

# **Social Mediation of Rewards in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

by

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## **Dedication**

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who have given me the opportunity of a good education and  
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motivation, encouragement

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never-ending love throughout my life.

## **Abstract**

The development of the Internet has created an innovative communication channel which has had a pervasive impact on consumers' behaviour worldwide. This creates a new social construct in the form of virtual communities based on communal consumption, which are widely known as brand communities. To date a number of studies have researched brand communities by emphasising social theories and been conducted in a Western context. Few studies have addressed behavioural theories and investigated these groups in an Asian context like Thailand, which has a growing number of consumer brand communities. This thesis uses a behavioural perspective and highlights the role of intentional dimension in the analysis of consumer behaviour in these communities.

The thesis aims to investigate and explain the rationale for rewards which maintain consumer participation in Thai car-consumer clubs. To do so it adopts the Behavioural Perspective Model (BPM) as a primary interpretive device to develop a qualitative multiple-case study of seven Thai car-consumer clubs. Rule-governed behaviour is also examined in this thesis. The results of the BPM interpretive analysis demonstrate that the members' behaviours in the Thai car-consumer clubs take place in a relatively closed setting that is maintained by high levels of both functional reinforcement (such as car-knowledge) and symbolic reinforcement (such as friendship). Foremost of all, status is the key symbolic reinforcement which performs as a gateway to other rewards. The value of symbolic reinforcement such as status is derived from collective intentionality that can be found in cooperative behaviour and in the beliefs and attitude of the intentional language of people in a particular context. In essence, the emergence of Thai car-consumers clubs involves the capacity for behaviour to be reinforced through mutual rewards. Therefore, members' participation in the car-consumer clubs is facilitated by the rewards which are socially mediated by members of the community.

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## **Abbreviations**

NSO	-	National Statistics Office of Thailand
BC	-	Brand Community
VC	-	Virtual Community
SC	-	Sense of Community
SCI	-	Sense of Community Index
BPM	-	Behavioural Perspective Model
RGB	-	Rule-Governed Behaviour

# **Chapter One**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This thesis investigates consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs, which are the case studies of the brand community in Thailand, and it specifically addresses the application of the Behavioural Perspective Model (BPM) to understand these Thai brand communities. This chapter provides an introduction to this research and begins with a description of the background to the research. This is followed by the research problems, aim and objectives. The key research questions and justification of the research will be presented. The next section gives a summary of research methodology and potential contributions. The last section of this chapter outlines the structure of this thesis.

### **1.2 Background to the Research**

The development of the Internet has already had a significant impact on communication channels because it enables people to access their communications conveniently from any location. The Internet has connected people from diverse and dispersed locations, and this has created a new social construct in the form of the virtual community (hereafter, VC) (Jones, 1999). The advent of the Internet has also had a significant effect on consumer behaviour because it allows people to generate websites that combine consumers into communities with a focus on communal consumption (Gruen et al., 2005; Cova and Pace, 2006). It appears that consumers are increasingly getting information from the Internet and sharing ideas about products and brands in the Internet (Kozinets, 2002; Szmigin, 2003). Consequently, the consumer's social interactions in the virtual context are based on mutual interest in a brand or product, which advances them to aggregate and develop consumption communities, namely "brand community" (hereafter, BC) (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Andersen, 2005).

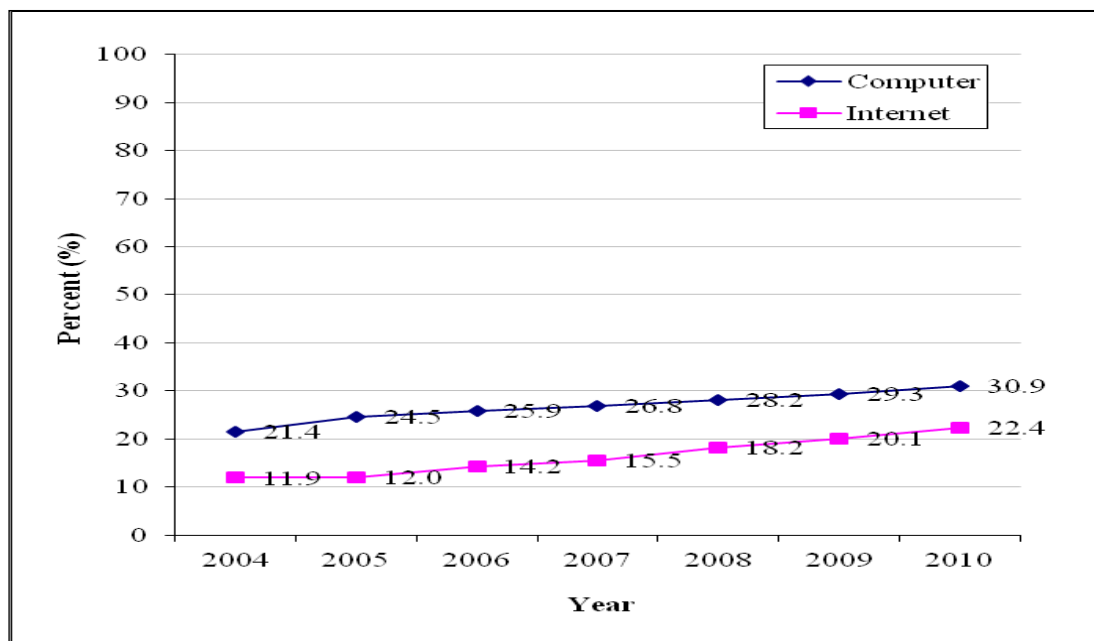
The notion of a consumption community was built on the idea of community which has long been used in the pursuit of the understanding of human beings (O'Guinn and Muniz, 2005). Friedman et al. (1993) mentioned that the concept of a consumption community was proposed by Daniel Boorstin (1973), who claims that people are not only looking for feelings of community from the neighbourhood but also through the communality of consumption behaviour. Thus, consumption communities are formed around the communality of consumption of the common brands and goods that people buy and use to compensate for feelings of separation in modern society (Friedman et al., 1993). Although the fragmentation of society and the growth of individualism has led to increased individuality in consumer lifestyles (Firat, 1992; Thompson and Holt, 1996; Cova, 1997), there are signs of a return to community since some individuals have tried to seek satisfaction through emotions which are shared with others (Cova, 1997). The desire for community has led individuals to seek products and services that provide a link to other people and communities (Cooper et al., 2005; Patterson and O'Malley, 2006). Therefore, the desire for social connection has an influence on consumer behaviour to construct a relationship within a group of consumers who share common interests based on mutual consumption.

Technological innovation, particularly the development of the Internet, provides an opportunity for consumers to return to a community where they can exchange and share ideas, and information on products or brands with one another arbitrarily beyond the constraint of geographical boundaries, and it is this which generates a new type of community as a BC. Consequently, the BC appears to be akin to the third place, which is a gathering place for informal life beyond home and workplace (Rosenbaum et al., 2007) where consumers can communicate and interact with one another. The BC is centred on the brand or product that divulges the significant role of the consumer group. To date, many BCs have been formed in contemporary consumer societies, such as: sports fans communities (Moutinho et al., 2007; Devasagayam and Buff, 2008), magazine communities (Davidson et al., 2007), and even a Nutella Spread community (Cova and Pace, 2006).

The widespread reach of the Internet has expanded in many countries worldwide, this has also been true in Thailand. According to Palasri et al. (1999), the Internet has been

developed in Thailand since 1987, but at that time the usage was still limited to the education sector. In 1992 the Thai Government allowed Internet providers to provide commercial access to the World Wide Web. The Internet has continued to grow in the public sector ever since. According to the national survey of Thai populations from age six and above by the National Statistic Office of Thailand (NSO) (see Figure 1.1) the use of both the Internet and computers in Thailand has gradually increased from 21.4% in 2004 to 30.9% in 2010. This data suggests that the Internet has become another popular source of communication for Thai people.

**Figure 1.1: The Trend of Internet and Computer Users in Thailand from 2004 to 2010**



Source: The National Statistical Office of Thailand (2010)

The data from the NSO in 2010 reports that the activities that Thai people carry out on the Internet are: to search for information (82.2%), to send and receive emails (26.5%), and to play and download games (25.6%) (NSO, 2010). The development of the Internet in Thailand has also provided an opportunity for Thai consumers to search for information about products or brands in which they are interested, as well as sharing knowledge and opinions on products or brands. Consequently, there has been an aggregation of Thai consumers of various products and brands who use Internet platforms to connect with one another in the virtual network. According to the research on Thai consumers which was conducted by Millward Brown Firefly, Ltd., Thai

consumers feel that the VCs present an opportunity for them to adopt membership (Thai PR, 2011). The feelings of unity and a desire for social acceptance are the main drivers for Thai consumer behaviour towards virtual consumer communities (BrandAge, 2011). It can be noted that the virtual consumer communities in Thailand are comparable to the notion of BC in that the community is built around the consumption of a product or brand on a non-geographical boundary basis (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2005).

Accordingly, it is necessary to understand consumer behaviour in the BC because the consumer lies at the heart of any marketing scheme. Extant research on consumer behaviour has adopted various disciplines (such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology) to understand the complexion of consumer behaviour (Solomon et al., 2002). Behavioural learning theories are the best known theories amongst the range of interdisciplinary influences which are used to study and explain consumer behaviour. According to behavioural learning theories, behaviour is learned and takes place as a result of responses to external stimuli (Solomon et al., 2002).

One of the most noteworthy models, which stems from the behavioural learning theories in understanding consumer behaviour, is the Behavioural Perspective Model (BPM) which was proposed by Foxall (1990). The BPM is an alternative approach to understand consumer behaviour, and it is built on a framework of radical behaviourism. The fundamental proposition of the BPM is that consumer behaviour locates at the intersection between the consumer's learning history and the behavioural setting. Another distinct concept of the BPM is the pattern of reinforcement, which is composed of utilitarian reinforcement and informational reinforcement that are determined by consumer's learning history. As a result, the BPM proposes three structural components of consumer situations, which are: utilitarian reinforcement, informational reinforcement, and behaviour setting scope.

More importantly, the BPM also offers an interpretive account that includes philosophical context (such as intentional behaviourism) to comprehend consumer phenomena. The present study employs this model to interpret consumer behaviour at a personal level in Thai car-consumer brand communities. In comparison the majority of

the marketing literature and consumer research typically explains the BC phenomena in a sociological context. While social theory is undoubtedly important, the aspect of consumer behaviour at the personal level has been relatively overlooked. The present study will bridge this gap and make a case for why and how the behavioural perspective should be represented in the field of consumer research on the BC context by illustrating the BC in Thailand through multiple case studies.

