By letting the voice of the participant shine through, the essence of the phenomenon is allowed to unfold. This element of quality was also assessed and adhered to as a part of the initial research design.

Question five, researcher reflexivity, is addressed throughout this study. By opening with a narrative that allows for the reader to understand my experience with the phenomenon of study,

I have allowed for an understanding of how my experience could ultimately have impacted the results. During the recruitment and consent phase, I strategically noted that I would not disclose my experience with Disney to the participants until after the elicitation procedure in order to minimize my impact as a researcher on their responses. Finally, I include a researcher bracketing section in Chapter 4 - Findings to clearly state my position in the research, and the steps I took to minimize this bias in my results.

3.6 Research Steps and Timeline

To complete this research in a timely manner, I identified six key steps. Each step showcases the various tasks that were performed, as well as the completion date. The goal for completion, including all materials submitted to the graduate school, is May 26, 2017. These steps are exemplified in Table 1.

Table 1. Research Steps and Timeline for Completion

RESEARCH STEPS AND TIMELINE		
STEPS	TASKS	COMPLETION DATE
1 Thesis Proposal	Draft & Revise Thesis Proposal	2/13/2017
	Defend Thesis Proposal	
2 IRB Approval	Submit To IRB For Exempt Status	3/3/2017
	Work With IRB To Attain Approval	
3 Perform Study	Initiate Recruitment On Facebook	3/15/2017
	Perform Participant Elicitations	
4 Analyze Results	Analyze Mental Model Elicitations	4/1/2017
	Identify Emerging Themes	
	Compare Themes To The PSBC	
5 Thesis	Draft Final Thesis	5/3/2017
	Defend Thesis	
6 Summer 2017 Graduation	Make Defense Feedback Revisions	5/26/2017
	Submit Thesis Electronically	
	Submit All Required JMC And Graduate School Forms	

CHAPTER 4. FINDINGS

Data analysis in qualitative research is considered to be more than the selection of an analysis approach (Creswell, 2012, p. 179). Instead, it is an intense process, involving: data organization, multiple reviews of the data, classification of themes and categories of information, data representation, and interpretation (Creswell, 2012, p.179). Data analysis in phenomenological studies starts with a review of the research questions defined for the study. This becomes the framework from which the researcher determines "significant statements" (Creswell, 2012). The process of reviewing the significant statements in relation to the research questions to gain an understanding of the participants' experience with a phenomenon is referred to as "horizontalization" (Creswell, 2012). The researcher than uses the significant statements to form "clusters of meaning", which result in themes (Creswell, 2012).

The process of analysis naturally flows directly into the reflection for a phenomenological study. In this stage, the researcher uses textural and structural descriptions to reveal the essence of the phenomenon through the eyes of the participant (Creswell, 2008). For this study, by performing a thorough analysis, I gained insight into the participants' individual relationship with the Disney brand. Finally, phenomenological researchers should give a narrative of their experience with the phenomenon, typically in the introduction. For this study, the opening narrative was provided in order to give the reader the full context of my potential bias throughout the research process.

As previously stated, this study was designed using a social constructivist interpretative framework. By using a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the existence of the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) (Carlson et al., 2008) among members of the Disney brand community, I sought a deeper understanding through the evaluation of the

participant's subjective view of the world (Creswell, 2012). To allow the pattern of meaning for the essence of the PSBC to unfold, I performed a diagrammatic-oral interview procedure for the elicitation of mental models. By examining the PSBC phenomenon, I hoped to better understand the shared experience of self-identified members of a brand community.

This study followed Creswell's framework for the process and structure of qualitative phenomenological research (2012). As a result, I first reflected on my research questions before beginning the analysis for this study. I sought to answer one overarching central research question with several related subquestions. Based upon the analysis of literature for the PSBC and mental models, I posed the following central research question: RQ1: What are the shared mental model expressions among members of the Disney brand community? To uncover the universal essence of the phenomenon in this study, I posed four subquestions for this research question: RQ1a: What expressions emerge to support psychological brand community and identification with the brand? RQ1b: What expressions emerge to support social brand community and identification with the group? RQ1c: What expressions emerge to support PSBC? RQ1d: What differences, if any, exist between the visual expressions and the verbal expressions during the mental model elicitation?

Theme-based analysis in qualitative research involves three core elements: reducing the data into meaningful segments (codes/classifications), combining the segments into larger categories or themes (typically 5-7), and displaying the categories/themes visually in order to make comparisons (Creswell, 2012, p. 180). For this study, the word classification was used in place of code. Classification is the process of "taking the text or qualitative information apart, and looking for categories, themes, or dimensions of information" (Creswell, 2012, p. 186). The core elements of theme based analysis are part of a process, not steps within a process (Creswell,

2012, p. 182). As such, these elements are "interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project" (Creswell, 2012, p. 182). The result is a process of analysis that does not adhere to strict guidelines or procedures. Given the unstructured nature of the thematic analysis, qualitative researchers must be willing to "learn by doing", using the core elements of qualitative analysis to guide them along the way (Creswell, 2012, p. 182).

With the understanding that classifications and themes would emerge from this study through an inductive process, I initially looked to the main components of the PSBC research, and the primary drivers of the PSBC model, as the framework. Given the nature of qualitative work, these themes evolved based on disconfirming evidence during the thematic analysis. The reimagined themes are: (1) Emotional Responses, (2) Brand Symbols, (3) Memories, (4) Perceptions of the Disney Brand, and (5) Physical Elements of Disney Properties.

Data analysis in qualitative research can be overwhelming. Even with the best intentions, researchers can become stuck in a seemingly endless cycle of analysis, constantly reviewing and reevaluating what all the field notes mean (Creswell, 2012). The inner dialogue of this struggle can become all-consuming until the researcher asks, "Did we (I) get the story 'right'?" (Stake, 1995), knowing that there are no 'right' stories, only multiple stories. Perhaps qualitative studies have no endings, only questions (Wolcott, 1994b)" (Creswell, 2012, p. 52). Thus, the goal for this study was to follow the core elements of the data analysis process, knowing that my interpretations of the data are merely a reflection of the participants' experience.

4.1 Researcher Bracketing

In phenomenological studies, researchers should provide a narrative of their experience with the phenomenon. While this typically occurs in the introduction, the location is not the

focus. The idea is to give the reader the full context of the potential bias of the researcher throughout the study.

As a self-identified social constructivist, I believe in the existence of multiple realities based on personal experience. The existence of multiple realities brings a layer of complexity and insight to the process of uncovering meaning in social science research. I understand that it is impossible to separate my experience as a human from my research. Through the reflexivity of acknowledging my affinity towards the Disney brand, I showcased my understanding of the value and the bias brought to the research through my mere presence as an instrument in this study. Pulling from both my personal experience with Disney and my professional experience in branding to evaluate the experience of Disney brand community members, I acknowledge my influence on the results of this study.

To minimize the impact of my experience on the results, I did not disclose my history with Disney, or my professional background, to the participants before or during the study. I was aware of my body language, tone, and responses in order to present as neutral of a presence as possible during the one-on-one interactions. At the end of each one-on-one session, I debriefed the participants on my personal experience with Disney. In my analysis, I have allowed classifications and themes to emerge from the participants' words and images, setting the stage for these emerging themes to tell the story. By taking these steps, I have allowed for the phenomenon to unfold as naturally as possible. Thus, the emphasis is placed on uncovering the participants' experience as a member of the Disney brand community.

4.2 Phenomenological Reflection

This study employs van Manen's approach to phenomenological analysis, known as the "phenomenological reflection" (1990, p. 77). Through the spiral of data analysis, I became fully

immersed in the details in order to "fully grasp the essential meaning" (van Manen, 1990, p. 77) of the expressed visual and verbal mental models gathered during the mental model elicitation process (Creswell, 2012, p. 194). This process included a holistic overview of the visual (Figure 7) and verbal participant responses, highlighting key responses, and conducting a thorough examination of the lived experience with the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon (Creswell, 2012, p. 194-195). Following van Manen's lead, I sought to understand the classifications by asking, "what is this example an example of?" (1990, p. 86).
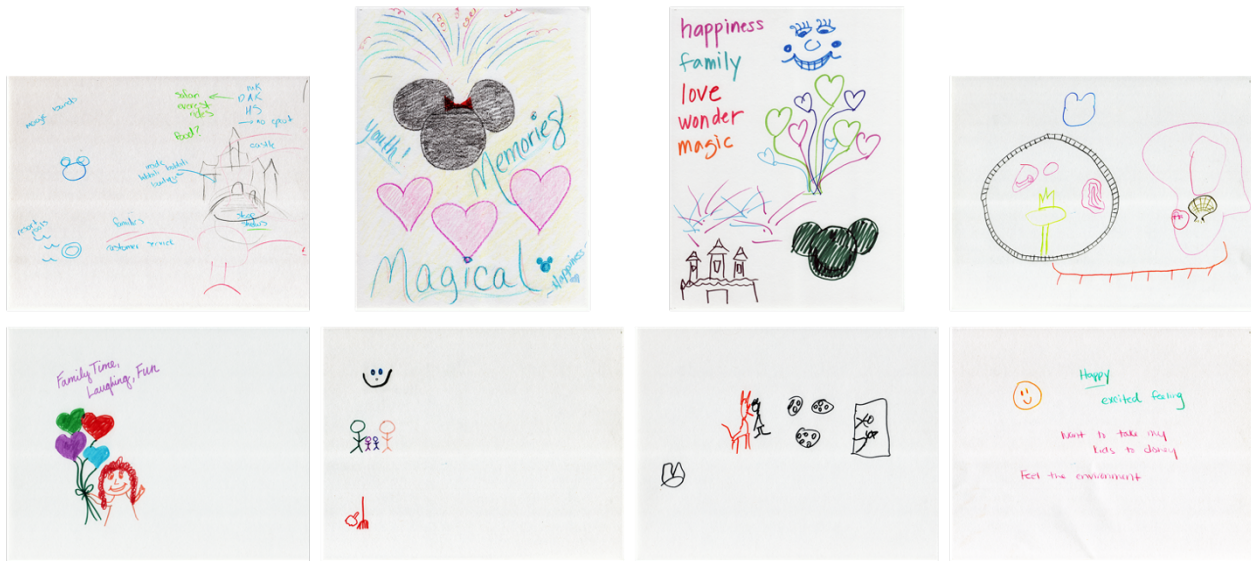
Figure 7. Expressed Visual Mental Models from Eight Participants

Qualitative data analysis can be overwhelming given the sheer amount data researchers must process. This study evaluated 30 pages of verbatim transcriptions, along with the visual responses from eight participants. To sort through the initial data, I used the qualitative computer software MAXQDA to bring organization to the analysis process (Creswell, 2012, p. 202-203). This software allows the qualitative researcher to conceptually map codes for both visual and verbal participant responses. This process resulted in 36 classifications and five themes to use as the basis of the phenomenological reflection. Note that the quantity of responses in each

classification and theme is not of value during the phenomenological reflection process. It is the interpretation of the meaning behind these themes that uncovers the universal essence of the PSBC phenomenon. This will be aided by the use of significant participant statements.

The conceptual mapping process lead to the discovery of five themes for the shared experience for the self-identified members of the Disney brand community in this study. These themes are: (1) Emotional Responses, (2) Brand Symbols, (3) Memories, (4) Perceptions of the Disney Brand, and (5) Physical Elements of Disney Properties (Table 2). Participant behavior, participant experience with the brand, the use of color, and any mentions of cost were also observed and noted during this process.

Table 2. Five Themes and 36 Classifications from Mental Model Elicitations

EMOTIONAL RESPONSE	BRAND SYMBOLS	MEMORIES	BRAND PERCEPTIONS	PHYSICAL ELEMENTS
Happy	Mickey	Brand & Shared	What The Brand Stands For	Specific Rides
Fun	Castle	Shared	Disney Is A Feeling	Specific Parks
Love	Family	Brand	Disney Equals Family	Other Park Features
Youthful	Princess		An Escape From Reality	Specific Events
Excitement	Main Street USA		Unparalleled Customer Service	
Magic	Clean		Vacation	
Wonder	Hearts		Disney Equals Love	
	Safe			
	Fireworks			
	Disney Characters			
	Balloons			
	Fairytales			
	Disney Font			
	Ferris Wheel			
	Heroes			

4.2.1   Theme 1: Emotional Responses

All eight participants referenced specific emotions and feelings in both their visual and verbal responses. In this theme, participants seemed focused on positive emotions. Some of these emotions were present as a direct result of the stimulus exposure, while some were rooted in

specific memories, experiences, or the idea of getting to share the experience with friends and

family. The focus on the emotional experience is important in uncovering how participants are

interacting with the Disney brand.

