

## #Us Vs #Them - Do #Communities help #Sell Products and #Brands-#Apple

The basis of this article is during a period 6 to 7 years ago before e-commerce companies had really picked up when a new Apple product was getting launched. I used to get amazed at the response any new Apple product would create in the market. Since the option of getting the new products through the ecommerce companies wasn't available at that time, I would be amazed to hear about people waiting in queues from the previous day night before the launch to get these products.

### How could Apple pull this off ... Was it only about the products they made or was it something else?

Before we get into that let us understand a little bit about an experiment which was conducted by Henri Tajfel which later led to what came to be known as the Social Identity theory. For this experiment he got together a group of 12- to 14-year-olds who didn't know each other earlier... Once together they were separated into 2 groups. The students were told that they were grouped together based on the scores that they had scored in a test which was conducted just before the grouping happened. The tests were usually very irrelevant for a 12- or 14-year-old like deciding which modern art out of the two they liked. Very often the researchers just randomly divided them into two groups. Once the team members were told to which group, they belonged to them were made to sit in separate cubicles. So, there was no interaction between the different members of the same group nor did any of the group members know each other earlier.

Each of the team members were then shown different tables like the one below based on which they had to allocate a monetary value to the different members of the group.

Ingroup Member	7	8	10	12	13	14	15	17	19
Outgroup Member	1	3	7	11	13	15	17	21	25

It is interesting to note that none of the members were ever asked to allocate anything for themselves. They just had to decide which of the allocation they would go for between an ingroup member and an outgroup member. As can be seen towards the right side of the table if a person selected options from the right side of the column there were more chances of getting more money for the members of the group though the money earned would be less compared to what people in the other group gets.

Towards the middle of the table members of both groups get almost the same amount and towards the rights members from the ingroup get a higher amount than the members of the outgroup, but much lower amount than what they would get had they selected options which were there on the right side of the table. In this situation though the members of the in group would end up getting much lower amounts than what they would get compared to the options on the right-hand side of the table.

Normal logic would suggest that people should select more and more options towards the right side of the table since it offered more money in actual terms to its members. What happened was the opposite ...

Almost all the people selected options towards the left with the majority selecting the last option of 7 and 1 which is the option which provided the biggest difference between the inhouse member and

the outhouse member. So, though the people in the experiment never knew each other or weren't really being together as a group for the experiment

- They considered themselves to be part of a group
- They were not looking at realistic benefits but wanted their group members to get more than the other group members
- It was Us vs Them

Let us now consider the basic building blocks that were used by apple to build up their community using the same principle. Consider that Apple was incorporated in 1976 was in the early growth stages of an organisation when the advertisements that we are discussing got released.

Let's consider the advertisement released by Apple in 1984 link to which is as below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VtvjbmoDx-I>

If you watch this advertisement you will find everyone else following a particular path or direction without any thought just following directions being put out by someone and how the girl comes in and who is very different and breaks free from the whole set up ..Doesn't this resonate to the experiment conducted by Tajfel which is creating the same feeling as Us vs Them..

Let's look at another advertisement which was released by Apple in 1985 .

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V-SJQdREDKM>

In this advertisement also it shows how business people are blindly following the same path and falling off the cliff and how the new Apple Office could make everything different.

#### **Again building a Us vs Them differentiation...**

What has also been observed that if your put an Apple follower into an MRI machine their brains light up in the same areas that normally light up when people relate their thoughts to religion. Such is the belief and belonging that they feel as being part of the Apple community and this is what makes them into such strong Evangelists of Apple.

Some of the key parameters to be borne in mind while trying to create communities or groups like what Apple did over decades of planned advertisements based on the Tejfal experiment are

- People can develop group loyalty very quickly even when there is hardly any difference between the different groups
- People become emotionally attached to the meaningless groups as created by Tejfal and start cheering for their identified groups
- People then base their identity on these groups and build boundaries to keep the other groups separate
- People are looking to connect to each other and not to companies
- The company is just an enabler bringing the people together so that they have something to form a group or a tribe as we may call it
- Identifying an enemy group strengthens the cohesiveness of the group
- Demographic or other easily identifiable differences will make it easier to build bonding between such groups.

What can be seen in the above two and several other advertisements made by Apple is they have focused not on the products but on the people using those products.

If you watch this advertisement, you will find that there is no Apple product being displayed or any features of the product being shown in the advertisement. It just shows how people using Apple are different from the other users involuntarily building a group bonding between all Apple users and hence building up the huge following that I talked about initially.

There are several other companies in different product categories who have successfully used the community concept including several political and religious organisations...

**Therefore, does it make more business sense to do community or tribe management rather than brand management?**

Keep watching this space for more ....