### **1.3 Research Problems**

Most of the extant research on BC addresses social relationships by implementing social theory to describe the phenomena (i.e. Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Andersen, 2005; Cova and Pace, 2006). To date, little research has analysed consumer behaviour in the BC from a behavioural perspective of the effects of rewards on consumer behaviour, which represents the personal desire and motivation to participate in those communities. Having perceived that human behaviour is a result of rewards (Skinner, 1969), the benefits or rewards from BC participation could be the main reason for consumers to continue their participation in these BCs. However, this subject has still been little addressed in the literature.

There are two leading explanations of behaviour: the first is radical behaviourism (which focuses on observable behaviour) and the second is cognitive psychology (which focuses on an individual's thought processes that affect their behaviour) (Foxall, 2007a). To date, most of our understanding of behavioural analysis is derived from radical behaviourism. Although this may be sufficient to predict and control behaviour in the laboratory, it is unable to cope with the personal level of explanation, the continuity of behaviour, and the delimitation of behaviourist interpretations (Foxall, 2008a). Furthermore, the previous research on the BPM has predominantly relied on the consumer situation in the extensional model. Foxall (2007a) addresses the imperative needs of intentionality, which could strengthen the analysis of consumer behaviour at the personal level; however, the intentional dimension is still only slightly mentioned in the model.

In addition, existing research on BCs has been predominantly been conducted in Western societies, particularly in the United States. Due to the progress of the Internet, the BC phenomena have been expanded to many countries in the world, and this includes Southeast Asia. Nevertheless, it appears that research on Asian consumer behaviour in these BCs is still in its infancy and there is still need for further investigation because the BC phenomena that occur in a Western setting may have different aspects from those which occur in an Asian environment where the cultural values are different.

A number of strategic marketing tools are applied by Thai marketers in the competitive atmosphere of marketing in Thailand with the aim of acquiring consumer loyalty in order to compete in the market. One of the most popular strategies which they use is the loyalty programme, which is implemented to embed the relationship between the company provider and consumer. Nevertheless, it seems that many Thai companies have exploited the loyalty programme, which in turn decreases the numbers of loyal consumers to their products or brands. Since marketing today has been expanded into the scope to the virtual world, this has inspired Thai marketers and researchers to respond to this movement by searching for a new strategic approach in order to reach their target consumers. Since the typical loyalty programme appears to have become a common marketing strategy for Thai companies, the rise of social media and consumer communities has become a new phenomenon in Thailand (Chainiran, 2010). This has drawn the attention of Thai marketers to closely monitor this trend.

Although the importance of these BCs is continually increasing, there is still a lack of studies on these BCs in Thailand. To understand Thai consumer behaviour in the BCs is necessary because the BC is a cost effective and powerful instrument which is able to create added value to the company (Algesheimer et al., 2005). The concept of a BC is valuable for marketers because it allows marketers to develop a social relationship with the consumer (Lawer, 2005). In contrast, since consumers are able to share and express their opinions on products and brands liberally in these BCs, it could prove to be a drawback to the company if there is no suitable controlling measure. Despite their loyalty to the products and brands, these consumers can spread either positive or negative word-of-mouth, which has a considerable influence on other consumers

(Pickton and Borderick, 2005; Brown et al., 2007) in addition to possibly damaging the image of the products, brand, and company (Cova and Pace, 2006; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006). By controlling the information flows of the consumers themselves the power of negotiation has been shifted to these groups of consumers, this is a movement which no industry can afford to ignore in the long-term (Akehurst, 2009). The lack of proper understanding of consumer behaviour in the BC phenomenon in Thailand has motivated this study to investigate consumer behaviour in these communities since there are so few studies on Thai consumer behaviour in these BCs. Therefore, utilising a behavioural approach, particularly the BPM, to investigate the phenomena will allow researchers and marketers to comprehend the BC in Thailand in order to find an appropriate strategy to maintain Thai consumer behaviour.

## **1.4 Research Aim and Objectives**

The main purpose of this study is to investigate Thai car-consumer clubs and explain the rationale for rewards which maintain consumer participation in these clubs. This thesis will also extend the body of knowledge of consumer behaviour in Asia with the aim to provide an understanding of consumer behaviour in a developing country in Asia such as Thailand. As a result, this study hopes to achieve the following objectives:

1. To understand the nature of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand, which are social groups formed by voluntary members, and to explore the reasons why car consumers are interested in these clubs.
2. To explain the effects of rewards on Thai consumer behaviour towards the clubs, which can lead members continuing their membership in the clubs.
3. To explain the rationale behind the significance of the rewards which have an effect on consumer behaviour in the car-consumer clubs.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

There are three key research questions which will be answered by the present study, which are based on the research objectives and the existing literature. The first question explores the nature of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand, which is:

**What are car-consumer clubs in Thailand?**

The second question seeks to explain the effects of the rewards on Thai consumers, which is:

**How do consumers participate in these car-consumer clubs?**

The third question attempts to explain the rationale behind the significance of the rewards, which is:

**Why do consumers participate in these car-consumer clubs?**

## **1.6 Justification of the Research**

The research problem indicates several issues that need to be researched in the present study. Firstly, to date there are only a small number of studies which have used a behavioural perspective in the BC. More significantly, no study has implemented the BPM to interpret the consumer phenomena in the BC. The BPM provides an intensive and comprehensive account to interpret and understand consumer behaviour. Therefore, the present study employs the BPM to understand Thai consumer behaviour in the BC. Moreover, although the preceding research of the BPM has mostly revealed the consumer's situation in the extensional model solely in terms of the scope of consumer behaviour setting, it has only slightly addressed the intentional dimension in the model.

Foxall (2007a) states that the intentional dimension can be employed to complete the explanatory elements of human behaviour. Intentionality plays a significant role in the

pattern of reinforcement (Foxall, 2010b). In addition, the collective intentionality of people, which is the intentional dimension, is a foundation of social actions and activities and a prime theory of human society (Foxall, 2010b). Thus, the present study will also add an intentional dimension, particularly the role of collective intentionality, in the explanation of consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of this phenomenon.

Secondly, most of the existing research has been conducted in Western societies, few studies have yet investigated BCs in the Asian context. Thus, this study attempts to investigate the BC in an Asian environment, in this case Thailand. As stated earlier, many Thai companies have put considerable investment into loyalty programmes to maintain their consumers. Due to the development of the Internet in Thailand, which connects Thai consumers together, several consumption communities have arisen in Thai society. This phenomenon has led the companies to become concerned and revise their marketing strategy in response to these communities, rather than simply focusing on their loyalty programmes. The lack of research and understanding of this phenomenon is the main concern of this present study, and its task is to provide an overview of the nature of BCs in Thailand and to explain consumer behaviour by using the BPM in order to offer an appropriate marketing approach for Thai companies.

Thirdly, this study replicates the preceding studies on the BC by investigating the BC within the same product category, which is cars, but in a different cultural setting, as suggested by McAlexander et al. (2002). The original study of BC was conducted with car BCs, such as Ford Bronco and Saab (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Moreover, there is some prior evidence of BCs in Western car clubs (i.e. Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Algesheimer et al., 2005) and in some Asia car clubs (Wu and Fang, 2010). Although a similar pattern of car clubs also exists in Thailand, they have not yet been investigated in terms of the BC's context.

Lastly, cars are a high-involvement product which requires information when making a decision to purchase and in their maintenance. Consequently, Thai car consumers tend to seek information from other car consumers and share their mutual interests, which lead them to form a new community that centres on the car brand or model of their own

use and/or interest. Furthermore, a car is a product that represents the social class of the owners in addition to its core functional benefits (Kotler, 2003). The car offers both symbolic and functional values to the owner. Consequently, consumers who become members of these car communities possibly obtain both symbolic and functional rewards, which are the pattern of reinforcement (Foxall, 1997a) as illustrated in the BPM. The car-consumer clubs in Thailand have been selected to serve as case studies in order to inform our understanding of consumer behaviour in the Thai BCs.

## **1.7 Research Methodology**

The extant literature on BC has employed a qualitative methodology, which has been shown to be effective in the investigation of phenomena where there is little prior knowledge (i.e. Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz and Schau, 2005; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Cova and Pace, 2006). Likewise, the present study attempts to examine rule-governed behaviour (RGB) and the role of collective intentionality, which usually rely on the verbal language. Therefore, a qualitative multiple-case study approach is undertaken in this study in order to empirically reveal consumer behaviour in Thailand.

The present study is composed of two main stages: exploratory and explanatory. The study itself was undertaken with seven car-consumer clubs in Thailand during December 2009 to January 2010, and March to May 2010. This study begins with an exploratory stage which explores the nature of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with a group of respondents, who are the club leaders. This purposive sampling is drawn with this group of respondents in order to obtain overall information about the clubs. This is followed by an explanatory stage which seeks to examine consumer behaviour in this context. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with respondents who are club members. The snowball sampling technique was implemented to reach the target number of respondents because there are a large number of members in these clubs. The methodology of the study is explained in further detail in Chapter 3. Finally, the results are informed by the BPM and three levels of interpretation (see Chapter 10).

## 1.8 Potential Contributions

The present study will offer a behavioural perspective in examining consumer behaviour in these BCs, which adds to consumer research. This study will demonstrate how to interpret consumer behaviour in the BC based on a behavioural approach by implementing the BPM as an interpretive device adding to the literature. It will also be an empirical contribution through the use of the model for future studies.

Furthermore, another contribution of this thesis is to introduce the role of collective intentionality, which is related to intentional behaviourism, in association to the BPM to strengthen the analysis of consumer behaviour in Thai BC as well as to strengthen the model. This study will empirically show the connection of collective intentionality, which is extensively discussed in the philosophy, and the BPM in the analysis of consumer behaviour at the personal level. As a result, it will extend the theoretical knowledge of the consumer behaviour and marketing literature.

Another important difference from previous BC research is that the present research is one of the few studies which have focused on the BC in a developing country, such as Thailand. This study will extend earlier research by investigating the consumer BC in a different research environment from other previous studies. Thus, it will offer an additional knowledge to scholars, researchers, marketers and executives to understand consumer behaviour and BC phenomena in Thailand and, perhaps, to some other developing countries which have a similar environment to Thailand.

Ultimately, the findings of this study will be a guide for marketers and companies in Thailand to develop their marketing strategy. Focusing on the BC might be a more effective and efficient way than focusing only on typical loyalty programmes. Moreover, understanding the mechanism of rewards enables the marketers to tailor the marketing strategy by utilising schedules of reinforcement to control such communities more effectively in the long run. These anticipated results will provide an opportunity for researchers and marketing practitioners to understand consumer behaviour in Thai BC in order to provide an appropriate and successful strategy in response to this phenomenon.