> They've gone as far as scripting what people say, and what outfits they wear, and what music is playing, and a whole host of different emotional...um things that you don't even realize are going on. But it is affecting your brain and how you...psychological things that are going on that you don't realize. And in a very positive way, not in a negative way. (Participant 3)

> For me it's kind of like hard to express the feelings that it gives me. Like one thing that we do when we go in, I have to go in and then do this little, excited, happy dance and I'm just "YAY" (laughs) you know? And my husband's like okay get it out of your system. Because it's like all of this pent-up energy and when we walk in it gives me such emotions that I just have to get it all out (laughs). And so...see I'm getting emotional now just thinking about it (tearing up a little - wipes tears and laughs). (Participant 5)

> I tend to be an emotional person so watching something kind of triggers feelings for me. (Participant 8)

4.2.1.1. *Happy*

Happy was the most prolific emotion to surface during the elicitation procedures. Verbal

responses that included references to happy, happiness, smiling, joy, cheerful, and laughter fell

within this classification. Visuals that showed a smiling face or the use of the previously

mentioned words were also included (Figure 2).

> So, just having those memories of the rides, the princesses and what you remember that's still there, that brings a lot of happiness to people and myself. (Participant 1)

> It always brings back happy memories and it makes me happy. (Participant 2)

> It just, it's always been like an escape. Something to make me happy, something to make me smile. (Participant 5)

> I drew a big smiley face because Disney is a happy place. Everything Disney is happy. It just shows that all of these people are happy...even adults. Kids are happy, adults are happy. There's a big variety of things to do. (Participant 6)

> Just makes you feel happy. You can just laugh at yourself and have a good time. (Participant 7)

> Because it makes me happy (laughs)! With all the negativity, you can kind of count on Disney to be that happy spot. (Participant 8)

The elicited visuals reinforce the happy emotion by showcasing a broad use of color. Only one participant stuck to a two-color format, while the rest used several. One participant illuminated the importance of color as a representation of happiness during the description of what they drew.

> It's bright and cheerful. I used a lot of colors because I wanted to portray just being happy and fun and bright and the more colors the better (laughs). (Participant 5)

Noted separately from the visual and verbal responses was the behavior of the participants throughout the elicitation process. An overwhelming number of the participants were noted as laughing at some point during the process. During the concept mapping stage of the analysis, forty instances of laughter were accounted for. Only one participant out of eight did not laugh during the elicitation process. This laughter is interpreted as a physical reinforcement for the happy emotion, and is notated in the participant quotes.

4.2.1.2. *Fun*

The second most elicited emotion was fun. While only one of the visuals directly pointed to this emotion, six of the participants verbally explored this emotion during the elicitation procedure. It should be noted that the emotion of fun sometimes overlaps with the emotion of happy, as well as other classifications and themes. This helps to explicate the reasoning behind the formation of the themes, as well as the unfolding of the universal essence of the phenomenon. The presence of fun in the participant responses highlights the importance of this emotion in the overall experience with the brand. Fun as an emotion also has a lot of overlap with the previously discussed emotion of happy.

> You can do anything that you want at Disney because it's all fun and games. (Participant 1)

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It was something we looked forward to every summer. And we had a lot of fun. It was a time for us to play as a family together. (Participant 3)

So, I would have drawn more people but I didn't because I can't draw people that good. But, I was just thinking it really provoked family time and laughing and having a lot of fun together where you don't really get to go and do things together where it's just you without any outside influences. It's just, you know, it's always fun and you look at the new things. (Participant 5)

Just happy. Fun. Magic. (Participant 6)

Throughout the elicitation procedure, the notion of the cost of going to Disney was also closely monitored. One participant explicated the importance of the fun emotion as a justification for the cost.

So, we went, I think every summer for 8 years either to Disneyland or Disney World. And you know, every year we would look forward to that summer trip right when school got out and I know my parents worked hard and saved all year for us to be able to go on that trip. But there was just a lot of excitement about being able to go and do all of these really fun activities and it was fun to spend all of that time together as a family in such a creative, vibrant atmosphere. I think also because I'm a creative person that Disney is kind of the mecca for all things creative so it was really inspiring to be around all of that creativity and see how they were pushing technology and communicating stories in a lot of different mediums. It's just a very colorful, active, fun, loving environment. There's just a lot of really positive energy there. (Participant 3)

4.2.1.3. Other Significant Emotions

Rounding out the theme of emotion were five other classifications: love, youth, excitement, magic, and wonder. Love is noted as two separate classifications in this reflection. The emotion themed classification was based on the participants' expression of love when experiencing the Disney brand.

I think there's a lot of love that comes from experiencing Disney. There's my personal love of Disney. There's my love of my memories that I have at Disney. There's my love of spending time with my immediate family, as well as my new family...with my husband and my kids. There's just a lot of joy that comes from that. (Participant 3)

The emotion of youthfulness was an unexpected classification for this elicitation. As this study included responses from adults, it was clear that members of the Disney brand community place a value on having an experience that makes them feel like a kid again.

> At Disney, it's a lot of little kids, but you're allowed to enjoy kid things as an adult. So, I don't know. I enjoy being less mature and walking around with Mickey Mouse ears on my head. (Participant 1)

> You know I still, walking down Main Street, I still feel that walking through the gates and you're 12 years old again. And it's like, yes! Let's go! (Participant 2)

> You know they always make me smile and feel like a kid again and there's just something magical about Disney that I just love. (Participant 2)

Another interesting note is that the emotion of magic was not used as frequently as I expected in the participant responses. Given that the stimulus is titled "The Magic Is Endless", and the both the VO and the music bed also explicitly state this emotion, my initial hunch was that this would have appeared more frequently. Thus, even though a branded stimulus may overtly try to lead a brand community member to feel an emotion, the brand community members are still responsible for shaping their individual experience and perceptions about the brand. This points to Fanning's notion that corporate control over brand perceptions is merely an illusion (1999). Instead, the consumer-brand relationship appears to be more of a co-creation of meaning.

4.2.2 Theme 2: Brand Symbols

Fifteen classifications were expressed as being symbols of the Disney brand throughout the elicitation process. It was clear through the analysis of both the visual and verbal responses that members of the Disney brand community have strong images and associations as to what symbolizes the Disney brand.

4.2.2.1. *Overt Disney Symbols*

Some of the symbol classifications in this theme are overtly recognizable as Disney brand

icons and imagery: Mickey Mouse, the castle, Main Street U.S.A., other Disney Characters, the

Disney font, and the California Adventure Ferris wheel. These are the images that are unique to

various Disney experiences. Some are symbolic of being in the parks, while others are

representative of various interactions with the brand such as television shows, movies, and more.

Mickey Mouse and the castle at the Disney parks were the two most recognizable overt symbols

among the participants. The commonality for all the overt symbols is the idea that none of them

would exist without the Disney brand.

> I always think of Mickey Mouse when I think of Disney. He's pretty iconic and he's in the video and he's very Disney. (Participant 1)

> Yeah, usually I think of Mickey Mouse ears, you know. (Participant 7)

> I guess with Disney in general I always think of Mickey. (Participant 8)

> Right here is the castle because that's the first thing everyone thinks of when they think of Disney, like I am at Disney. And if they don't see the castle they don't know. So, I always think of the castle and the stage shows that they have everyday...so many times a day. (Participant 1)

> I just remember the castle. I wanted to live there you know. As you're walking down Main Street you see that castle and it's just, you know it's the best sight in the world. (Participant 2)

> You walk in and you're on Main Street and you can see the castle down there, but like for me I love just the buildings and the feel of...it's like a small little town. And so, it's like Disney's own small little town. It's like you're in some place special. (Participant 5)

> When you walk in on Main Street and then you see the castle it is kind of magical. You're excited for the kids to see the characters and all the fun stuff. (Participant 6)

> I really like the characters, having the characters be able to be dressed up and meet and greet them because they treat everybody so special. It doesn't matter what their age is, it's kind of like a celebrity giving you attention (laughs). (Participant 5)

> The way they write Disney. That's kind of unique. You don't see that anywhere else. (Participant 6)

4.2.2.2. *Inferred Disney Symbols*

The participants also visually and verbally expressed several symbols of the Disney brand that were more abstract in their direct relationship: family, cleanliness, hearts, safety, and balloons. These symbols were inferred by the participants as being directly representative of the brand, usually based on specific experience, memory, or emotion.

> Disney does represent that you are there as a family. (Participant 1)

> I would have drawn more people but I didn't because I can't draw people that good. But, I was just thinking it really provoked family time. (Participant 5)

> There is just a pureness to their brand. It's basically a brand about love and fun and family. (Participant 3)

> I drew a family, and they're safe (points to kids in drawing), because it's a safe place to take kids. When we took our kids, I was always worried about keeping them safe. But it seemed like a safer place than most. I felt like we could take the kids there and they would be safe. I was impressed with how clean it was. (Participant 6)

> If there was a symbol or icon that means Disney to me it would be the heart shape because I think there's a lot of love that comes from experiencing Disney. (Participant 3)

> I drew the heart shape because of all the love and being with the family and loving just being there at Disneyland. (Participant 5)

> I drew balloons because balloons always put a smile on everybody's face and it's always something that I see in the Disney commercials or when we go. And so just kind of like a bundle of happiness is what the balloons remind me of. (Participant 5)

Note that family is used as two separate classifications in this phenomenological reflection. The symbol themed classification was based on the participants' expression of Disney being directly symbolic of time spent with family and loved ones. This points directly to Christensen and Olson's notion of mental models being an effective vehicle for imbuing meaning for a variety of representations (2002, p. 477).

4.2.2.3. *Overtly Inferred Symbols*

The expression of princesses, fireworks, fairytales, and heroes as being symbolic of the Disney brand, while not surprising, represents an overlap of symbols that are overtly Disney mixed with symbols that are inferred to be reflective of Disney. Princesses and heroes are not unique to the Disney brand or Disney stories. Disney does not own the fireworks experience, nor are all fairytales traced back to the Disney brand. However, when directly discussing the Disney brand, these symbols become a symbolic part of the brand experience.

> As a little girl, I always identified as a little princess. I have a princess parking spot at my house. But everything I think of when seeing this is me, like I'm very girly. (Participant 1)

> When I see commercials like that I always think of the big icons of Disney, of course Mickey and Minnie and then the fireworks that they always have. Um, you know by the castle and stuff. (Participant 2)

> The kids grow up with all the fairy tales and the stories and you know for them to go and see that stuff, and ride the rides…even the hotels are cool. (Participant 6)

The imbued meaning by the participants of both the overt and inferred symbols for the Disney brand, provides support for the idea of brands being a co-creation of meaning. For instance, Mickey Mouse may be directly representative of the Disney brand, but this representation holds varying values depending on the location and experience involved. This points to the need for various elements to come together in order to co-create the meaning for each of these expressed symbols.

> I mean if Mickey was just standing on the street he wouldn't be the same strong emotional response you would have when you're actually set in the environment with all of Disney around. It's a shared experience. (Participant 3)

4.2.3 Theme 3: Memories

Specific memories from past experiences, and the idea of creating memories in the future, was another theme that emerged from the expressed mental models of the participants. The

memory theme was extremely strong for Participant 7, as both the visual and verbal responses from this participant were grounded in memories. The focus of the memory theme was spread across three distinct categories: memories that centered around elements of the Disney brand, memories that centered around the shared experience with friends and family, and memories that encompass both elements of the brand and the shared experience.

4.2.3.1. Brand Centered Memories

Exclusively brand centered memories were the lowest represented classification in the memory theme. This classification represents expressed memories strongly rooted in brand symbols, icons, and specific physical elements within the parks. References to memories of favorite rides, character interactions, and tangible brand experiences were included as a part of the brand memory classification.

> I loved doing Meet and Greets as a kid and doing all the rides. I magically have all the fears of heights now in my life, but didn't as a child so that's good. So, just having those memories of the rides, the princesses and what you remember that's still there that brings a lot of happiness to people and myself. (Participant 1)

> I think the part with Mickey Mouse in the costume hugging the kid is probably the one that I would relate most of my childhood and growing up and remembering the characters. I think the castle was a big part of it. That's part of the backdrop. It lets you know that it's Disney...outside of Mickey. (Participant 3)

> Going in the front gate and seeing the main promenade going downtown type thing...that's something that always brings back a lot of memories. (Participant 7)

4.2.3.2. Shared Experience Memories

The participants also expressed memories that were heavily based in a shared experience. Memories in the shared experience classification were expressed at nearly the same level as those in the brand and shared experience combined classification. These expressions included family memories as a kid, as a parent taking your kids, the desire to go back with family and/or

friends, and more. Expressed memories that were heavily focused on family and friends were

noted under the shared memory classification.

> So, it's more the family vacations and experiences growing up that shaped my love for Disney. (Participant 1)

> I think probably the most special memory for me was my first time taking my husband to Disney because he had never been there. And then getting to go with Gina, my childhood friend. We finally got to go a couple of years ago for the first time ever together and that was just amazing. (Participant 2)

> Being at Disney brought us close together. Being there together and doing things together. Having a schedule to stay together. (Participant 7)

> It makes me happy (laughs)! I got like a feeling of excitement because I can feel it when you see the video...that memory of being at Disney before. I want to take my kids there. I feel like I can almost envision being there with them. (Participant 8)

4.2.3.3. *Brand and Shared Experience Memories*

Memories expressing both brand and shared experiences combined created the final

classification within the memory theme. All of the participants in the study expressed at least one

memory that showcased both the brand and a shared experience. This classification exemplifies

the importance of the consumer-brand relationship within the memory theme.

> Well, I've been to Disney a lot and I have a lot of memories tied to Disney and I think those words that I wrote down (Happiness, Family, Love, Wonder, and Magic) are very much in tune with my experience at Disney. I mean it's just a really happy, positive memory from my childhood going to Disney. It was something we looked forward to every summer. And we had a lot of fun. It was a time for us to play as a family together. I think a lot of it is around the parks and being at the parks and then that translates to other Disney things. So, like wearing a Disney shirt or having other Disney paraphernalia there's a memory that...a warm memory that's attached to that company name that makes me want to have their merchandise. (Participant 3)

> Family stuff...like the cars and kids waiting in line until the very end and then having to go to the bathroom. My daughter used to take her naps at a little house in front of the steamship over here. So that's probably why I remember that. And then that's the carousel (points to drawing) and that was one of the first rides that she could go on and enjoy. And then the monorail...that's probably more from even when I was younger...as a kid going. Epcot, my wife and I spent a lot of time on our honeymoon. Then I think last time I was at Epcot was the first time I ever went on the ride in there (points to Spaceship Earth), which I thought was pretty cool. (Participant 4)

Just looking down and seeing the castle in front of you and walking that way. And then seeing the little girl in the makeup area, that kind of reminds me of my granddaughter. Going through and having her get dressed up and be treated like a little princess. (Participant 7)

This is us having dinner and my wife getting her head put inside Tigger's mouth (points to element on visual expression). (Participant 7)

The strong relationships between the Disney brand and the various expressed memories from the participants helps to illuminate the complexities of the consumer-brand relationship. It is clear from the responses elicited in this study that brand community members do place a meaning and value on every experience, interaction and touchpoint with the brand. Thus, while the effort Disney puts into the brand experience at their parks is important, it is truly a co-creation of meaning that leads to the overall memories elicited from brand community members.

4.2.4 Theme 4: Perceptions of the Disney Brand

Throughout the spiral of analysis of the expressed mental models, it became clear that the participants had various notions and perceptions as to what the Disney brand represents. Some of the participants were able to clearly define this meaning, while others really struggled with expressing what it was that made Disney a stronger brand in their experience. To illuminate this explication, participants were asked to define what made Disney different from other similar brands and experiences. For most of these participants, this became a discussion of comparing Disney to Universal or other amusement parks. Several classifications were identified within this theme including: perceptions as to what Disney as a brand stands for, Disney is a feeling, Disney equals family, Disney equals love, Disney offers an escape from reality, Disney has unparalleled customer service, and Disney is a vacation. The most powerful statements for the Disney brand perception theme are covered in this reflection.

4.2.4.1. Perceptions of What The Disney Brand Stands For

The expressions for the perceptions of what the Disney brand stands for classification offered some of the most powerful insights into the pattern of meaning of the Disney brand among members of the brand community. These expressions ranged from noting the importance of using brand power to take on social issues to acknowledging actual brand strategy implementation and execution.

> There's a new commercial about empowering little girls...there's a princess for every person or little girl out there. And I think it's really empowering for little girls to see that. So, my age group, we all look at that and think that's really great that Disney's doing that because you're not seeing a family vacation. You're seeing what Disney can do and what their impact is. (Participant 1)

> It's just...it's another universe that you walk into when it's Disney. I don't think any of that stuff would be the same without the brand. But I think the brand is more than what people think of a brand is. It's not just a logo, it's not just standards, it's not even a script, it's a whole way of life. It's like another world that they've built. And that is the brand. And that brand has evangelists that love that brand and tell everyone they run into how much they love that brand. But if they stopped managing all those different touchpoints and making sure that people were experiencing the Disney brand at any level and any touchpoint then it wouldn't be as strong as it is now. It's the best, well thought out, well-engineered brand in the entire world. Nobody else does it quite like Disney. I mean they definitely have pioneered the brand experience model. And no one else has been able to come even close to what they do. (Participant 3)

> It is very well run which adds to it (the experience). The cleanliness, you actually notice. It's to their detriment that it's so well run and so clean that you notice anything that's slightly off. So, they have a hugely high standard to meet. (Participant 4)

4.2.4.2. Disney is a Feeling

Disney as a feeling was the next most expressed perception of the Disney brand during the elicitation process. In this classification, participants pointed to emotions, symbols, and memories in order to try and illuminate what made Disney different from other theme park and amusement park experiences. Most of the statements within this classification are more abstract. The word feeling, or the use of words used to describe a feeling, helped to define perceptions that fell within this classification.

You know they always make me smile and feel like a kid again and there's just something magical about Disney that I just love. I think it's the way they go above and beyond. To make your experience the best it can be. The smells, you know when you walk down Main Street and you smell the cinnamon and the bakeries and the taffy, I mean it just smells like home. I just don't get that at Universal. I like Universal, but I just don't get that same warm fuzzy, you know, feeling that I get at Disney. (Participant 2)

I think Universal is more of a park that's geared at an older audience. So, it's more about a high-end amusement park than it is about the Disney experience. I think the new Harry Potter land kind of evokes a little bit of the similar feelings, but not anywhere close. You know Harry Potter has got its own brand and emotions tied to it and its not...it's like an older family experience than more of a younger, youthful, pure experience that is Disney. Disney is just a different brand. It's more encompassing, it's more...um...wholesome I guess is the word I'm looking for. And Universal is...you just don't get that feeling from Universal. It's not special in the same way. (Participant 3)

4.2.4.3. *Disney Equals Family and Love*

As noted in the emotional response and symbolic themes, the expressions of family and love had varying meanings in relation to the themes that were uncovered in this study. The term family as a brand perception classification was used as an example for what makes the Disney brand experience special. Love was considered to be a brand perception classification when it was used as a descriptor of what Disney equates to as a brand.

Disney is different because of all the love, and being with the family, and loving just being there. (Participant 5)

I think the focus on family fun and not like, Universal has a real emphasis on big, exciting, carnival type rides more...I think anyway than Disney. Disney's more of a family place. You can go ride Dumbo as a family. It doesn't have to be just little kids on Dumbo. I don't think it represents anything but family stuff to me. (Participant 7)

Family, just I think family oriented. Good, like with all the negativity you can kind of count on Disney to be that happy spot. You can, I feel like, always relate to Disney. (Participant 8)

4.2.4.4. *Disney is an Escape From Reality*

While some of the participants noted Disney being perceived as a vacation, a surprising number of expressions described perceiving Disney as an escape from reality. This classification

was unexpected, but starts to bring a more tangible description to the what makes Disney

different from other brands.

> I'm just obsessed with the whole happily ever after. You know, life is great (laughs). You know, it's all magic and fireworks and escapism. Yes, it's that exactly. It's my happy place, you know? So, when things stress me out, it's like, I'm going to Disneyland. Because when I'm there, I don't care about bills, I don't care about...you know? It's just when you're there you have no worries. (Participant 2)

> The memories are more family based, but when I just think of Disney in general, specifically Disney World, I kind of think of this total escape from reality. (Participant 4)

> The expression of Disney as an escape from reality also revealed a strong justification for

the higher cost associated with the Disney brand experience.

> It's hard to spend that amount for that experience. But I'll say it this way, if we're fortunate enough to be able to spend that money, one of the benefits of going to Disney and staying on property, which is more expensive, is that escapism concept. That you don't need to rent a car, you just go on Disney property and you're just in this other world. You don't see anything from the real world for the whole week that you're there. So, I would, to the extent that I could, pay that extra money to have that experience. (Participant 4)

4.2.4.5.   *Other Brand Perceptions*

Two other classifications were identified as a part of the perceptions of the Disney brand

theme: Disney has unparalleled customer service and Disney is a vacation. Disney places a

strong emphasis as a corporation on providing unmatched customer service, so expressions

reflecting these efforts were considered significant.

> I think it's the way they go above and beyond. To make your experience the best it can be. (Participant 2)

> I mean, they've really perfected the art of the customer journey and the user experience and they make sure that every touchpoint is special. And it fits into their brand ethos of what they want people to feel when it comes to the Disney brand. (Participant 3)

> The Disney brand perception theme sheds some light on the what makes Disney different

from everyone else question. By evaluating the significant statements within this theme, Disney

brand community members were able to express their individual experiences with Disney as a

brand. These experiences were a mixture of direct brand initiatives (i.e. customer service and brand strategy) mixed with the associated meaning of these experiences for the consumer (i.e. Disney is a feeling and an escape from reality). Thus, the perceptions of the Disney brand theme is reflective of the consumer-brand relationship and the co-creation of meaning.

4.2.5 Theme 5: Physical Elements of Disney Properties

The final theme uncovered during the spiral of analysis was the large amount of expressions that reflected physical elements within the Disney resort properties. These included references to specific Disney parks and rides. This theme also includes references to specific events that occur within the parks, such as parades and annual festivals. Other park features that were also included in this theme were: food, music, the monorail, and more. The breakdown of the various physical elements that were expressed is not the focus in this theme. Instead, the interesting discovery in these expressions was the way these physical elements allowed participants to physically map their expressions. This physical mapping can be seen in the visual expressions of Participant 1 and Participant 4 (Figure 8). Other participant verbal expressions that correlated to specific locations of physical elements within the parks were also of note.
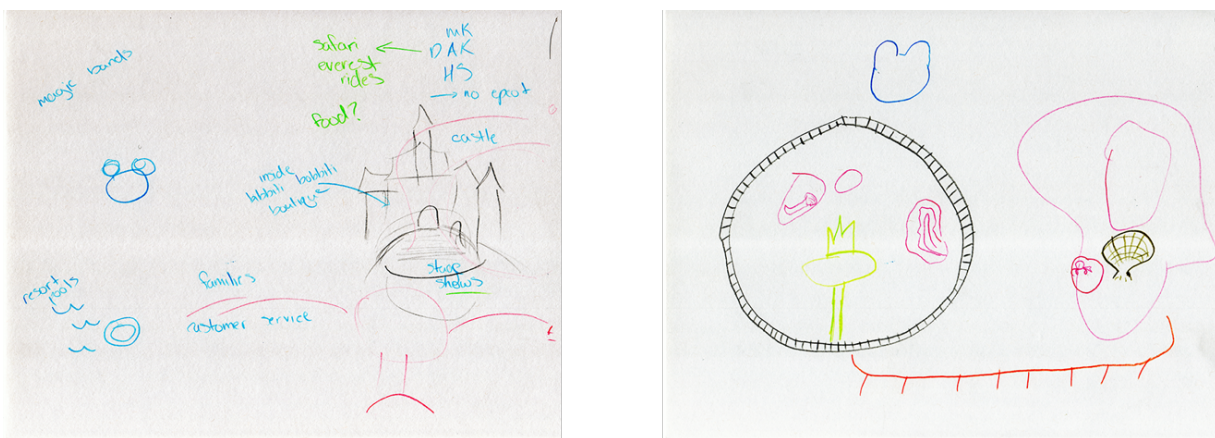
Figure 8. Expressed Visual Mental Models from Participants 1 and 4

I identify with the park itself. Once you've been there you kind of can orient yourself. So, the walk down Main Street as a family, I did that with my friends. I did that with my mom and my grandma. I don't know if you know how the new map is set up, but they got rid of Toon Town. So, there's no more Toon Town. Right behind the castle isn't Dumbo's ride. It's all Fantasyland. So, they have the carousel, and I don't know what used to be where the Mine Train is, but the Mine Train takes up everything back there. And then you can walk around it. I believe the Alice and Wonderland ride used to be around there, but...I don't know. Let's see if I can draw a map of behind the castle. There's this area (drawing) and right here is where Dumbo used to be (points to drawing) and then if you arch over to where the Speedway is over here and like where the Tea Cup ride is, over here would be It's A Small World (points to drawing) and then back here (points to drawing) it winds back to The Circus. (Participant 1)

So, I drew basically my memory of the highlights of the parks. So, I did a little Mickey head. And then this is the Magic Kingdom with the railroad track that goes around it. And then this is sort of Main Street...that's the castle, theoretically (giggles). Those are the race cars. This is where the carousel is. This is the big Steamboat. And then this is the monorail to Epcot. Then this is the big Epcot ball. This is the Test Track. And then this is the lake that they do the fireworks and then all the nations are sort of around the outside. (points to drawing throughout). So, I drew the parks. (Participant 4)

This study used the diagrammatic-oral interview procedure for mental model elicitation. The addition of the visual expression was important as it allowed the participants to explore their mental models visually "through the process of mapping it" (Jones et al., 2014). Participants 1 and 4 quite literally mapped Disney in their visual expressions. This points to a direct correlation with this theme and the expressions being located in the working memory.