## **1.9 Structure of this Thesis**

This thesis is structured in ten chapters:

Chapter 1 introduces the chapter, and the themes which it outlines will be elaborated in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2 provides a critical review of the literature on BC, VC, sense of community, collective intentionality and on the BPM.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology of the qualitative multiple-case study which is applied in this study.

Chapter 4 presents the data findings from the primary data collection in relation to the seven case studies.

Chapter 5 presents the results of the cross-case analysis of seven car-consumer clubs and provides an overview of Thai car-consumer clubs in order to understand the nature of BCs in Thailand.

Chapter 6 discusses the first proposition, which is related to rewards that members receive from the clubs in relation to functional and symbolic reinforcement.

Chapter 7 discusses the second proposition, which further elaborates the discussion of the first proposition in terms of the effects that the rewards have on consumer behaviour. Evidence of rule-governed behaviour is also presented in this chapter.

Chapter 8 presents a discussion of the third proposition by demonstrating the importance of the reward “status”, which plays a central role in these car-consumer clubs. This chapter also offers an account of status and symbolic reinforcement.

Chapter 9 portrays the rationale behind the significance of status and explain why status should counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs. This chapter also presents the role of collective intentionality in the emergence of Thai car-consumer clubs.

Finally, Chapter 10 demonstrates the implementation of the BPM's three level of analysis to present consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs. The key research questions will be answered in this chapter. The implications of the study, the contributions of the study, research limitations, and recommendations for further research are also provided in this final chapter.

## **Chapter Two**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

As previously stated in Chapter 1, this study aims to investigate consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs by exploring the nature of the phenomena and explaining consumer behaviour by implementing the Behavioural Perspective Model (BPM) in the interpretation of consumer behaviour in Thailand. Since there has been no similar research which has employed the BPM in the explanation of consumer behaviour in the Brand Community (BC), this study fills this gap in the literature by offering another perspective in the analysis of consumer behaviour in a BC. Accordingly, this chapter is organised in two main parts. The first part of the chapter is concentrated on the theoretical foundations of the BC and related theories of the nature of the case studies. This part is composed of four sections:

1. An overview of the VC and its terminology;
2. An overview of a BC, including three main principles of BC and types of BC;
3. The motivation of people who participate in these communities;
4. The theory of sense of community and the sense of community index is described.

The second part of the chapter is concerned about the theoretical foundations of the BPM, which is a key theoretical approach in the interpretation of consumer behaviour in this study. There are five sections in this part:

1. An overview of operant conditioning;
2. A detailed description and discussion of the BPM and its components including the rule-governed behaviour;
3. The three levels of interpretation of consumer behaviour;

4. A discussion and description of intentional consumer and the notion of collective intentionality; and,
5. An application of the BPM in Thai car-consumer clubs is presented.

## **Part I: Brand Community**

### **2.2 Virtual Community**

The introduction of World Wide Web (WWW) in the 1990s made the concept of virtual networks commonplace for many people worldwide (Flavian and Guinaliu, 2005). The Internet has allowed people to form a new type of community from new social constructs (Maclaran and Catterall, 2002). This new type of community is extensively known as “virtual community” (VC). The advent of the VC has created a new platform for international people to connect with one another across diverse and dispersed locations. The Internet has enabled people to communicate and interact from any place and at any time (Wellman et al., 1996). The communication in VC can be either synchronous (real-time or at the point of time) such as chat rooms and messenger services, where members can send instant message and promptly interact to one another, or they can be asynchronous (time-delayed or not at specific times) such as bulletin boards, message boards, newsgroup and email, where members can read and respond to messages on different schedules (Wellman, 1996; Kozinets, 2002; Maclaran and Catterall, 2002; Lea et al., 2006).

Since the concept of VC has become a current trend for people in fragmented societies (Firat, 1991, 1992; Cova, 1997), research on VC has gained considerable attention and many researchers are currently investigating this phenomenon in various disciplines, such as: business economic, e-commerce, psychology, information technology and marketing. Accordingly, there have been a number of attempts to clarify this concept as well as to define its terminology. However, there is still no common agreement on the definition of the term virtual community due to the fact that VC is a multidimensional research topic (Leimeister et al., 2006). In light of the controversies in the definitions of

VC, its terminology can be divided into four groups of perspectives: social, economic, technology, and multidisciplinary.

The first group, social perspective, focuses on socially motivated relationships via the Internet. For instance, Rheingold (1993: p.413) proposes a definition of VC as “*social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in the cyberspace.*” Meanwhile Bagozzi and Dholakia (2002) mention VC as a social space that is primarily supported by a continuous process of communication.

The second group, economic perspective, concerns commercial benefits exchanged via computer-mediated spaces. For example, Balasubramanian and Mahajan (2001) define VC as an aggregation of people who engage social exchange processes that include mutual production and consumption and shared objectives, property/identity, and interest. In the same manner, Gupta and Kim (2004) define VC as a group of unknown people with the same opinions who form relationships to share knowledge and to engage in an economic relationship.

The third group, technology perspective, emphasises technological systems that connects people in VC. For instance, Romm et al. (1997) refer to VC as a group of people who interact with others through the support of technological communication. Gay et al. (2007) highlight that people nowadays can interact with one another through information technologies instead of face-to-face. In common with Hesse (1995), he states that VC supplements geography with computers and information superhighways. Likewise, Erickson (1997) points out that VCs are a computer-mediated with large groups over a long period of time.

The fourth group is multidisciplinary and it tries to conquer the confusion among broad and loosely defined terms of VC by combining all related views together in a single, multidisciplinary perspective. For instance, Whittaker et al. (1997) state that members in VCs engage in repeated active participation, access to shared resources, reciprocity of information, shared social context, and have some shared vision that provides the primary reason for belonging to the community. Preece (2000) defines VC as consisting

of socially interacting people with a common purpose to satisfy their own needs, such as interest need and information exchange, rules that guide people's interactions, and computer systems. Similarly, Leimeister et al. (2006) also point out that VC consists of interacting people who shared common interest, problems or tasks, technical platform and implicit and explicit codes of behaviour. Among the array definitions of VC, the most often quoted VC definition is:

*Groups of people with common interests and needs who come together on-line. Most are drawn by the opportunity to share a sense of community with like-minded strangers, regardless of where they live. But virtual communities are more than just a social phenomenon. What starts off as a group drawn together by common interests ends up as a group with a critical mass of purchasing power, partly thanks to the fact that communities allow members to exchange information on such things as a product's price and quality. (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997: p. 143)*

According to the aforementioned definitions, VC can be classified into several typologies based on the main focus of the research, such as: member behaviour, community's purpose, or members' motivation to participate (Markus, 2002). Hagel and Armstrong (1997) classify VC into four types based on the purposes to meet consumer needs, which are: communities of interest, relationship building, and transactions that focus on economic and social dimensions. Markus (2002) classifies VC into social, professional, and commercial orientation which also concerns economic and social dimensions. It can be noticed that most of the VC definitions and typologies are overlapping in all three perspectives (social, economic, technology), which makes it difficult to categorise unambiguously. Therefore, all of these perspectives will be taken into consideration when exploring the nature of Thai car-consumer clubs in order to find the most appropriate definition for use in the car-consumer clubs in Thailand.

## 2.3 Brand Community

The BC is defined as “a specialised, non-geographically bounded community, based on a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand” (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001: p.412). The concept of a BC argues that the traditional scope of the

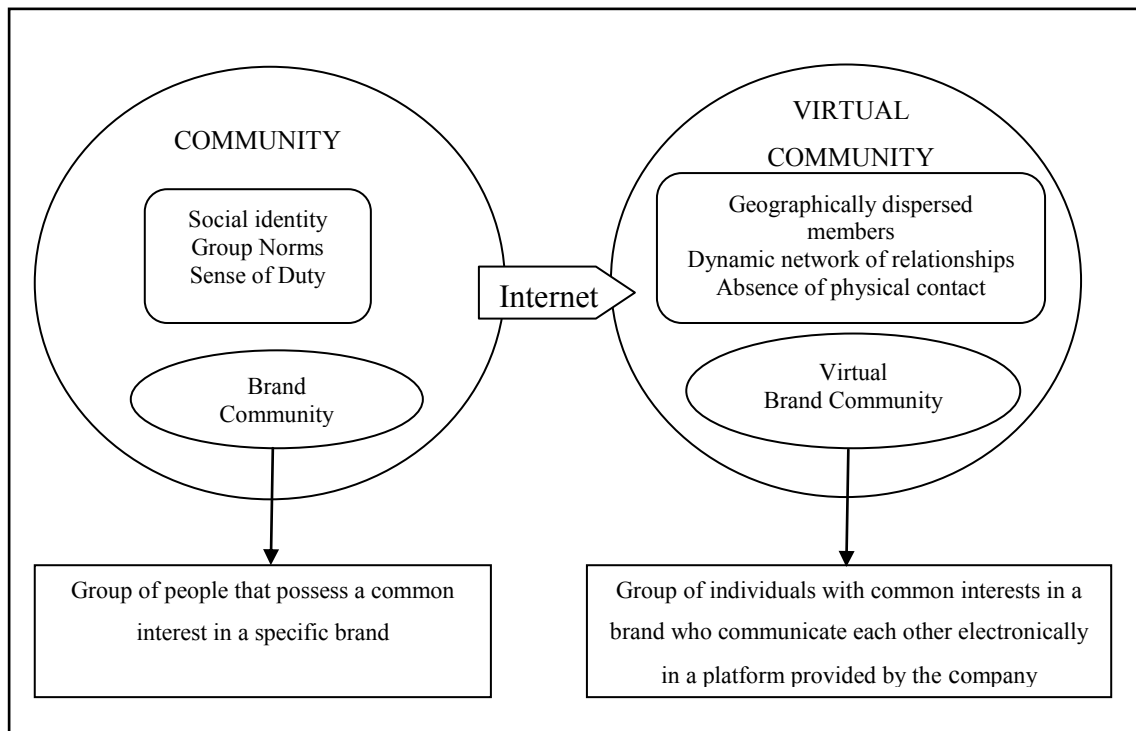
community concept is specified by the territory. Tonnies (1912) proposes that communities can be seen as an intimate and private geography. Andersen (2005) argues that the development of the Internet brings people into a new movement which overcomes time and space constraints. Devasagayam and Van Den Heuvel (2008) view the concept of a geographical bound community as no longer an issue for people who develop relationships via the Internet, which leads to a new kind of community replacing geographical restrictions. Similarly, Muniz and O'Guinn (1995) assert that the BC phenomenon not only appears in any particular place but it can also appear in any location beyond geographical boundaries. The idea of a non-geographical bounded BC is supported by numerous researchers (e.g. Schau and Muniz, 2002; Andersen, 2005; Flavian and Guinaliu, 2005; Cova et al., 2007; Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder, 2008; Dionisio et al., 2008; Devasagayam et al., 2010).