There is an element of co-creation of meaning occurring in this theme as well. The physical elements of the park becoming a literal representation of the Disney experience among brand community members directly ties into the consumer-brand relationship discussed throughout this study. By seeing these physical elements represented in either the stimulus or the visual expressions, participants were able to make connections to the meaning of the brand experience overall.

And now that they're doing the Star Wars stuff, I love Star Wars too (laughs). So that's kind of fun to see the little TomTom on the Great Movie Ride. That was...that makes me happy too. I'm so excited for the Stars Wars stuff to open. Love it! (Participant 2)

I think it just brings back the memories and the stuff that you see as you go through. You kind of see highlights of places you've been and things you've seen. (Participant 7)

It should be noted that the defined themes from this reflection do not occur in isolation, there is a significant amount of overlap. This points to the need to view the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon among members of the Disney brand community as a complex tapestry of tangible and intangible elements coming together as a co-creation of meaning.

4.3 Discussion

This study aimed to uncover the universal essence of the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon among self-identified members of the Disney brand community. I began this study by postulating that distinct characteristics of social brand community and psychological brand community would be uncovered through the elicitation and analysis of mental models from self-identified brand community members. I also argued that evidence would emerge to support varying degrees of identification with the brand and identification with the group. Overall, the goal was to examine the expressed mental models of self-identified members of a brand community to provide support for the PSBC. The phenomenological reflection of the five identified themes for this study was an important step towards achieving this goal. The final step is to correlate these expressions with the identified research questions in order to truly uncover the universal essence of this phenomenon.

4.3.1 RQ1: What are the shared mental model expressions among members of the Disney brand community?

The five themes uncovered during the phenomenological reflection, as well as their associated classifications, create a pattern of meaning for the shared mental model expressions among members of the Disney brand community. These themes are: (1) Emotional Responses,

(2) Brand Symbols, (3) Memories, (4) Perceptions of the Disney Brand, and (5) Physical

Elements of Disney Properties. By eliciting and analyzing both the visual and verbal mental

model expressions, participants were able to cognitively map their experience and access deeply

held beliefs (Jones et al., 2014). This created a powerful combination of cognition, leading to a

more thorough evaluation of the pattern of meaning of the shared experience.

After a full reflection of the identified themes and classifications, these shared

experiences become a representation of the universal essence of the brand community

phenomenon. Among self-identified members of the Disney brand community, the pattern of

meaning is rooted in the co-creation of meaning that occurs as a part of the consumer-brand

relationship. Throughout the reflection process, each theme uncovered the consumer's role in

shaping their individual experience with, and perceptions of, the brand. Given the notion that

brands have the "communicative power to convey cultural meaning" (Kilambi et al., 2013, p.

45)" and this meaning is created by brand communities through "the interpersonal relationship

between the consumer and a brand" (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45), there is a need for media

communication researchers to better understand, and further explore, the co-creation of meaning

in the consumer-brand relationship.

4.3.2 RQ1a: What expressions emerge to support psychological brand community and identification with the brand?

The psychological brand community is defined as "an unbound group of admirers, who

perceive a sense of community with other brand admirers, in the absence of social interaction"

(Carlson et al., 2008). This is the true essence of "a community that exists in the mind of an

individual" (Anderson, 1983). While harder to pinpoint during the elicitation process,

expressions that pointed to the idea that "members feel that they 'sort of know each other' at

some level, even if they have never met" (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001, p. 418) were considered to support psychological brand community.

A few of the participants in the study expressed notions of psychological brand community by acknowledging they would immediately have something in common with a person they didn't know if that person expressed an identification with the Disney brand.

> I actually became really good friends with a lady in Georgia. I've never met her a day in my life. We just became really good friends just because of our mutual love of Disney. So, it's kind of cool. (Participant 2)

> I think there's definitely a connection with other people that love Disney. I'm always really surprised when people say they don't like it. I secretly think there's something wrong with them (laughs). I mean who doesn't love Disney. It's a weird thing to not love. (Participant 3)

> It would probably help getting to know that person. I'd immediately have a positive impression of who they are and my ability to be friendly with them. (Participant 4)

> Pretty much anybody who says that they like Disney becomes a friend (laughs). We'd start talking about it and yep. Because I've done that a couple of times too. You know mainly at work because I started this job just last May so, you know there was one person there that liked Disney too and now...every time we got something new we'd pass by each other and we would talk and...kind of like an instant connection. (Participant 5)

Identification with the brand occurs when consumers identify with the "desirable characteristics of a particular brand" (Carlson et al., 2008). The form of identification is an important distinction when analyzing the way an individual formulates a psychological brand community. The brand should be clearly stated as the impetus behind the sense of brand community (Carlson et al., 2008, p. 285). During the phenomenological reflection, all five themes showed expressions relating to identification with the brand. These were overtly recognizable in the emotional responses theme, the brand symbols theme, the perceptions of the Disney brand theme, and the physical elements of Disney properties themes. However, there are inferred relationships to identification with the brand in the memories theme as well.

After a thorough analysis of the mental model expressions elicited from members of the Disney brand community, the expressions of psychological brand community show a clear relationship to members identifying with the brand. Thus, to enhance identification with the brand in order to foster psychological brand communities, messages should be focused on overt brand attributes.

4.3.3 RQ1b: What expressions emerge to support social brand community and identification with the group?

The social brand community is defined as a "social community of brand admirers who acknowledge membership in the community and engage in structured social relations" (Carlson et al., 2008). The true essence of the social community is the engagement through social interaction, which may occur in either face-to-face encounter or in a computer-mediated environment. Expressions of social brand community were easily identified during the elicitation process.

During the verbal elicitation process, participants were asked if they belonged to any social groups that centered around the Disney brand. During this elicitation, it was clearly stated that these social groups could occur online or face-to-face. All eight participant expressions were reflective of only social relationships occurring in a computer-mediated environment. Only three of the eight participants belong to social brand communities online. Only one of those responses pointed to the possibility of a social relationship offline.

> I'm a member of the Disney College Program page. I'm a member of the Disney Alumni Association. I still get emails from them trying to recruit me back. CSU also has a Disney Alumni page for potential DCP's on Facebook and I think on other Social Media platforms. I just follow like Disney College Program housing on my Snapchat, which is just hilarious nonsense that you're not sure you want to remember (laugh). Mostly Facebook groups. Um, I don't think I do anything on Instagram. A little bit of Snapchat but not that much. (Participant 1)

The All Things Disney Facebook group, I'm on that one. And then there's just like several that are you know, like Disney Magic, Disney Members...pretty much anything Disney oriented that, you know, either talks about the parks or just people that will just post Disney pictures and stuff. So, I'm on quite a few of those. (Participant 2)

There's a Facebook group called Disney Addicts. And then I usually join the specific groups for movies that are coming out so I can get information there. And then just on its own…it's not like on Facebook or social media, but it's like a website that, where you get points for purchasing movies and things like that. And you can use those to redeem free stuff. So, I do that as well. And then they kind of give you newsletters and things like that. Pretty much anybody who says that they like Disney becomes a friend (laughs). (Participant 5)

Identification with the group occurs when consumers identify with the characteristics of "other consumers who purchase the brand" (Carlson et al., 2008). With limited recognition of structured social relationships in the participants' expressions, identification with the group becomes an important part of this discussion. Any expressions that focus on group/social interaction, or a desire for group/social interaction are the impetus behind social brand community. These structured social relationships could include family experiences, friend experiences, relationships built with coworkers, and more.

There are people at work that I know are Disney fans. So, I talk to them about stuff around going to Disney World or some of the things they have in their office. So, you kind of can tell who can have those conversations and get excited about it. (Participant 4)

I'd only go to the parks with my family. I don't think it represents anything but family stuff to me. I don't think I would go to the parks by myself. No, I don't think I would. It's more about who I go with. (Participant 7)

Interestingly, identification with the group expressions were common when participants were expressing a desire for action or reflecting on specific memories.

Well, we haven't been in a while, but luckily we have a trip planned (laughs). So, I guess, it reminds me that I'd like to take the grandkids. (Participant 6)

I mean I would like to go to Disney again. Definitely want to take the kids there. Probably when they're a little bit older (laughs). I think that would be a recipe for disaster right now. But, yeah, I definitely would love to do that. Seeing the princess dress up. Automatically I think that would be awesome for my daughter. She'd love that. (Participant 8)

I think mainly of the family time that I did get to go and it was always with my mom and my dad and my brother. It was always a really positive time. A fun, summer vacation. (Participant 1)

I think probably the most special memory for me was my first time taking my husband to Disney because he had never been there. And then I got to take my son and his girlfriend at the time, now it's his fiancé, for the first time and she had never been to Disney. And then this December, we took my younger son, my middle son, and his girlfriend for her first time. And just experiencing it through the eyes of someone whose never been there before, you know, it just makes it all new to me again. (Participant 2)

For most people that grew up with Disney it kind of brings you to a happy memory. I remember seeing my first Disney movie with my dad or you know something like that. (Participant 8)

During the phenomenological reflection, all five themes showed expressions relating to identification with the group. While most were readily recognizable in the memories theme, elements of identification with the group can be found in the emotional responses theme, the brand symbols theme, the perceptions of the Disney brand theme, and the physical elements of Disney properties themes as well.

Similar to the results found with psychological brand communities and identification with the brand, a thorough analysis of the elicited mental model expressions shows a clear relationship between social brand community and identification with the group. Thus, to enhance identification with the group in order to foster social brand communities, messages should be focused on the elements of community.

4.3.4 RQ1c: What expressions emerge to support PSBC?

The psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) is defined as "the degree to which an individual perceives relational bonds with other brand users" (Carlson et al., 2008, p. 286). The true essence of the PSBC is the idea that consumers form brand communities through varying degrees based on their identification with the brand or group. With the understanding that identification is a primary driver of brand community, and through the analysis of both

brand and group identification among participants in this study, varying levels of the PSBC can be seen in the elicited expressions. Participants that note elements of both psychological and social brand communities in their expressions are supporting the PSBC. Participants that show different routes of identification through their expressions, both with the group and the brand, are supporting the PSBC.

While the notion of placing participant expressions along a spectrum of brand community type seems plausible, this part of the study created an interesting dichotomy between what participants' identification seemed to be throughout the elicitation process and what community they self-selected when directly asked. At the end of each elicitation procedure, participants were given a basic summary of social brand community versus psychological brand community. They were then asked to self-select which community they fit within, or they could select both as equals. These responses when compared to the previous expressions provided the most notable representations of the PSBC.

4.3.4.1. Participant 1

Participant 1 self-selected as being a part of the social brand community. The root of this answer was the idea that the experience changes based on who you share the experience with.

> Just because I have had more experience with that and I love the movies, I love Disney. I'm not going to ever say I hate Disney. There are movies I like better than others, but it's definitely the people that I'm there with that make a difference. If I went with five people from this building it'd be different than going with people that you've gotten to know through, rather it's family bonding or just friends that have mutual interest in Disney.

This answer is in direct opposition to the majority of mental model expressions from this participant. This is clearly illustrated in the participant's answer to an earlier question, "If you had to pick between the family/friend/social experience or the Disney (as a brand) experience, what would you pick?". In this answer, the focus is clearly on the psychological brand community.

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It was more about the fun at Disney and then like being with your family, it's like I'm too little to be alone and I'm not sure what I'd do as an alone adult. Which it is lonely in Magic Kingdom. Everywhere else it's totally fine to be alone (laughs). Can't be in Magic Kingdom alone.

4.3.4.2. *Participant 2*

Participant 2 self-selected as being a part of the psychological brand community. This participant stated that the social brand community only existed as a result of their love for Disney.

> I think I love the brand and as a result it encourages me to have the social interaction with people that share that same love and passion for it. Because a lot of people don't understand. You're like "Oh my God I love Disney!" and they're like "Why?" you know (laughs). They don't get it. It's not something you can explain. It's like it's something they have to experience. And some people just don't have that same...you know they'll walk in and go, yeah, Disney's crowded. And I'm like "well yeah but that's not the point" you know. And just some people can't get beyond certain aspects of it. But you know that's okay, it's not for everybody. But for me it's just something very special.

This answer conforms to the majority of mental model expressions from this participant. This was also clearly illustrated in this participant's attire. The Disney brand was noticeable on the participants' shirt, socks, jewelry, handbag, and a hair accessory. This participant also expressed the Disney brand as being more like a member of the family than a corporation. When referring to the call to action or desire brought on by the stimulus exposure, this participant stated, "It makes me homesick. You know, I guess that's the best way to put it".

4.3.4.3. *Participant 3*

Participant 3 self-selected as being an equal part of both the psychological and social brand community. However, the entire explanation behind this answer is rooted in the Disney brand experience.

> I think that's a really hard question because I think it's both. Because I think the parks wouldn't be Disney without the Disney brand. They've put a lot of effort into their experiential marketing and I like I said before, every single touchpoint follows the Disney brand and the Disney brand standards down to a tee. But I still feel a strong affinity for the brand, even if you're not in the parks, like if you're in the store and things like that.

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Once again, they've done a really good job of expanding that brand experience. It's just...it's another universe that you walk into when it's Disney. I don't think any of that stuff would be the same without the brand. But I think the brand is more than what people think of a brand is. It's not just a logo, it's not just standards, it's not even a script, it's a whole way of life. It's like another world that they've built. And that is the brand. And that brand has evangelists that love that brand and tell everyone they run into how much they love that brand. But if they stopped managing all those different touchpoints and making sure that people were experiencing the Disney brand at any level and any touchpoint then it wouldn't be as strong as it is now.

While the justification of the equal brand community self-selection seems to be in opposition to that answer, this participant expressed an identification with both the group and the brand throughout the elicitation procedure. This equal mix of psychological and social brand community is best shown in the participants' response to what symbols and images come to mind after being exposed to the stimulus.

I think there's a lot of love that comes from experiencing Disney. There's my personal love of Disney. There's my love of my memories that I have at Disney. There's my love of spending time with my immediate family, as well as my new family...with my husband and my kids. There's just a lot of joy that comes from that.
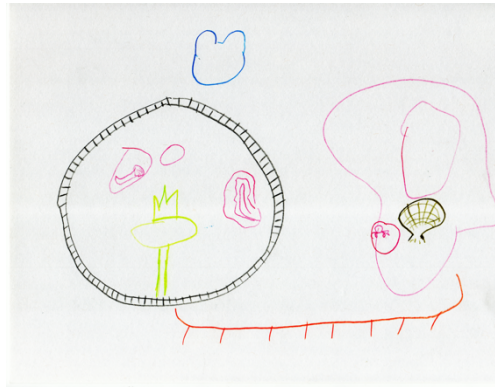
4.3.4.4. Participant 4

Participant 4 self-selected as being a part of the psychological brand community. The root of this answer was confusing in that it mostly represented family. When asked to elaborate, this participant explained that family experiences can be shared anywhere, but it's the Disney brand that makes this shared experience special.

I'd probably select psychological brand community. Because my experience is more personal and with family and that's already something I enjoy and is a big part of it for me.

This answer is interesting as this participant expressed a mix of identification with both the group and the brand throughout the elicitation procedure. Psychological brand community was prevalent in both the memories this participant had with family, as well as the future memories they hoped to create. Social brand community was more evident in this participants'

memories of Disney as a kid and in the visual expression, a map of the participants two favorite

Disney parks (Figure 9).

> Probably the two most identifiable pieces on there was the...at the beginning the boy sort of spinning around in wonder. That's kind of a memory I have of myself of being a kid at Disney. And then seeing our kids there, having sort of the same reaction to certain things. And then they showed a little clip of the Bibbidi Bobbidi Boutique, which I sort of associated with watching my daughter go there and get her hair done and dress and everything.

Figure 9. Participant 4 Expressed Visual Mental Model

4.3.4.5. Participant 5

Participant 5 self-selected as being a part of the psychological brand community. The root

of this answer was the idea that the Disney experience is something this participant would enjoy

regardless of it was shared with family or friends. However, this participant noted that the social

element adds to the experience.

> I would like Disney no matter if I had kids or anything. But I think with having the kids and friends that do like it, it definitely bleeds into the social realm as well. Because the more the merrier. I mean if I could take a party of us and go then that would be fun too.

> This answer conforms to the majority of mental model expressions from this participant.

For this participant, the brand was typically the impetus behind the expressions, but social

experiences were also seen to have value. When asked if this participant would have more fun at

the parks alone or as a part of a shared experience, the answer reflected that the brand is more

heavily weighted, but the shared experience is important too.

> Kind of both. I mean I would definitely go if it was just me because I'd probably still have a lot of fun because I just love being there. And I've gone with just my mom. You know, mother-daughter trip just recently, just a couple of years ago. And then I do like taking people for the first time. And I've got to experience that because it's just, it's something that makes me have butterflies when I can see the joy that's on everybody else's face because I get so excited and then I kind of feed that excitement for them (laughs).

4.3.4.6. Participant 6

Participant 6 self-selected as being an equal part of both the psychological and social

brand community. This participant really seemed to struggle with the self-selection process.

They asked to have the two types of community described three times before answering. When

the answer was finally given, there was a long pause and then some hesitation between the initial

answer and the realization that social brand community may be the better fit.

> I don't know. It's just kind of all one thing. (long pause) Family maybe weighs a little more heavily.

The difficulty this participant had in self-selecting between psychological and social

brand community was interesting. While specific symbols for the Disney brand were pointed to

throughout this participants' expressions, the majority of the answers centered around the shared

experience with family. This dynamic between the shared experience and what the brand

symbolizes shines through in this participant's description of their visual expression.

> I drew a family, and they're safe (points to kids in drawing), because it's a safe place to take kids. When we took our kids, I was always worried about keeping them safe. But it seemed like a safer place than most. I felt like we could take the kids there and they would be safe. I was impressed with how clean it was.

4.3.4.7. Participant 7

Participant 7 self-selected as being a part of the psychological brand community. The root of this answer was confusing in that the expressions from this participant were mostly representative of specific memories with family.

> I think if it wasn't Disney I wouldn't have that experience that I would have shared so probably the brand and Disney itself.

This answer is in direct opposition to most of mental model expressions from this participant. When asked about participation in social groups that centered around the Disney brand, this participant stated that Disney represents family. The visual expression from this participant was about two specific family memories within the Disney parks: a character breakfast and the Hoop-Dee-Doo Musical Revue. This participants' leaning towards social brand community is clearly illustrated in their response to the notion of going to the parks alone.

> No, I don't think I'd go alone. I don't think so. Only with family. I don't think it represents anything but family stuff to me.

4.3.4.8. Participant 8

Participant 8 self-selected as being an equal part of both the psychological and social brand community. No elaboration was given on this participant's self-selection process. However, this answer is interesting because the majority of the mental model expressions for this participant were reflective of a memory with family and friends or a desire to create new memories with the kids. This is exemplified in the participants' response to the question "Please explain what you have drawn based on watching this television commercial?". This resulted in a response to the stimulus versus a description of the visual expression.

> It makes me happy (laughs)! I got like a feeling of excitement because I can feel it when you see the video...that memory of being at Disney before. I want to take my kids there. I feel like I can almost envision being there with them.

Based on a combination of phenomenological reflection of the participants' mental model visual and verbal expressions, combined with their self-selection as psychological versus social brand community, there is evidence of a varying level of the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) occurring among the eight participants in this study. Participant 2 showcases the strongest evidence of psychological brand community in their expressions. Note that elements of social brand community are identifiable in some of this participants' expressions. Participant 1 and Participant 5 would come next in terms of being more heavily weighted towards psychological brand community. Participant 7 showcases the strongest evidence of social brand community in their expressions. Note that elements of psychological brand community are identifiable in this participants' expressions as well. Participant 6 and Participant 8 would come next in terms of being more heavily weighted towards social brand community. Participant 3 and Participant 4 fall more towards the middle of this spectrum. Their expressions seemed to show a good mix of both psychological and social brand community overall.

It is clear from comparing stimulus expressions of brand community versus direct self-selection that some opposition is occurring in brand participant responses. The foundation for the dichotomy between some of these answers could be a result of the type of memory being accessed: working memory versus long-term memory. This discrepancy ties back to work done by Nersessian (2002) calling into question the separation between working memory and long-term memory (Jones et al., 2011). While this is one possible explanation behind the discrepancy, other underlying factors could be a possibility as well. This discrepancy in answers points to a need for researchers in the media communication field to gain a better understanding of the PSBC to create effective messages that will foster brand community.

4.3.5 RQ1d: What differences, if any, exist between the visual expressions and the verbal expressions during the mental model elicitation?

The use of both visual and verbal expressions throughout the phenomenological reflection for this study lead to some interesting discoveries, as well as some potential areas for future research. The biggest takeaway from this mixed elicitation procedure was that the visual elicitation procedures did provide a solid foundation for oral elicitation responses (Jones et al., 2014). All eight participants pointed back to their visual expressions at some point during their verbal expressions. In some instances, the visual expressions were quite literally representative for what the participant was verbally expressing. For example, Participant 2 explained their immediate thoughts/reactions to the commercial by pointing to elements in the visual expression, as well as expressing elements that were not included in the visual expression (Figure 10).

> I always think of the big icons of Disney, of course Mickey and Minnie, and then the fireworks that they always have (points to drawing). Um, you know by the castle and stuff. I would have drawn a castle but my artistic ability isn't that good. It always brings back happy memories and it makes me happy. You know they always make me smile and feel like a kid again and there's just something magical about Disney that I just love.
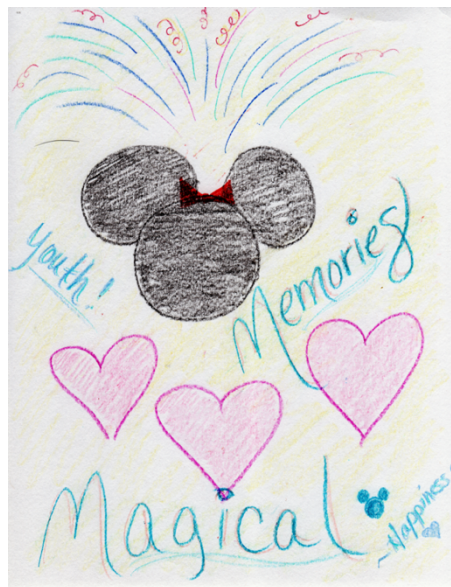
Figure 10. Participant 2 Expressed Visual Mental Model

The oral elicitations from this procedure seemed to allow participants a format to access and express "deeply held beliefs" (Jones et al., 2014). The depth between the difference in the visual elicitation expression and the verbal elicitation expression is exemplified by Participant 3. While the visual elicitation from this participant showcases basic brand symbols and words, this participant had an unexpected depth and insight in their verbal expressions (Figure 11).

> It's just...it's another universe that you walk into when it's Disney. I don't think any of that stuff would be the same without the brand. But I think the brand is more than what people think of a brand is. It's not just a logo, it's not just standards, it's not even a script, it's a whole way of life. It's like another world that they've built. And that is the brand. And that brand has evangelists that love that brand and tell everyone they run into how much they love that brand. But if they stopped managing all those different touchpoints and making sure that people were experiencing the Disney brand at any level and any touchpoint then it wouldn't be as strong as it is now. It's the best, well thought out, well-engineered brand in the entire world. Nobody else does it quite like Disney. I mean they definitely have pioneered the brand experience model. And no one else has been able to come even close to what they do.

**Figure 11. Participant 3 Expressed Visual Mental Model**

The postulated benefit for using visual mental model elicitation procedures is that they allow participants the chance to map their internal representations (Jones et al., 2014). Given this

understanding, it is interesting to note that two participants in this study quite literally mapped out the parks in their visual expressions. While some of their verbal elicitations pointed to specific references within their maps, for the most part, these map-like visual expressions seemed to serve as an aide for more accessing "deeply held beliefs" (Jones et al., 2014). The importance of literal versus figurative mapping in the visual elicitation is an area for further consideration in future research.

Overall, using a combination of both visual and verbal elicitations in future media communication research is worth further exploration. By analyzing both the visual and verbal mental model expressions, participants were able to cognitively map their experience and access deeply held beliefs (Jones et al., 2014). The medium used for the stimulus is one area that may need further consideration when performing a diagrammatic-oral interview procedure for mental model elicitations in media communication research. However, for this study, the use of both the visual and verbal elicitations provided a powerful combination of cognition, leading to a thorough phenomenological reflection on the pattern of meaning of the shared experience.