Davidson et al. (2007) consider that the issue of territory of the BC can be apprehended by a sense of community, which is called "imagined community". The idea of an imagined community was first proposed by Anderson (1983). Anderson (1983) in his analysis of the concept of the nation states that members in a community connect to one another through their mental image of affinity, which is related to neither geography nor language but to mind and feelings. Shaw (2007) asserts that the growth of technology and the mass media has expanded the feelings of community as evidenced by VCs. This is similar to the BCs in the sense that the BCs exist in their member's minds. The BC members feel a sense of belonging to an unmet community of like-minded people (Shaw, 2007). Although the members never meet each other, they share sense of belonging through their consumption of the same brand and products in the communities such as the magazine community (Davidson et al., 2007), the Nutella Spread community (Cova and Pace, 2006).

Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) find that both concepts of BC and VC are overlapping but not synonymous because the Internet plays a main role in supporting BC. Thus, it can be stated that VC and BC are overlapping concepts in terms of non-geographical boundaries and that both of them exist through the sense of belonging of members in such communities. The Internet plays an important role in connecting people worldwide into communities. Flavian and Guinaliu (2005) state that a BC can be

produced by a VC that has developed around the brand, which can be called a virtual BC. Given the important role of the Internet, Sicilia and Palazón (2008) show the evolution of the BC which begins from an offline BC and then moves to a virtual BC (see Figure 2.1).

**Figure 2.1: The Evolution from Offline Communities to Virtual Communities**



Source: Sicilia and Palazón (2008: p.258)

Nevertheless, McAlexander et al. (2002) argue that the concept of BC can be both geographically concentrated and non-geographically concentrated (i.e. on the Internet). Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008) also state that the concept of BC includes both online and offline groups. For example, a geographically concentrated community often arises in the ethnic diasporas in the USA (Quinn and Devasagayam, 2005), which reveals that the BC can be built on a sense of ethnicity and in some cases of small groups of BC (such as Jeep Jamborees and Harley Davidson) (McAlexander et al., 2002; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006) whose brand company regularly organises events for members to gather loyal customers and build a BC.

In light of the physical concentrated communities, many studies support the view that offline activities strengthen the relationship of members and enhance the community

strength (e.g. Kozinets, 1999; Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Langerak et al., 2003; Koh and Kim, 2003; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Shang et al., 2006; Casalo et al., 2007; Schouten et al., 2007). The offline activities support their member's connections in the physical world and so increase the solidarity and cohesiveness of the community by providing a synergy to online communications (Koh and Kim, 2003; Shang et al., 2006; Casalo et al., 2007). These activities can increase the sense of belonging of members of the communities (Lin, 2007). As a result, both online communication and offline activities perform as complementary functions to the BC.

Returning to the concept of the BC, it may be stated that the BC can be developed either from VC then extended to the offline or physical world, or they can be extended from the physical world to VC. Most of the previous studies have investigated existing communities that are already established in society; meanwhile, the background of how these communities are created has still only been briefly mentioned. Therefore, this study will explore the car-consumer clubs from their origin in order to reveal the background of those clubs in addition to the nature of the BCs in Thailand.

### **2.3.1 Brand Community Characteristics**

A brand community is characterised by three underlying markers: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and shared sense of moral responsibility (or sense of duty or reciprocity) (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Cova and Cova, 2001; Quester and Fleck, 2010).

#### **2.3.1.1 Consciousness of Kind**

Consciousness of kind represents a "we-ness feeling" among members who belong to the same community, which is the collective sense of identity experienced by members of BC (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2005). Members feel connected to the brand and similarity to one another in the same BC (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2005). The we-ness feeling or feeling of togetherness relies on intimate social

relationships of members in the community and it represents the forms of “we are together” and “we are friend” (Nilsen, 2005: p.123). It refers to the sense of connection between the members in the BC towards the brand or product of their own use and other members (Cova, 1997). In line with Dionisio et al. (2008), the we-ness of a community can be expressed through consumption. There are often times when members in the BC feel that they know one another even though they have never met (Muniz and O’Guinn 2001). Hence, the consciousness of kind represents a sense of social connection between members in the BC.

In addition to the consciousness of kind, legitimacy and oppositional brand loyalty are two additional features which are generally found in the BC (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; O’Guinn and Muniz, 2005). Legitimacy presents the degree of closeness to the brand and it can indicate true members of the BC (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). It relates to the degree to which consumers truly know the products, which leads members in BC establish a hierarchical status inside the community. Schouten and McAlexander (1995) find that the hierarchical status of members within the BC is generated from the level of commitment and brand authenticity. Accordingly, members are likely to control the brand and make their own judgements in order to identify others who are appropriate to the brand and who are not (O’Guinn and Muniz, 2005). These members tend to oppose a new member who uses the brand and products for the wrong reasons (Muniz and Schau, 2005). As a result, they can discourage a new adopter who merely joins the BC without sincerity and not for (what they consider to be) the right reasons.

Oppositional brand loyalty shows members of a BC differentiate their brand from other brands: “we are different from them” (O’Guinn and Muniz, 2005: p. 260). It is a sense of “us” versus “them” (Muniz and Hamer, 2001; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). It often shows in members’ offensive behaviour toward competing brands, such as insulting consumers of the competing brand and challenging the other brand consumers to defend their choice (Muniz and Hamer, 2001). In agreement with Hickman and Ward (2007), there is a potential for members in BC to provoke negative views and actions toward rival brands, such as producing negative communication about rival brands. This is because of the strong feeling of membership with other members which generates a collective friendship in the group of a particular brand and this makes them oppose the

rival brands (Amine and Sitz, 2004). For instance, Apple enthusiasts and users are likely to forcefully reject Microsoft (Fournier and Lee, 2009). Similarly, loyal customers of Nikon and Canon are likely to reject one another because they consider the other to be an enemy brand (Amine and Sitz, 2004). Moreover, there is a tendency of oppositional brand loyalty in soft drink brands, particularly Coke and Pepsi (Muniz and Hamer, 2001). Accordingly, the legitimacy and oppositional brand loyalty can be observed from members' behaviour and this represents their strong connection to the BC.

### **2.3.1.2 Shared Rituals and Traditions**

The second core characteristic of BC is the sharing of rituals and traditions. The rituals and traditions represent social processes through which the meaning of community is reproduced and transmitted within the community (Szmigin and Carrigan, 2006). Members of the BC generally create their own norms and cultures within their community, including: celebrating the history of the brand, sharing brand stories and myths, create special lexicon and icons as code of conducts and to reify the community (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2005; Schau and Muniz, 2007). McAlexander et al. (2002) argue that the rituals and traditions are not only created by BC members but they can also be created by brand producers. They suggest that the rituals and traditions can be coproduced by members of the BC and brand producers.

The stories shared by members of BC are related to the usage of the brand, the associations with the brand, and the knowledge about the brand (Roll, 2006a). Most of their stories are based on the member's experiences of the brands and products of their use, which will be repetitively told from member to member. The history of the brand can enhance the sense of sacredness of the brand, and this leads members to have more appreciation of the brand. For instance, Muniz and Schau (2005) examine the narratives that the Apple Newton community users share with one another and found that the tales can strengthen the brand and enhance the power of the brand. Consequently, storytelling is an essential device to create and maintain BC (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2005; Muniz and Schau, 2005; Schau and Muniz, 2006;

Schau and Muniz, 2007). This is because narratives are important to human social existence, as well as to communities (Schau and Muniz, 2006).

### **2.3.1.3 Shared Sense of Moral Responsibility**

The last distinctive characteristic of BC is a shared sense of moral responsibility or sense of duty. It refers to an inherent sense of duty which BC members have for their BC as a whole and for other members individually (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Lawer, 2005). This sense relates to an appropriateness of what members will do and what the effect will be on others (Hollenbeck et al., 2006; Szmigin and Carrigan, 2006). It also obligates members to generate and share knowledge to one another with selflessness within the community (Ardichvili et al., 2003). Consequently, the sense of moral responsibility reflects on the collective actions and the member’s contribution to the group in terms of reciprocating behaviours (Chan and Li, 2010).

Collective actions include recruiting new prospective members to the community as well as retaining existing members, and sharing their product knowledge and experience of using the product with one another (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; O’Guinn and Muniz, 2005). These collective actions also appear in the case of an anti-BC such as anti-McDonald’s and anti-Starbuck’s whose anti-brand members provide reciprocal exchange of ideas, advice, and support to other community members which demonstrate their common moral obligation (Hollenbeck and Zinkhan., 2006). Furthermore, members in BC provide assistance to one another regarding the brand and product usage and other problems (Schau and Muniz, 2002). For example, the Nikon and Canon users correspond to other users who use the same brand and/or product via their website, showing their assistance to others with regards to their products (Amize and Sitz, 2004). Saab owners assist other Saab people by sharing information, such as: recommended dealers, parts suppliers and other technical information (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001). These kinds of reciprocity will keep the community alive (O’Guinn and Muniz, 2005) and sustain supportive relationships and collective actions in community (Shumaker and Brownell, 1984). Therefore, the sense of moral

responsibility is another essential component in BC because it will reinforce the community strength and sustain the community in the long run.

#### **2.3.1.4 Justification of Car-Consumer Clubs as an Example of Brand Communities**

According to the BC traits, the car-consumer clubs in Thailand appear to fit the criteria in this respect because they have all of the three key principles identified in the literature: consciousness of kind, rituals and traditions, and sense of moral responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). The shared consciousness of kind is seen from the members' online interaction, such as comments and suggestions. They also welcome new members who join by saying "welcome to join us", which represents their we-ness feelings. They have also organised regular offline events, which can be seen from the photos that they have posted on the website, representing their rituals and traditions. Furthermore, they also have moral obligations, which can be seen from their responses to the questions on the web-boards when other members ask questions about car issues. Therefore, the car-consumer clubs in Thailand can be seen to be an example of BCs which is capable of further investigation. Additional details of the description and the nature of Thai car-consumer clubs with regard to the literature of BCs will be presented in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5.

#### **2.3.2 Types of Brand Community**

There are many ways to look at BC type when conducting research. It can be classified by the type of products (Muniz and Schau, 2005; Davidson et al., 2007) or service provider (Fraering and Minor, 2006). It can also be categorised by the formation of the group (Kang, 2004; Jang et al., 2007), which is of particular interest in this research project.

Jang et al. (2007) classify online brand communities into two major groups according to the community initiators. One is a company-initiated community that is operated by the brand owner company. The reason for this community is to build a relationship directly

with consumers and to manage customer feedback. The other is a consumer-initiated community which is built by the voluntary community members who are loyal to the brand.