The exploration of the themes and research questions for this study add insight to the importance of brand community studies among media communication scholars. The reflections throughout this chapter clearly point to an existence of varying degrees of brand community, as postulated by the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC). However, media effects scholars tend to be interested in the direct effects of the stimulus, or the media, among brand community members. For example, how would the findings for this study be different if the media stimulus was textually based versus visually based? How would they change if the research involved a pre-test mental model elicitation using no media stimulus and a similar post-test mental model elicitation?

As noted in the Emotional Responses theme, the emotion of "magic" was not frequently expressed even though the voiceover and the music bed explicitly state this emotion. Thus, the text from the stimulus did not come through in the elicited mental models. However, when reviewing the expressed visual mental models and screenshots of the commercial, the visuals from the stimulus are reflected in the mental models (Figure 12). Understanding the effects of the media stimulus used in campaigns in order to help develop and enhance membership in brand communities will be an important next step in this field of research.
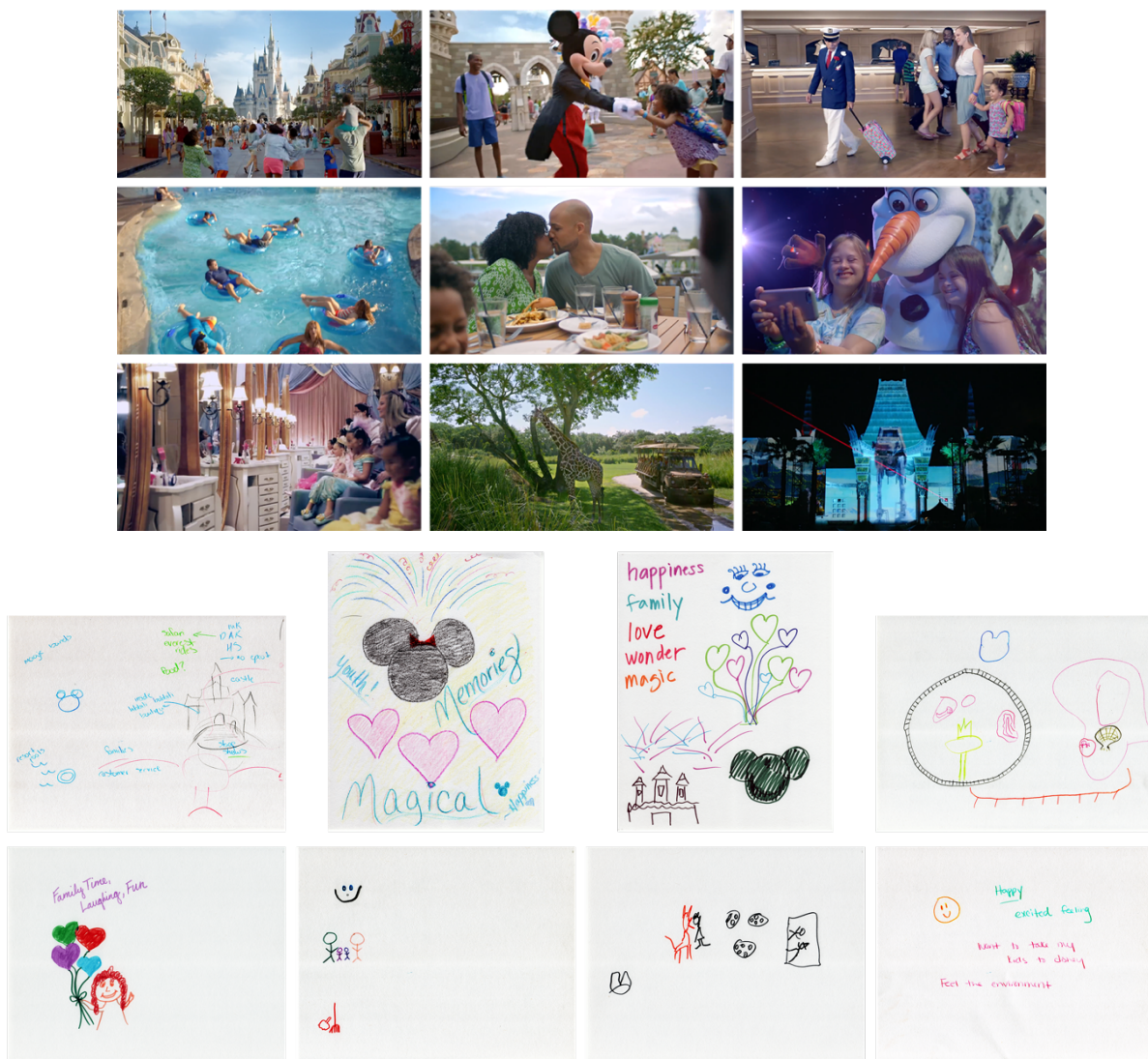
Figure 12. "The Magic Is Endless" Screenshots and Participant Visual Expressions

The importance of the visual stimulus being directly reflected in the visual elicitations correlates with the research done by Kim, Lloyd, and Cervellon (2016) on the use of narrative transportation in advertising messages to build consumer-brand relationships. Noting that engagement is a strong "motivational force", the researchers point to the emotions involved in narrative transportation advertisements as being an opportunity to provoke "psychological ownership" among consumers towards brand communications (Kim et al., 2016). The implicit use of the word "magic" did not create an implicit expression of the term in this study. However, based on the notion that implicit messaging in narrative transportations can build value for a brand when used in advertisements, it is logical to see a correlation between the visual narrative and the expressed mental models of the participants. By gaining a better understanding of how the medium used in the stimulus affects brand community members, researchers can gain insight into the complexities of the consumer-brand relationship and the co-creation of meaning.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS

Brands have the "communicative power to convey cultural meaning" (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45) and this meaning is created by brand communities through "the interpersonal relationship between the consumer and a brand" (Kilambi et al., 2013, p. 45). Traditionally, brand community research has been focused on social interaction as a key foundation for brand community relationship formation. However, newer research points to the psychological formation of brand communities, in which individuals "perceive a sense of community with other brand admirers, in the absence of social interaction" (Carlson et al., 2008). Viewing communities as "imagined" (Anderson 1983) better encompasses the full reality of the brand community relationship, leading to a model that encompasses "the degree to which an individual perceives relational bonds with other brand users", known as the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) (Carlson et al., 2008). By defining the difference between psychological and social brand communities, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how the types messages created for a brand can foster a sense of relationship with the brand (Carlson et al, 2008, p. 291).

Mental models are an individual's "cognitive representations of an external reality" (Jones et al., 2011). Commonly used in the fields of cognitive science and psychology, mental models are believed to be the cognitive model that an individual pulls from as a "basis of reasoning and decision making" (Jones et al., 2011). Understanding that individuals "must be able to represent the external world mentally to interact with it" (Johnson-Laird, 1983; Jones et al., 2014), mental models provide insight to the individual's reality of the brand community relationship at the social and psychological level. By studying the mental models of a participant in relation to the PSBC phenomenon, media communication scholars will gain a better

understanding of how to create and deliver branded communications more effectively in order to nurture long-term consumer relationships.

Using the PSBC research (Carlson et al., 2008) as my guide, this study used a qualitative phenomenological approach. A diagrammatic-oral interview procedure of eliciting mental models (Jones et al., 2014) was conducted using a criterion-convenience sample of members that self-identified as part of the Disney brand community. Using a one-on-one, non-situated elicitation procedure, eight adults were recruited for the study. Each participant: was shown the selected Disney television commercial, asked to draw a representation of the commercial and/or their feelings after watching the commercial, and participated in a set of open-ended interview questions. I then performed a thematic analysis of the drawings, the interviews, and the drawings mixed with the interviews to formulate the results. Finally, the results were compared to the PSBC research in order to add to the literature on brand communities.

5.1 Inferences

This study aimed to explore how users form a relationship known as brand community on a cognitive level when exposed to branded media. By focusing the mental model elicitation procedure on a brand exemplar such as Disney, this study illuminates how the use of video advertisements activates a psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) among a loyal brand community member. By studying this phenomenon, I was able to reveal some common themes from the PSBC research in order to add to the literature on the types of internal representations of external reality (Jones et al., 2011) elicited by branded media exposure.

As previously stated, this study aimed to (a) add to the literature on the PSBC phenomenon, (b) explore the themes in mental models constructed by Disney brand community members, (c) search for evidence of existence of psychological versus social brand communities,

(d) search for evidence of existence of brand versus group identification, and (e) see if the themes found can be correlated with the PSBC. By following the best practices and procedures of previous mental model research, this study allowed for themes to emerge that represented: (a) social versus psychological brand community, (b) group versus brand identification, and (c) visual versus verbal response.

This study will add to the literature in two fields. First, this study will add to the literature on the PSBC. While this study is not designed to prove the PSBC model, it did uncover clues in an individual's mental models that point to major components of the PSBC. All findings were considered of value, as they have added to the understanding of the consumer's mental models in relation to brand community. This knowledge will be of value for media communication scholars and marketing academics involved in message creation and dissemination. Second, this study explored the value of mental models in media communication research, as both a theoretical framework and methodology. Expanding the literature on branded media exposure through mental model constructs will aid in the understanding of how to create effective communication tactics.

5.2 Critical Analysis of Project

This study aimed to gain a better understanding of the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon using the lens of mental model theory. By using a qualitative phenomenological approach to study the mental models elicited from self-identified brand community members, this study aimed to add to the literature on brand communities. Essentially, understanding participants' mental models in relation to brand community will allow researchers to better understand how to create branded communications that more effectively build long-term consumer relationships.

5.2.1 Instrument Limitations

Mental models are a unique representation of an individual's experience of the world. The individualized nature of mental models does present some limitations in terms of research. The first limitation is in the elicitation process itself (Sharma, 2016). Given the nature of mental models existing in the mind of the individual, they "are not available for direct inspection or measurement" (Jones et al., 2011). Subsequently, the elicitation process is merely a way to "gain insight into people's internal representations of the world" (Jones et al., 2011). While many elicitation procedures have been performed throughout the years, this study used the diagrammatic-oral interview procedure to account for both visual and verbal modes of cognition. By merging two traditional qualitative procedures, the limitations of each were mitigated.

A second limitation of mental model research is the reliance of the analysis on an individual's unique life experience. Given the understanding that one individual's life experience cannot be considered an accurate representation of the world, mental models are considered to be "incomplete representations of reality" (Jones et al., 2014). This study was designed using a social constructivist philosophy. Social constructivists seek to understand an individual's experience of the world, and it is this shared experience among individuals that inductively leads to a "pattern of meaning" (Creswell, 2012, p. 25). Thus, by using an emergent design to perform a phenomenological study to capture the "universal essence" (Creswell, 2012, p. 76) of the shared experience of the Disney brand community, this study did not seek to create a generalizable result. Instead, this study sought to add to the understanding of the PSBC phenomenon by allowing themes to emerge from the mental models of the participants' brand community experience. As previously noted, the interpretation of the expressed mental models is

considered to be the essence of the PSBC phenomenon. For this study, the essence is uncovered in the phenomenological reflection in Chapter 4 – Findings.

A final limitation of mental models is their context-dependent, dynamic nature. As noted above, mental model studies aim to provide researchers with a deeper understanding of the individual's experience with the phenomenon of study, noting that the results are limited to that particular situation and environment. Due to the idea that a mental model "that fits the environment today may not be adequate tomorrow" (de Chernatony & Riley, 1998), mental models should be viewed as a snapshot in time in relation to one particular phenomenon, with the understanding that a change in environment, experience, and the type of media exposure could impact the result. This study assumes that the results found only give insight to the specific demographic and sample of study in relation to the PSBC phenomenon. This study also notes that a change in the media selection, the setting, the brand community selection, and more could produce a significant change in the results. Thus, the results from this research are limited to adult members of the Disney brand community when exposed to "The Magic Is Endless" television commercial. This meets the goal of adding to the literature on the PSBC phenomenon.

5.2.2 Data Sampling and Analysis Limitations

Based on the nature of qualitative phenomenological studies, this study used a criterion-convenience sample of eight adults that self-identified as members of the Disney brand community. The first limitation for this study was finding participants that fit the defined sample criteria within driving distance for participation. Given the small sample size needed for the study, it was important to recruit only participants that could participate in a face-to-face environment. Thus, participants for this study had to be conveniently located, within a two-hour drive of Erie, Colorado. The next participant issue was finding adults who self-identified as

members of the Disney brand community. While no formal scale was used for this evaluation, adults selected for this study had to express their love of Disney verbally, with no negative indicators in their response. The first stage in recruitment was through my immediate network of friends and family on Facebook. The second stage was to ask friends and family to refer me to members of their network. Several self-identified members of the Disney brand community were turned down for participation in this study based on their physical location.