This is in agreement with Kang (2004), who divides brand communities into two main types according to the activities within the group: the first is a customer-led community and the second is a marketer-led community. Activities in the customer-led community are held by the customers with the aim to promote human relationships among community members. These activities can include exchanging product information, exchanging their experience of product usage, and trading products. Meanwhile, in the marketer-led community the activities are created by marketers and brand owner in order to build the brand and consumer relationships.

As can be seen, the extant literature has distinguished the types of BC into two main categories, which are: company-led communities and customer-led communities. A company-initiated BC is a community that sponsored-companies organise in order to build and maintain relationships with their customers, such as a loyalty programme. A consumer-initiated BC is a community that is set up by customers with the aim of sharing their mutual interest, exchange information, and share their feelings towards the products and brands. The consumer-initiated BC is deemed to be more interesting in terms of loyalty to the products and brands. These groups of consumers are authentic consumers who represent their affiliation to the products and the brands by creating a community of their possession. Hence, this study will investigate the consumer-initiated BC in order to find consumers' motivation to create and participate in the car-consumer clubs.

## **2.4 Motivation to Participate**

In general, the motivations for individuals to join the group include the human need to belong and affiliate with others, and to join a group that can serve individuals with information as well as give rewards that help them achieve goals (Watson and Johnson, 1972). Similar to the reasons for participating in regular groups, people participate in

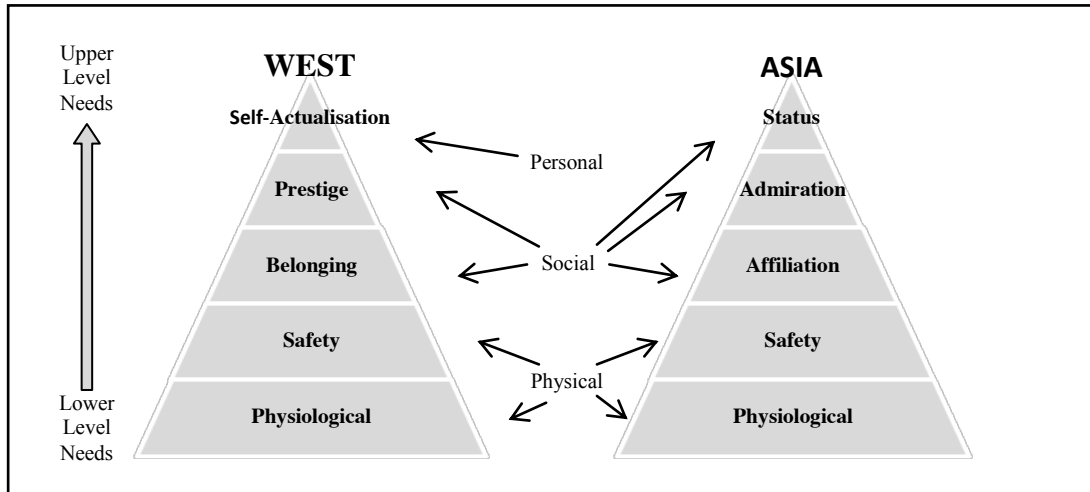
BCs because of the needs of social belonging and the status of membership, position, and social class identification (Laine, 2006). In accordance with Sukoco and Wu (2010), many of the member's questioned in this study mentioned that their two basic motives to integrate into a BC are their needs for affiliation and status. Social need is one of the main influence factors on consumer consumption that motivates people to be a part of the group (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Lazer, 1996). Hence, it can be said that social need (or desire) is the main drive that motivates people to participate in the BC.

Since the main motivation for people to participate in a BC is related to the needs of individuals, Bishop (2007) recommends that hierarchical needs theory (Maslow, 1943) is a practical theory to use to investigate the motives of people who participate in such communities. Maslow's hierarchical needs theory is extensively used to explain the psychological needs of people. Likewise, the theory is also applied to understand consumer consumption (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1994; Lazer, 1996; Schutte and Ciarlante, 1998). It is also used in the VC of consumption, such as in BC (Kim, 2000; Bishop, 2007). Bishop (2007) states that the members participate in a BC because of their individual needs (as suggested by Maslow's hierarchical needs theory).

Nevertheless, it is possible to critique Maslow's hierarchical needs theory because the model was built based on Western countries and cultures (Roll, 2006b). The assumptions of the model might be relevant to Western cultures where there are high individualistic and materialistic attitudes (Solomon et al., 2002), they might also be specific to these cultures. The individualist and collectivist culture is one of the main factors that have an effect on VCs (Talukder and Yeow, 2006). It has been argued that the Maslow's hierarchical needs theory model is unable to capture other influence factors, like culture, which may have an impact on people in different cultural settings, such as in Asia (Roll, 2006b; Amornchevin, 2006). This happens because the cultures in Asia are collectivist (Usunier, 2000) where the relationship between individual and group appears to be stronger than in an individualist culture (Mead, 2005). Consequently, Asian people are likely to place a high value on interpersonal relationships and social interactions (Roll, 2006b). Because of this criticism, Schutte and Ciarlante (1998) have redefined the Maslow's hierarchy by focusing on Asian

consumers and they have proposed another pattern of hierarchy of needs which is relevant to Asia (see Figure 2.2).

**Figure 2.2: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Asian Equivalent**



Source: Schutte and Ciarlante (1998: p.93)

According to Schutte and Ciarlante (1998), social needs are the highest level of needs for people in Asia because Asian cultures place high values on group norms and behaviours that reflect on the need to be a part of society and represent their social status from the image of the products and the brands (Schutte and Ciarlante, 1998). Similarly, Roll (2006b) also mentions that Asian people prioritise interpersonal relationships and social interactions, which reflect on the social needs of Asian cultures. This is consistent with the study of Thai cultural values by Komin (1990) which reveals that Thai people place high values on social interaction, which is shown in their smooth interpersonal relationship orientation. Consequently, Thai people prefer harmony and pleasant interactions. The Thai also place value on ego orientation, which affects social interaction in terms of paying respect to one another and avoiding criticism. Furthermore, fun-pleasure orientation (or enjoyment) is another important value that maintains social relationship among the Thai. Because the majority of Thai people are Buddhist, the religion-physical orientation plays a main role in Thai society. Consequently, the Thais like to make merit by doing good deeds in society and they participate in religious and philanthropic activities, such as donation and charity work (which is called “Tamboon”) (Komin, 1990). As stated above, Thailand is one of the Asian countries which is acknowledged as collectivist culture (Hofstede, 2009);

therefore, the social needs and cultural values of the Thai are very important aspects to investigate to see whether or not they have an influence on the integration of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand.

Furthermore, in the BC, people are able to join and seek benefits from the BC (such as information, knowledge and friendship). Accessing and acquiring information is one of the cited reasons for membership in the literature (Wellman, 1996; Romm et al., 1997; Ridings and Gefen, 2004) because individuals can learn from others' experience in such communities (Romm et al., 1997). Accordingly, knowledge and information are valuable resources in the communities (Rheingold, 1993; Hitz and Wellman, 1997). As important as knowledge and information is, individuals who participate in BC often seek for friendship to share their common interests, values, or desire in the communities (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996; Rheingold, 2003). Thus, friendship is another valuable resource that becomes a motive for individuals to participate in these communities (Ridings and Gefen, 2004).

As can be seen, there are lots of reasons for people to participate in the BC, many of which are due to different needs of individuals. The members' behaviours in the BC vary at different levels. Shang et al. (2006) mention that participation means "taking part in" or "contributing to" activities or events which can be measured by specific behaviours. Accordingly, participation in a BC can be referred to the member's posting behaviours in the virtual world (Mathwick, 2002) and taking part in the offline activities in the physical world (Shang et al., 2006).

Research of VC generally defines the types of members according to their participatory actions in the communities. Blanchard and Markus (2004) state that there are two types of people who participate in these communities: active and passive. Active members have posted and responded to messages while passive members have merely read the messages. Both types of members are combined in the BC, where it is difficult to indicate active and passive members. As stated earlier, members in a BC have a sense of belonging to their community, and participation in both online and offline activities will increase the sense of community of members. Therefore, the sense of community is

probably an indicator which is able to identify active members and passive members based on their participation in the club.

## 2.5 Sense of Community

The concept of sense of community (hereafter, SC) has been used to investigate members in communities in various settings, such as the SC in: a university or college (Mahan et al., 2002; Lounsbury and DeNeui, 1996), the neighbourhood (Glynn, 1981; Chavis et al., 1986; Perkins and Long, 2002; Bishop et al., 2002); classroom (Graft, 2003); the religious worshippers (Miers and Fisher, 2002; Legee, 2007); organisation (Hughey et al., 1999); and VC (Koh and Kim, 2001, Blanchard and Markus, 2004). The SC is one of the main concepts of community psychology (Sarason, 1974). SC is mostly concerned with feelings of belonging and faithfulness to community (Puddifoot, 1996; McMillan, 1996). This sense indicates that true members of the community are tied with affective bonds (Blanchard and Markus, 2004). SC is an interactive process between individuals and their community that varies at different points of time or can be changed from time to time (Loomis et al., 2004).

McMillan and Chavis (1986: p. 9) define SC as *“a feeling that members have of belonging, a feeling that members matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members’ needs will be met through their commitment to be together.”* They further added that the SC will occur when individuals obtain four benefits from joining group, which are: membership, influence, integration, and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connections. Descriptions of the features of these four elements are given below:

- 1) Membership refers to a *“feeling that one has invested part of oneself to become a member and therefore has right to belong”* (McMillan and Chavis, 1986: p.4). In addition, there are some attributes underpinning the membership which are common symbols system, emotional safety, and personal investment (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Bess et al., 2002). A common symbols system is a function to create the group and maintain the group. The symbols can include: logos,

landmarks, names, flags, ceremonies, dress, language and rituals which indicate the boundaries between in-group and out-group members (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Emotional safety refers to the sense of security that members feel of belonging in their group. Personal investment is an intention to contribute to the group that leads to members' participation for membership status (Bess et al., 2002).

- 2) Influence is a bidirectional concept by which members must be empowered to have influence over what the group does and the group has some influence over the member (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). It is a sense of mattering to one another in the group (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). Influence is an internal process that reflects the perceived influence which individuals have from their behaviours in the community (Bess et al., 2002); hence, it relates to individuals' feelings of empower from the group and the group influence on individuals or the exchange of power (McMillan, 1996). The influence allows individuals to freely express their own expressions and contributions to community, which is a positive outcome. Nevertheless, it creates potential drawback in that the member's behaviour in the community can be dominated by the influence of people in the group (Rosenbaum et al., 2005).
- 3) Integration and fulfilment of needs is a primary function of strong community because it is a motivator of behaviour to maintain a positive sense of togetherness, which is called "reinforcement" (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). It is a reward for members that individuals derive from their participation in the group (Bess et al., 2002). The rewards which the individual's will receive can include the status of membership and the self-competency so that the needs of individuals will be fulfilled through group membership (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Bess et al., 2002).
- 4) Shared emotional connections refer to the desires of members to acknowledge the community's identity or histories that add to their self-identity in the group (Rosenbaum et al., 2005). They are results of commitment and shared beliefs of members towards their community (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Accordingly,

the members of the community are often share a history, rituals, common places, tradition, time spent together, and experiences which generate emotional connections among members (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Consequently, the members often set up events that gather community members, that bond them together, and which have significant impact on the development of shared emotional connections between members (Bess et al., 2002). Bess et al. (2002) state that the member's shared emotional connections are influenced by the number of events that they participate in, and the importance of events in granting status to members and to the community as a whole.

### **2.5.1 Sense of Community Index**

The definition of the SC was proposed by McMillan and Chavis (1986). Based on this definition, Chavis et al. (1986) developed the Sense of Community Index (hereafter, SCI) which is related to the four elements described above. Chavis et al. (1986) propose the SCI which are twelve true/false items to assess the sense of community in terms of four elements. Obst and White (2004) state that there is a twofold importance of the SCI: firstly, it has been empirically shown by various studies that it has served as a good theoretical foundation of the study of SC (Brodsky, 1996; Chipure and Pretty, 1999; Obst et al., 2002a; Obst et al., 2002b; Obst and White, 2004; Peterson et al., 2006); secondly, it measures psychological sense of community in diverse settings, such as geographic or residential communities (Chavis et al., 1986; Pretty et al., 2006), religious communities (Leege, 2007), organisation (Hughey et al., 1999), classroom and student community (Rovai, 2002; Graft, 2003). Nevertheless, it can be argued that the SCI can as equally be applied to measure the SC in non-geographic communities as in the VC.

As stated earlier, the advent of technology, particularly the Internet, has generated a new form of communities in the shape of VC, which transcend geographical boundaries. In VC, people also share values, beliefs and norms that construct a sense of community in the VC (Preece, 2000). The members of a VC define a community for themselves and make it exist in their minds, which develops the SC in their feelings

(Petroczi et al., 2007). There is empirical support that the SC genuinely exists in VC. Chin and Chignell (2007) have studied the SC in blogs and social networks, and they have found evidence of SC in the blogs. Similarly, Blanchard and Markus (2004) observe the SC in VC and found that the SC exists in VC. Furthermore, research of the sense of VC by Koh and Kim (2003) also supports the SC in VC. Therefore, it can be concluded that the application of SCI can also be undertaken in settings without geographical boundaries because in VC there is evidence of SC in such communities.

In a similar manner, the SC has also been brought into the study of consumption communities. For instance, Carlson et al. (2008) illustrate the psychological sense of brand community which is an evidence of the SC in BC. Likewise, Fraering and Minor (2006) have empirically tested the sense of community measurement, which is developed from the SCI, in the consumer communities of financial services. These findings also support the view that SC exists in consumer communities and that the SCI can be implemented to search for consumers who have a sense of membership in financial services communities. Furthermore, Rosenbaum et al. (2005) explores the loyalty programmes based on four benefits that individuals obtain, which represent the SC of consumers. Based on previous studies, it can be said that the findings reveal that SC exists in consumer communities and the suggestion is that it can be implemented to search for active participants in these communities. Therefore, this study will adopt the SCI to categorise members into different types of membership in the clubs.

It can be noticed that most of the extant literature on BCs has adopted social theory and social psychology in order to understand the BC phenomena. However, research which implements behaviourism in explaining consumer behaviour in the BCs is still slim. Although some previous studies may have mentioned the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Mzoughi et al., 2010) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Dholakia et al., 2004; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006) in the participation in BC, they are related to social and cognitive psychological processes which have been critiqued because they lack attitude-behaviour consistency (Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005; Foxall et al., 2006) and do not address the behavioural approach and the rewards which maintain the member's participation in the BC. Therefore, this thesis implements the Behavioural Perspective Model as proposed by Foxall (1990), which is a neo-Skinnerian model

developed from Skinner's operant conditioning, to explain consumer behaviour in the BC in order to add another view from behaviourism in interpreting the BC phenomena. Accordingly, the next part of the chapter will provide a theoretical background of BPM and the other relevant theories to the model.

## **Part II: The Behavioural Perspective Model**

### **2.6 Operant Conditioning**

Prior to the development of BPM, operant conditioning, which is one of the theoretical foundations of behavioural learning theories, was highlighted as a prior knowledge to the model. Operant conditioning, also known as instrumental conditioning, is a form of learning process which occurs when individual's perform behaviour and then learn by a trial and error process. This person then learns how to act upon the consequences which produce a positive outcome and avoid negative consequences (Foxall et al., 1998; Solomon et al., 2002). Operant conditioning was empirically tested by B. F. Skinner (1953). Skinner (1953) demonstrated the effects of operant conditioning by training animals (such as pigeons and rats) and then experimenting with them in the Skinner's box, which is also called operant chamber. In the experiment, Skinner provided rewards to the trained animals for desired behaviours (Solomon et al., 2002). For instance, when a hungry rat presses the lever then a pellet of food is delivered and, consequently, the rat learns that there is a connection between the lever and food pellets so that whenever it presses the lever it will obtain the food, this is a positive consequence. According to the experiment, the lever functions as stimulus, the food is the reinforcer, and the rat response is the operant behaviour.

Skinner has shown in his experiments that a response, or act, of an organism is voluntarily based when it produces a specific outcome on the environment (Rachlin, 1976). Consequently, operant conditioning is a learning process through which an individual comes to deal effectively with a new environment (Skinner, 1969). Malott et al. (1993) summarise that a behavioural contingency consists of the occasion for a response, a response, and the outcome of the response.

Foxall et al. (1998: p.92) state that the simplest form of the operant conditioning framework is composed of Antecedent stimuli (A), Behaviour (B) and its Consequences (C); which can be portrayed as:

$$\mathbf{A : B : C}$$

Where A refers to elements of the setting (physical or social) that signal the outcomes of the response (rewarding or punishing) that are likely to follow from the action of a particular behaviour (B). The colons indicate that the relationships involved are probabilistic in that A does not automatically direct to B as well as B to C (Blackman, 1980 cited in Foxall et al., 2006: p.115). Mazur (2006) states that there is a contingency between behaviour and consequences by which the consequences will occur if, and only if, the behaviour occurs.

Skinner (1969) points out that there are three components in operant conditioning contingency. The first is the context or situation in which a response occurs, such as stimuli that precede the response. The second is the response itself. The third is the stimuli that follow the response, such as the reinforcer. These three components are known as three-term contingency and usually consist of:

1. Antecedence or discriminative stimuli (stimulus) behaviour;
2. Operant response; and,
3. Reinforcement/punishment (Skinner, 1969).

Accordingly, Foxall (2003: p. 582) summarises the basic diagram of the three-term contingency as:

$$\mathbf{S^D \rightarrow R \rightarrow S^R}$$

Where  $S^D$  is a cue or discriminative stimuli (stimulus), R is a response, and  $S^R$  is a reward or reinforcing stimulus (stimuli).

Operant conditioning deals with the modification of operant (voluntary) behaviour by which the behavioural consequences can be controlled and shaped (Evans et al., 2009). The responses can control the desired behaviour based on the reward and punishment through a shaping process. The tendency of specific behaviour occurrence is a result of the outcome of that behaviour. The consequences of this behaviour have an influence on the frequency, or probability, of the recurring behaviour. As a result, the frequency of recurred behaviour can be customised according to the consequences of the outcome (Evans et al., 2009).

According to Skinner (1969), the consequences of the outcome can either come in the form of reinforcement or punishment. The term “reinforcement” straightforwardly refers to the action of a reward on voluntary behaviour (Rachlin, 1976). It is the process that results when reinforcers are delivered (Mazur, 2006). Reinforcement is a consequence, which could be positive or negative, that affects behaviour to recur with greater frequency or which strengthens behaviour (Solomon et al., 2002). Positive reinforcement occurs when a response is strengthened or increased in frequency by favourable outcomes (such as praise) that is rewarding after the behaviour. Meanwhile, negative reinforcement occurs when a response is increased in frequency by the removal of an unpleasant outcome after the behaviour. On the other hand, the punishment is a consequence that affects behaviour to decrease. Therefore, the event that appeared to increase or maintain the likelihood of recurring behaviour which it is associated to is functioned by a reinforcer (Mazur, 2006). The reinforcers are could either be a primary or a secondary reinforcer. Primary reinforcer (sometimes known as unconditioned reinforcer) describes a stimulus that does not require pairing to function as reinforcer because it intrinsically reinforces the behaviour by satisfying biological needs for survival (such as food and water). A secondary reinforcer (sometimes known as conditioned reinforcer) describes a stimulus that requires pairing with a primary reinforcer through a learning process that associates with satisfying biological needs (such as money and tokens) (Foxall, 1997a).