The thematic analysis of the mental models also presented some expected limitations. The first limitation was my admitted membership in the Disney brand community. To address this inherent bias, I have been reflexive in my bias through both the narrative in the introduction and researcher bracketing in the methods chapter. In addition, during the analysis of the mental models, I have allowed themes to emerge based on the mental models elicited and not my inherent bias. To establish trustworthiness in these results, I have used both the images and quotes from these elicitations in my analysis. By taking these steps, I have allowed the results to unfold from the individual's perspective.

An unexpected limitation occurred during the thematic analysis stage of this study. Based on a thorough evaluation of the visuals created for Sharma's predicate study (2016), I was surprised by the lack of visual results for this study. These drawings had less illustrations than expected and used a lot of words. Some of the drawings are sparse and intentions had to be clarified in the oral response. The oral responses lead me to ponder if a visual stimulus is not the right fit for a diagrammatic-oral interview procedure for eliciting mental models. Sharma's work utilized a written narrative as the stimulus, which might have allowed for the participant to visualize the mental model on a deeper level (2016). While the overall results of the visual and verbal combined have good depth in this study, evaluating the appropriate stimulus format for

this procedure would be helpful for the body of work on mental models in the media communication field.

5.2.3 Inferences Limitations

Given the nature of human mind, there was an expected element of surprise from using mental models as a method for this study. The expectation was that participants that self-identified as a member of the Disney brand community would exhibit similarities in the mental models elicited as a result of the Disney media exposure. While this study was able to uncover five themes in the phenomenological reflection based on similarities in the expressed mental models from participants, the smaller sample allows room for future mental model research on the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon. The findings for this study are still considered to be of value, as they provide a foundation for future brand community research.

The second limitation for this study was the selection of participants. Phenomenological studies are focused on the analysis of participants that share an experience. Thus, the size of this sample was not the key factor, the shared experience was. Given that participants needed to self-identify as members of the Disney brand community to be selected for this study, varying degrees of the PSBC could have occurred based on the sample and not on the media exposure. For example, some of the older participants did not have the same level of exposure to Disney growing up compared to some of the younger and middle age participants. This was due to the timeline of events; Disney was just getting started during the childhood days of the older participants. Thus, there were not as many opportunities for brand exposure and brand experiences in these participants' formative years. This leads to a disparity in the comparison to the youngest participants that grew up with Disney television shows, movies, storybooks, theme

parks, and more. Understanding that the varying degrees in the PSBC could occur in the sampling phase of this study is part of the dynamic nature of this study.

5.3 Future Projects

The work in brand communities is vast, and this research merely opens the door for several future areas to be studied. The first area for further exploration will be to view this study as a pilot study and select a bigger sample with the goal of similar findings. Phenomenological studies generally range from 5-25 participants (Creswell, 2012). Thus, with only eight participants in this study, the lessons learned from the first round of testing could be addressed. Expanding the sample size in future studies will allow for a better understanding of the psychological sense of brand community (PSBC) phenomenon.

As an extension of using this study as a pilot study, future research should also add a quantitative element in order to more clearly define the overall essence of the PSBC phenomenon. One approach might be the use of a survey to establish the degree of the PSBC of the participants. This addition would also help to alleviate one of the known limitations of this study.

This study focuses on the Disney brand community. Future studies should replicate this procedure using other brand communities. The goal would be to evaluate if the PSBC phenomenon looks the same when comparing strong brands from a variety of industries. For example, what would the results look like if Starbucks (food and beverage industry), Apple (technology industry), and Disney (entertainment industry) were studied? An off shoot of this idea would be to perform a positive and negative comparison. For example, Disney is a brand that researchers can easily point to as having a strong community. Future studies should look at companies with weaker brand communities than their competitors to expose any identifiable

differences in mental models. For this to have the most value, two brands within the same industry would need to be compared.

Another area for future exploration exists in the evaluation of brand attributes, both tangible and intangible in nature. To better understand how individuals' self-identify with a brand community, it would be of value to learn more about how individuals respond to brand messaging, symbols, colors, experience and more. It would also be of interest to understand how the medium used to disseminate the message plays a role. Most importantly, researchers should study the effect of these attributes on the mental models of brand community members to see if there are any correlations between positive versus negative influences. Within these attributes, understanding the role of nostalgia, heritage brands, and other narrative elements will be key to gaining a better understanding on how to create and/or retain brand communities through message creation and dissemination. Understanding how the medium chosen for the stimulus could potentially impact the mental model elicitations would also add to the literature on the use of mental models in the media communication field.

Finally, future research should explore the element of the consumer. The consumer is one notable focus of both brand community and mental model studies. For the purposes of this research, the consumer can be viewed as the person(s) engaging with the brand, product, message, etc. To examine the importance of the consumer role in brand communities, future studies should look at the role of the consumer as the mediator and moderator of the message, as well as the message creator. To better understand the connection of the consumer to a brand, more research should be carried out using different theoretical frameworks, such as: co-creation of value theory, cognitive structure theory, schema theory, cognitive response theory, and the

elaboration likelihood model (Moriarty, 1996, p. 335-339). Symbolic interactionism and

semiotics would also add to the understanding of the consumer component.

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APPENDIX A: DIAGRAMMATIC-ORAL INTERVIEW PROCEDURE

Step 1: Expose participant to "The Magic Is Endless" commercial

Step 2: Ask participants to draw a representation of the commercial using any combination of illustrations, diagrams, symbols or words.

Step 3: Perform an open-ended/semi-structured interview using the following questions as a framework:

   a) Please explain what you have drawn based on watching this television commercial.

   b) What were your immediate thoughts/reactions to this commercial?

   c) Did you have any specific memories surface during this exposure?

   d) Were there symbols or images that immediately surfaced during this exposure?

   e) What is your experience with Disney?

   f) Did you identify with anyone/anything in particular in this commercial?

   g) Is there any element of your drawing that tells me something about you?

   h) Is there any call to action or desire for action on your part after seeing this commercial?

   i) Do you currently belong to any social groups that center around the Disney brand?

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVED RECRUITMENT/CONSENT MATERIALS

Facebook Friends and Family,

I am conducting research on brand communities to complete my master's thesis: Creating Brand Communities: Media and the Psychology of Brand Magic. This thesis will satisfy requirements of the M.S. Degree in Public Communication and Technology at Colorado State University. I am recruiting adults (18+) who self-identify as being part of the Disney brand community.

Ultimately, the goal of this research is to explore the shared experience among members of the Disney brand community in order to add to the literature on the psychological sense of brand community. When finished, I will share the results of this study with you.

How do you know if you are part of the Disney brand community? Ask yourself: Do you have a highly positive opinion of Disney, as well as a strong sense of satisfaction with Disney entertainment, products, and services? Or more simply, are you a fan of the Disney brand? If the answer is yes, then you should consider yourself a self-identified brand community member.

If your answer is yes, would you be willing to participate in a one-on-one audiotaped interview with me? The time commitment is roughly one hour. During this time, you will be shown a Disney commercial, be asked to draw how you feel, and then asked a few questions. Participation is completely voluntary and your responses will not be linked to you. The time and location of this interview can be determined based on our communication about your schedule and availability. There are no known risks or direct benefits to you associated with this research.

If you are interested in participating, please send me an email at jill.goodwin@colostate.edu or send me a private message. To protect your privacy, any public responses to this post will be deleted. If you have any questions about IRB participant rights, please email RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu or call 970-491-1553.
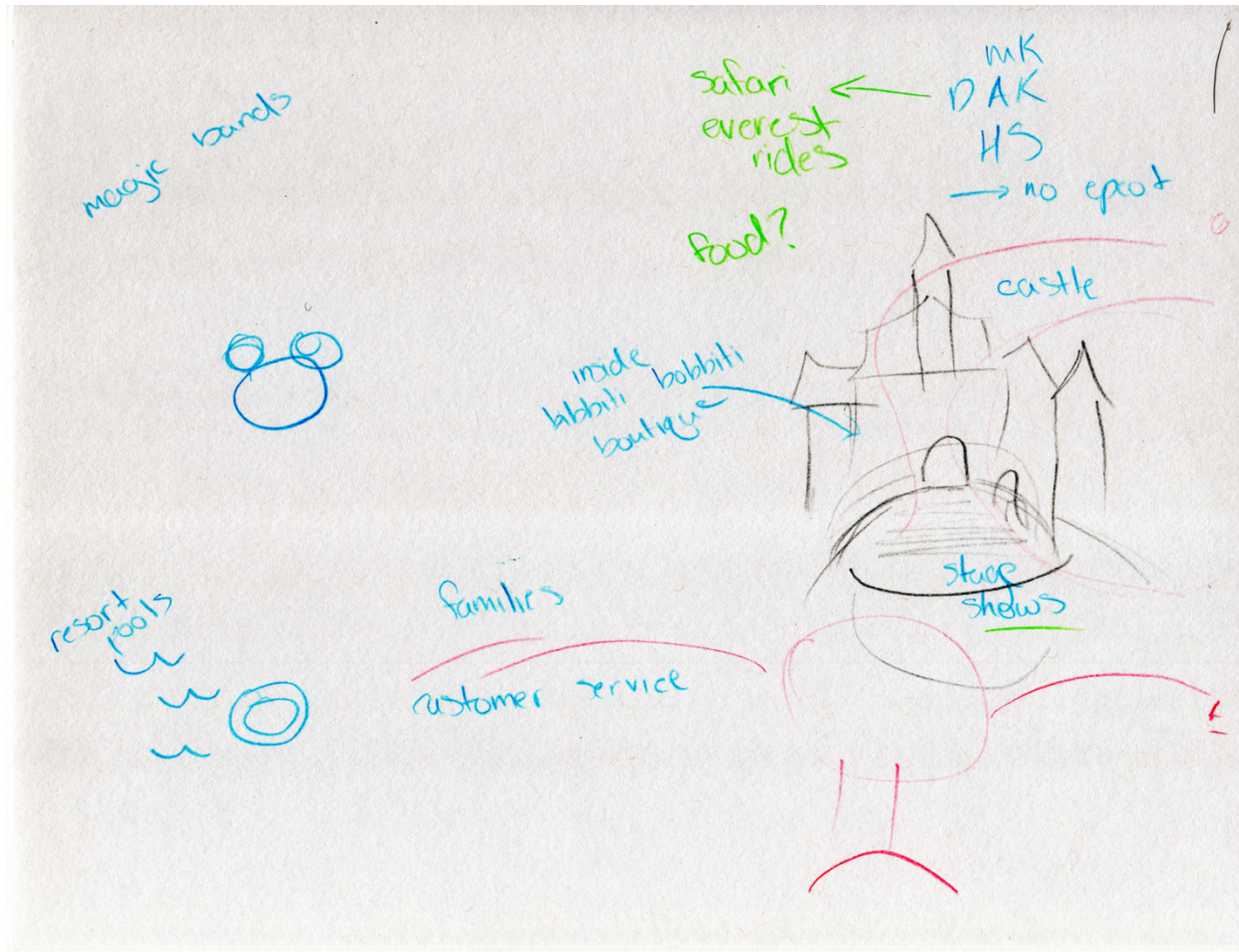
Participant 1
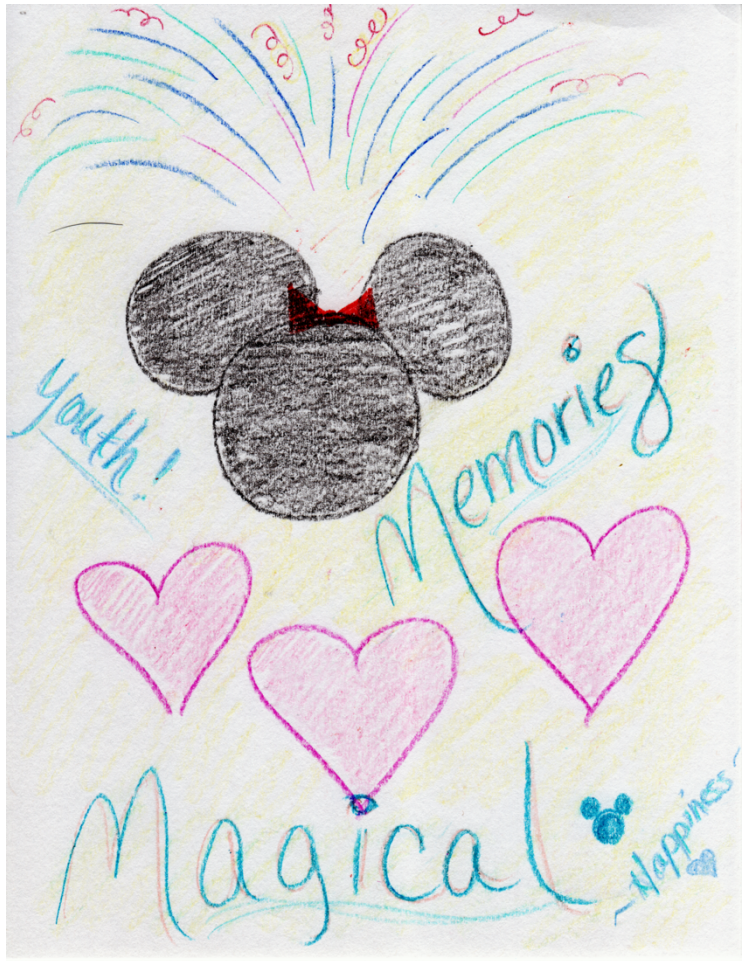
Participant 2

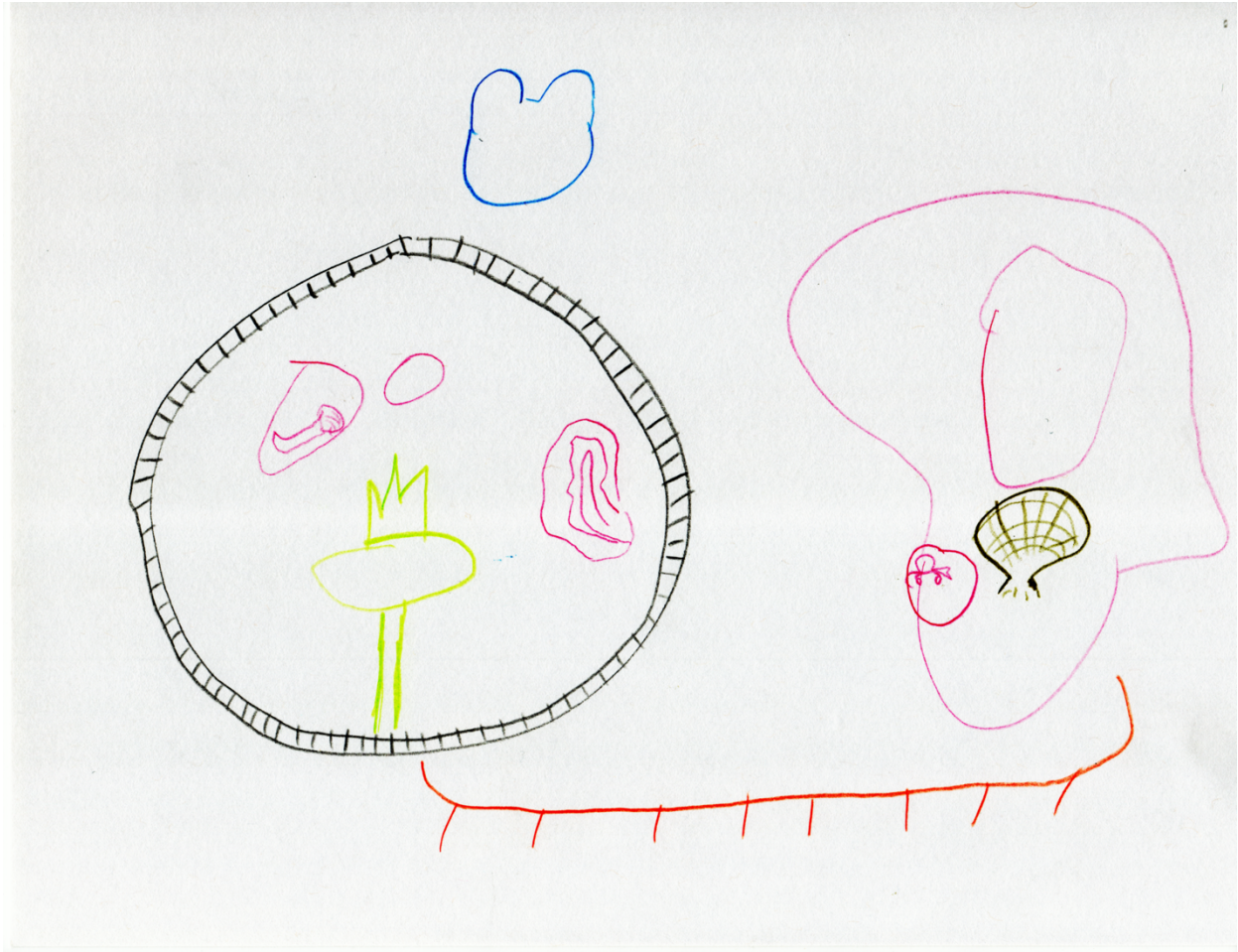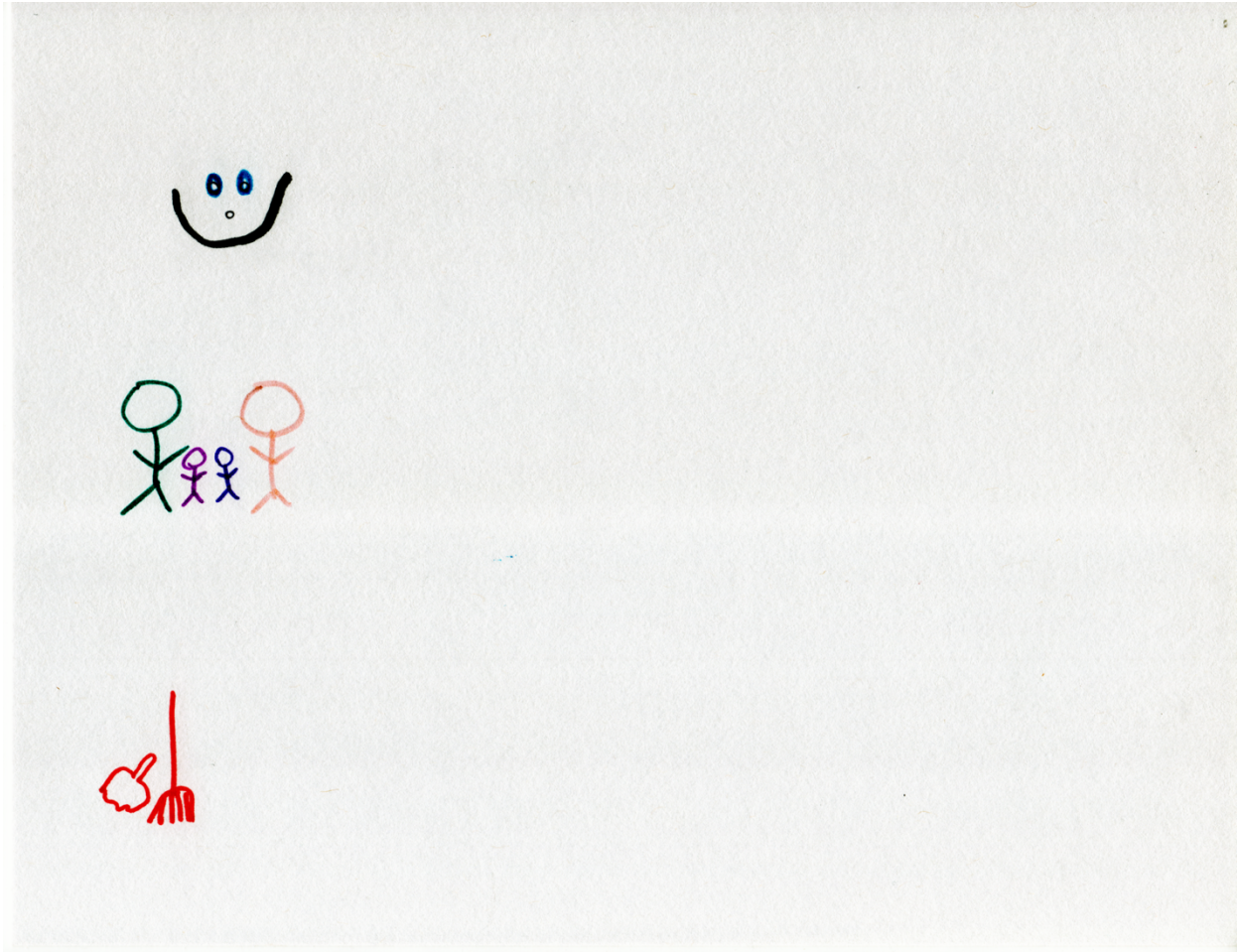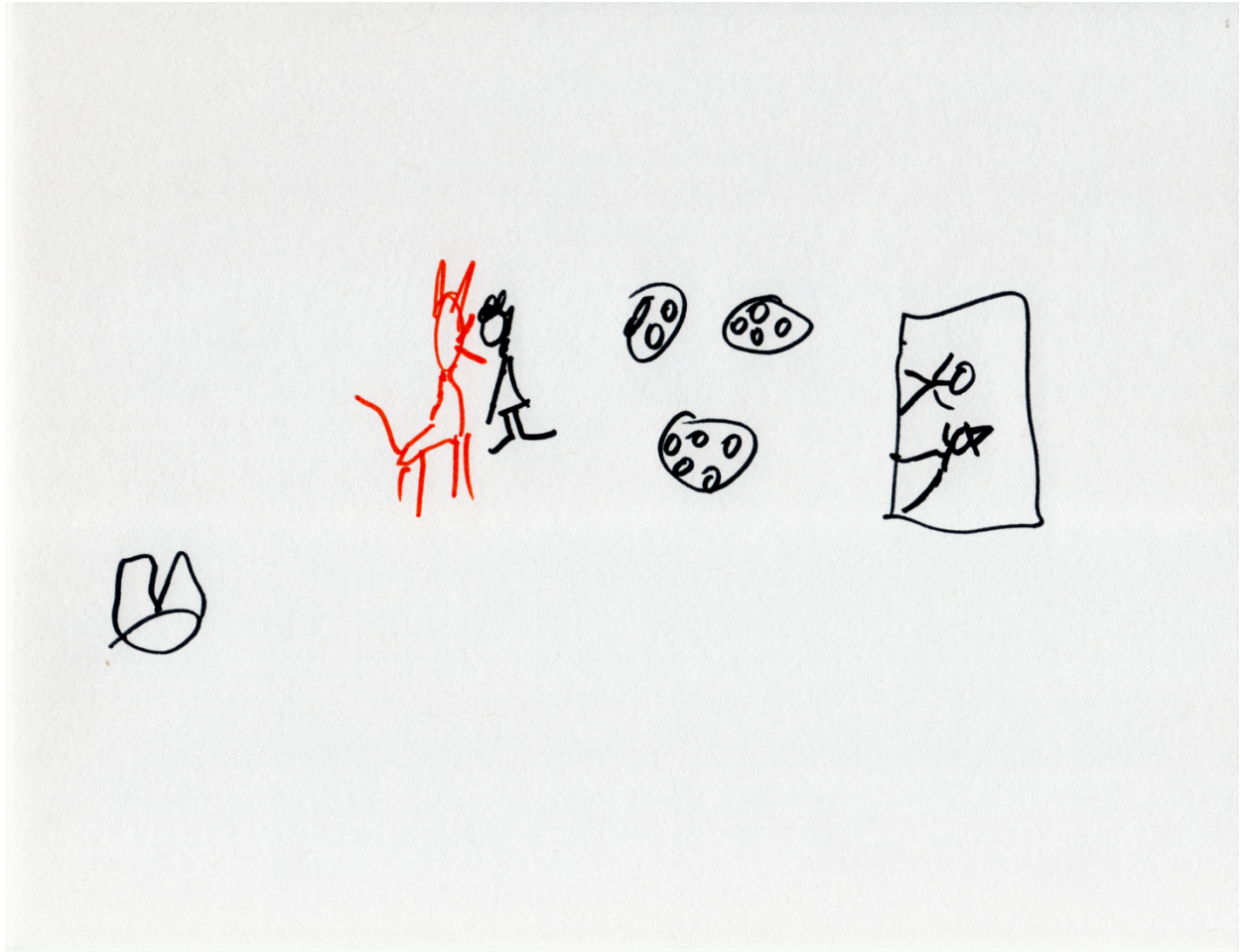**Participant 3**

Participant 4

Participant 5

Participant 6

Participant 7

Participant 8

Happy

excited feeling

Want to take my
kids to disney

Feel the environment