## 2.7 The Behavioural Perspective Model

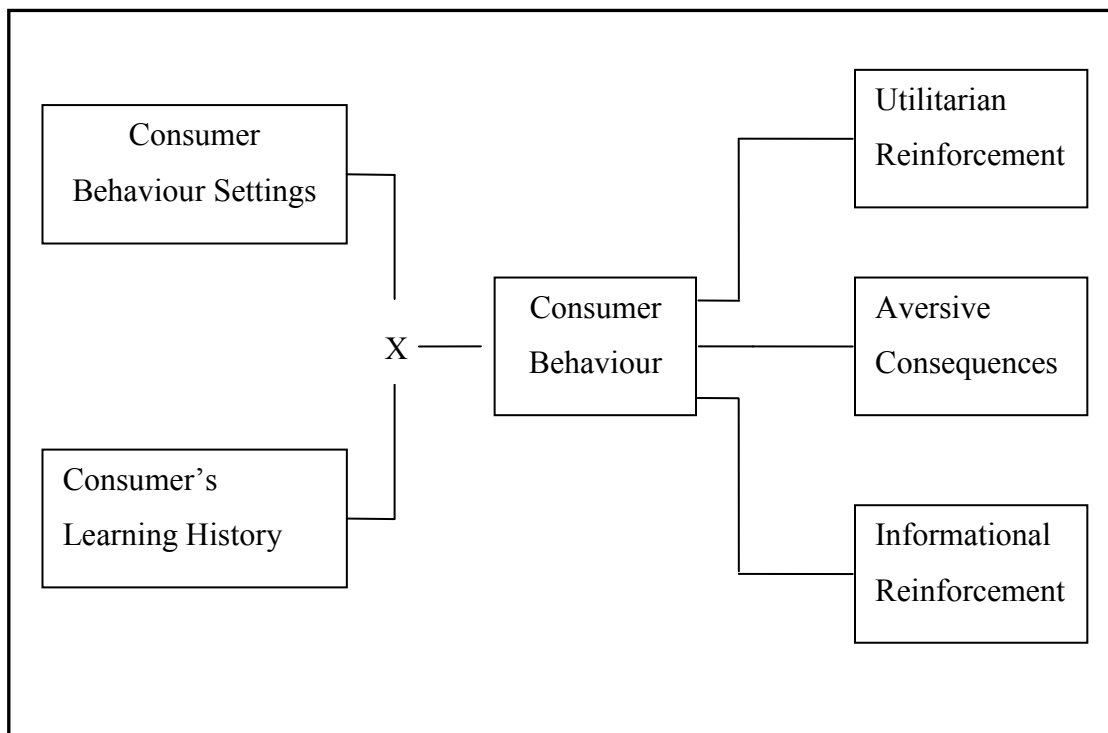
Since Skinner has empirically proved that the environment has an influence on operant behaviour, the idea of operant conditioning has been applied in many disciplines (such as organisation behaviour, psychology, medicine as well as in consumer behaviour). Previous research in consumer behaviour has traditionally borrowed from cognitive theories (Jacoby et al., 1998 cited in Foxall et al., 2011) and predominantly explains consumer behaviour by emphasising cognition (such as information processing theories) (Simonson et al., 2001). Moreover, researchers have widely employed the TRA (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980) and the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) to predict consumer behaviour by measuring attitudes and beliefs. Foxall (1997b) argues that the link between attitudes and action is much weaker than had previously been assumed. As pointed out by Skinner, the importance of environmental influences on operant behaviour and the effect of situational variables on behaviour and behavioural approaches, which might be an alternative to predict consumer behaviour, should be taken into account in consumer research.

Consequently, Foxall (1990) proposes an alternative account to interpret consumer behaviour by concentrating on the behaviours of consumers and the environment within these occurring behaviours. He asserts that the pattern of reinforcement that was previously received by the individual can effectively predict their behaviour. He adds that modifying the situation in which it takes place by making the reward or the reinforcement is dependent on new responses which can change behaviour (Foxall, 1990, 1997a, 1998, 2005, 2010a). Consequently, Foxall (1990) offers a model which illustrates an interpretation of consumer behaviour on purchase and consumption which is built on the assumption that consumer behaviour is functioned by environmental consequences, which is the BPM.

Foxall and Goldsmith (1994) point out that the BPM is based on the three-term contingency approach which indicates two main situations that are related to behaviour. The first is the antecedent of behaviour, or pre-behaviour stimuli, which can be used to predict and control the behaviour settings elements. It also shows how the behaviour setting elements can interact with an individual's learning history. The second is the

consequences or post-behaviour outcomes which can explain the behaviour that has occurred as a function of reinforcement and punishment consequences which are signalled by the stimuli. However, it is important to note that although the pre-behaviour stimuli functions as a signal that indicates the consequences (which could be reinforcement or punishment) when a specific action is performed, they do not usually have a spontaneous effect on the action.

Accordingly, the heart of the model lies on the concept of a consumer situation that locates consumer behaviour at the intersection of a consumer-behaviour setting and the consumer's learning history (Foxall, 1994; Foxall et al., 2006). In addition, the model also concentrates on the function of utilitarian (i.e. functional benefits of consumption that are mediated by the used-value of product) and informational consequences (i.e. symbolic benefits that mediated by other persons) which have an impact on the consumers' learning history, thus creating a new consumer situation (Foxall et al., 2006; Foxall et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2011). In summary, the BPM can be applied to predict consumer behaviour from two dimensions of situational influence: consumer behaviour setting and the pattern of reinforcement (utilitarian and informational) which are signalled by the setting based on the consumer's learning history (Foxall, 1998). In agreement with Wells et al. (2011), the BPM suggests that the environmental consequences which it produces are the most significant determinant of behaviour. The BPM is illustrated in Figure 2.3, and it will be elaborated in detail in the subsequent sections.

**Figure 2.3: The Behavioural Perspective Model**

Source: Foxall (1997a: p.79)

As previously mentioned in section 2.5.1, most of the research in BC interprets the BC phenomena in relation to social theories and cognitive approaches, such as the TRA in small BC (Mzoughi et al., 2010) and the TPB (Dholakia et al., 2004; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006). Little research on the topic of BC has addressed the influence of environment on consumer behaviour in the community, particularly the rewards or benefits from the community which can affect on members participation in the BC. Therefore, the BPM is considered to be an appropriate interpretive device in explaining the consumer behaviour in the study because it can serve the objectives of the study. Likewise, it will provide a constructive framework for the study to investigate consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs, which presumably functioned by rewards from the clubs. Furthermore, the BPM also provides a perspective of the environmental influence on consumer behaviour that is less mentioned in the study of BC, thus it can add to the body of knowledge of the study of BC.

### **2.7.1 Components of the Behavioural Perspective Model**

Although the BPM is built on the fundamental explanatory principles of behaviour analysis, the model has two distinct points of emphasis which make its explanatory stance different from the original versions of radical behaviourism. Foxall (1998) reports that the two emphasising points are: firstly, the extent to which behaviour can be manipulated varying upon the scope of the setting within which the behaviours occurs; and secondly, that there are bifurcations of reinforcement which are utilitarian and informational that are separated effect on behaviour. Accordingly, the BPM incorporates two variables, which are a continuum of (relatively) open/closed behaviour settings and the degree to which the reinforcement is signalled by these stimuli functions in place of unitary constructs of discriminative stimuli and reinforcement (Foxall, 1998). Therefore, the main components of the BPM consist of consumer situation, behaviour, and consequences of behaviour. The consumer situation is defined as, *“the intersection of an individual’s learning history and behaviour setting”* (Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005: p.519). The consequences of behaviour which are signalled by the stimuli are utilitarian reinforcement, informational reinforcement and aversive outcomes.

### **2.7.2 Consumer Behaviour Settings Scope**

According to BPM, the behavioural settings could be either relatively open or closed settings. Both are characterised by discriminative stimuli that identify controlling elements and that are antecedents of current behaviour (Foxall, 2010a). The relatively closed settings are those settings that are shaped and maintained by contingencies which are intimately and explicitly controlled, and specified by marketer. In contrast, the relatively open settings are not controlled by contingencies and they are unconditionally specified by marketers (Foxall, 1997a).

Consumer behavioural settings refer to a scope of place at the moment of the behaviour takes place (Foxall, 1997a, 2010a). In other words, the discriminative stimuli (sometimes known as cues) play a vital role in behaviour settings by way of signalling

the potential consequences of consumption activities and purchasing behaviour (Foxall et al., 1998). Consequently, Foxall et al.(1998) suggest that there are two principal ways in which marketers and researchers can manipulate the situations to urge consumer actions, which are: firstly, by controlling the environment; and secondly, by generating rules in consumption settings. These aspects are associated in the consumer situation theory offered by Belk (1975). Belk (1975) has classified the consumer situational characteristics based on the general features from previous taxonomies of consumer situation into five groups: physical, social, temporal, task definition, and antecedent states. Foxall et al. (1998) argue that the task definition and the antecedent states place more attention on personal factors and may be a part of the situation and, therefore, of the environment. Consequently, Foxall et al. (1998) have modified the consumer situation contexts and have categorised these into four contexts: physical, social, temporal, and regulatory.

The physical context refers to apparent attributes of a situation that stimulate a sensory system, such as: location, decoration, sounds, and smells (Belk, 1975). This can include store atmospherics (Kotler, 2000), point-of-sale advertising, and store logo (Foxall, 1997a). This is related to the tangible physical and intangible aspects of the environment which encompass consumer action (Mowen and Minor, 1998). The physical contexts are also integrated with the geographical and institutional location which can be seen as the environment (such as access to a website and reading a catalogue) (Nicholson et al., 2002). Thus, the physical contexts in car-consumer clubs can include the website design (such as colours and themes of the webpage, website layout, photos, and the contents of the website) and the offline activities (such as the events' atmosphere) which can have an influence on the members' behaviours.

The social context is typically related to other persons who are able to provide additional accounts of the situation (Belk, 1975). It deals with other people influences on a consumption condition (Mowen and Minor, 1998). Solomon et al. (2002) state that the social context has an influence on consumers' decisions. There are often occasions where consumers' decisions rely on other people comments and, therefore, other people appear to be a reason to purchase. The roles of other people (such as suggestions and an interrelation with other consumers) are able to mediate the consumers' awareness

(Nicholson et al., 2002). Thus, member's recommendations, comments, and suggestions in the car-consumer clubs could be related to social context because it can have an influence on members' behaviours.

The temporal perspective is related to the time that can stipulate the situation, such as a time constraint (Belk, 1975). Consequently, time allocation and the timetable of the consumers can have an impact on their behaviour (Foxall et al., 1998). Solomon et al. (2002) find that social time is the relationship between social processes and schedules in society; time is a temporal factor that affects consumer behaviour. The social time (such as institutional schedules, opening hour, working hours) are interrelated temporal incidents which will determine human activity. This involves the question of time availability, which has an impact on the consumer's ability to devote themselves to the interaction in their activity. For example, some members participate in VC only casually when they have some leisure time (Prykop and Heitmann, 2006). Therefore, the availability of time or time constraint has an effect on consumer behaviour because it can mean that they spend less time on their consumption activities (Nicholson et al., 2002). Therefore, the temporal context in the car-consumer clubs could be time availability for the club due to the social time (such as working hours) which can have an effect on consumer behaviour in the clubs.

The regulatory context refers to social and personal rules that identify individual behaviour which are appropriate to the settings (Foxall et al., 1998). In a similar manner, Solomon et al. (2002) recommend that people should develop their own norms or informal rules that govern their behaviours in order to be functional in their society or club, this leads them conform to the group owing to group pressure. Thus, rules and regulations, social manner and social norm in the BC may have an effect on consumer behaviour in BC. Foxall (1997a) finds that although the rule-governed behaviour is social phenomenon, it should be treated separately. Therefore, the rules and rule-governed behaviour will be further described in subsequent section. The consumer behavioural settings is summarised in Table 2.1.

**Table 2.1: Consumer Behaviour Settings**

<b>Contexts</b>	<b>Definitions</b>	<b>Example</b>
Physical	Physical surroundings that can encourage behaviour from the expected benefits which consumer may receive.	Store Logo, store layout, catalogue, website, website atmosphere, aesthetics.
Social	Consumer purchasing and decision-making to consume products and service that are affected by other people such as friends, sales staff, other consumers.	Salesperson, friends comments, social roles.
Temporal	The time allocation and timetable of the consumers which will have an impact on behaviours.	Store opening time, schedule, seasonal, special occasion, time availability, delivery service, self-check in, automated machine.
Regulatory	Social and personal rules for appropriate behaviour.	Rules and regulations, social manner, social norm.

Source: this study

### 2.7.3 Learning History

Foxall (2001) suggests that the effect of behaviour setting depends on individual learning. The experience of use in products and service has an influence on the recurrence of consumer behaviours. In general, an appropriate behaviour is encouraged by positive experience of consumers while a negative past experience causes consumers to avoid that behaviour. This happens because the learning history is transformed to discriminative stimuli by adding meaning into the elements that signal the specific performances of the consumer to endorse the setting (Foxall et al., 1998).

Accordingly, learning history plays a role by adding meaning to the components which direct the consumer to make the behaviour setting by transforming them into discriminative stimuli. Such discriminative stimuli function as a signal to specify outcomes for consumer behaviour perform in this setting. For example, the aforementioned process can be applied to explain the learning history about the brand. A brand which provides good service to consumers over time will prove its credibility and so achieve a value-added status. In contrast, a brand which offers poor conditions to consumer will fail to achieve a positive association because of the lacking reminder

from the consumers (Doyle and Stern, 2006). Laing et al. (2011) highlight that it is important to understand the history and background of becoming a member in the VC because it is key to understanding their behaviour. Therefore, in this study of Thai car-consumer clubs the members' learning history will also be observed from their story and experience of becoming a member in the clubs. If they have a positive learning experience with the BC then they are likely to maintain their participation while if they have a negative learning experience with the BC then they are likely to reduce their participation rate and eventually leave the clubs.

### **2.7.4 The Consequences of Behaviour**

As previously stated, the discriminative stimuli that compose the behaviour setting are antecedent stimuli which signal three kinds of consequences: utilitarian reinforcement, informational reinforcement, and aversive consequences (punishment) (Foxall, 1992, 1997a). However, the study will focus on the role of positive consequences, or reward, which has an effect on continued participation in the car-consumer clubs. Thus, the effect of punishment will only be slightly addressed in terms of the rules of the clubs because it is clear that people who break the rules will be punished by these clubs by being blocked and having their membership account deleted. These people are no longer current members and as such they have had to be excluded from the unit of analysis of this study.

#### **2.7.4.1 Utilitarian Reinforcement/Functional Reinforcement**

Utilitarian reinforcement is highlighted as *"the practical outcomes of purchase and consumption, that is, functional benefits derived directly (rather than mediated by other people) from product and service possession and application"* (Foxall, 2004: p.239). It refers to functional benefits which consumers derive from their consumption (Foxall, 2010a). In general, utilitarian goods and services are typically recognised as products and services that consumers are motivated to purchase due to their functional aspect (Hirschman and Holbrook, 1982). The functional aspect is a consequence of buyer

behaviours from intrinsic properties of the products and service because utilitarian reinforcement obtains from both the functional utilities of the product, and service and ownership feelings towards the products and services (Foxall, 1997a). Consumers will perceive the utilitarian reinforcement when they become owners and use those products and services. Consequently, the utilitarian reinforcement is mediated by the product or service from their use-value (Foxall et al., 2006). Therefore, utilitarian reinforcement in this study describes the functional benefits which members will receive from their participation and which motivate them to maintain their participation in the BC. Since the utilitarian reinforcement is much related to functional benefits of the properties, in the analysis this study will replace the term utilitarian reinforcement with functional reinforcement.

#### **2.7.4.2 Informational Reinforcement/Symbolic Reinforcement**

Informational reinforcement is described as “*symbolic, usually mediated by the responsive actions of others, and closely akin to exchange value.*” (Foxall, 1997a: p.82) While functional reinforcement describes the direct benefits of the direct possession of products and services, informational reinforcement is more concerned about the social aspect or feedback from others (Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005). According to the BPM, informational reinforcement is not related to the typical definition of the word “information”, but it refers to a specific information response on an individual’s performance or accomplishment (Foxall, 2010a). Thus, informational reinforcement stands for the symbolic reinforcement which an individual achieves from their performance, such as: social status, social esteem, prestige and acceptance. It is a state of pleasure from consumption experiences that concerns social judgement. In other words, the individual will not perceive the informational reinforcement if their consumptions have no feedback from others. Informational reinforcement is in contrast to utilitarian reinforcement by way of being mediated by other people’s reaction and it is not mediated directly by the commodity.

As Foxall et al. (2007) point out brand differentiation is related to symbolic reinforcement due to price differentiation and the image of the brands because the most

promoted and well-known brands tend to be involved with higher levels of prestige, social status, and trustworthiness. Thus, products and services that have symbolic status and have social meanings (such as car and, social exclusive groups) can serve as informational reinforcement. Consequently, informational reinforcement is usually mediated by others, or through performance feedback (Foxall et al., 2007). Therefore, informational reinforcement in this study is used to describe the symbolical benefits which members will receive from their participation and that motivate them to maintain their participation in the BC. Since informational reinforcement is considerably related to symbolical benefits and performance feedback, in its analysis this study will replace the term informational reinforcement with symbolic reinforcement.

Foxall (1997b, 2008b) states that utilitarian and informational reinforcement can be assessed by observing verbal expressions from the respondents' emotional responses because the verbal expressions of emotional responses are mediated by positive and negative classically conditioned attitudes as a result of utilitarian and informational reinforcement, and behaviour setting scope (Foxall and Yani-de-soriano, 2005). Foxall and Yani-de-soriano (2005) find that utilitarian reinforcement is related to pleasure in terms of a respondents' verbal assessment of the environment as happy, pleased, satisfied, contented, hopeful and relaxed. Informational reinforcement is associated with arousal in terms of verbal reactions to an environment that show the respondent to be stimulated, excited, frenzied, jittery, wide-awake, and aroused. Meanwhile, dominance is related to the openness and closeness of the consumer behaviour setting, which is reflected in the verbal appraisals of the respondent. Feelings of controlling, being influential, in control, important, dominant and autonomous indicates the openness of the settings; whereas, feelings of controlled, influenced, cared-for, awed, submissive and guided indicates the closeness of the settings. Thus, this study will observe the functional and symbolic reinforcement which the respondents mention based on these emotional responses from their verbal utterance since it has been proved to be significant in the relationship between emotional outcomes and the BPM (Yani-Soriano et al., 2001; Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005).

In conclusion, both symbolic and functional reinforcement are independent variables in the BPM, which are usually combined in the pattern of reinforcement that can

strengthen consumer behaviour (Foxall, 2010a). This happens because the effects of both types of reinforcers may be strengthening each other (Foxall, 1997a). Some reinforcers might have both utilitarian and informational effects, such as money. Consequently, the interpretation of the meaning of reinforcers is dependent upon the situation under investigation (Foxall, 1997a). Furthermore, Foxall (1997a) suggests that the expressions of pleasure or usefulness identify utilitarian (functional) reinforcement, whereas the considerations for status/self-esteem identify informational (symbolic) reinforcement. Accordingly, the interpretation in this study will consider functional and symbolic reinforcement from the context of an investigation based on interviews by looking for the pleasurable/usefulness and social/personal functions of reinforcers when identifying functional and symbolic reinforcers, respectively.

### **2.7.5 Contingency-Derived Reinforcers and Rule-Derived Reinforcers**

As previously mentioned in section 2.6, reinforcers are usually distinguished as either primary or secondary. Foxall (1997a) finds that a more useful functional distinction made of reinforcers is made between contingency-derived reinforcers and rule-derived reinforcers. Contingency-derived reinforcers could be both primary and secondary reinforcers and they have an effect on the contingency-shaping of behaviour upon its environment. In general, these reinforcers are associated with pleasurable effects. Examples of primary reinforcers include eating sugar while secondary reinforcers include food, furniture, and music (which have a utilitarian effect or pleasant outcome); therefore, contingency-derived reinforcers are utilitarian reinforcers.

Foxall (1997a) further adds that rule-derived reinforcers are always secondary where the effect is on rule-governed behaviour that is specified by the rules (i.e. social group rules). Thus, the rule-derived reinforcers are social and verbal, and they have an effect on behaviour that is mediated by others. It is crucial to note here that ‘the other’ may either be other people or the individual themselves. Examples of rule-derived reinforcers are an individual’s level of achievement of socially (or personally) prescribed goal which derives power from the social status and/or self-esteem. Consequently, rule-derived reinforcers are informational reinforcers. It can be

concluded that the difference between contingency-derived reinforcers and rule-derived reinforcers is that most of the contingency-derived reinforcers are utilitarian reinforcers that are associated with pleasurable effects while the rule-derived reinforcers are informational reinforcers in relation to social and verbal feedback.

### **2.7.6 Rule-Governed Behaviour: Linking the Variables**

As mentioned earlier in section 2.7.2, the consumer behaviour settings also contain discriminative stimuli in a regulatory context, which appears in the form of rules (Foxall, 1997a). The term “rules” in the theory of “rule-governed behaviour” (RGB) was first coined by Skinner which is used to observed verbal behaviour (1957, 1966, 1969). The behaviour that is controlled by verbal stimuli is RGB (Brownstein and Shull, 1985; Catania, 1989; Malott, 1989; Skinner, 1989; Malott et al., 1993). According to Skinner, the “rule”, in his use of the term, means a contingency-specifying stimulus (Skinner, 1969). To Skinner, the verbal statements indicating contingencies of reinforcement or punishment (such as a simple command or instruction) have been largely recognised as rules (Baumann et al., 2009). The discussion of the meaning of the term “rules” has remained an ongoing issue of debate in the behavioural literature (Schlinger, 1990). To date there is debating on the terms of the rule in behavioural analysis in which one group is focusing on the rules as antecedence of behaviour or a guide/an instruction of behaviour (e.g. Skinner, 1966, 1969; Glenn, 1987) while another is expanding the scope of the function of the rules to discriminative stimuli or instruction that specify a response which will be reinforced or punished, and controlling behaviour (e.g. Schlinger and Blakely, 1987; Vaughan, 1987; Catania, 1989; Malott, 1989; Schlinger, 1990; Malott et al., 1993; Kunkel, 1997; Catania, 1998; Peláez and Moreno, 1999; Törneke et al., 2008).

Glenn (1987) defines rules as environmental events regardless of whether or not the responses might be controlled by them. Schlinger (1990) criticises this definition because it puts an emphasis on environmental events while ignoring the responses, whether or not they are controlled by them. He argues that that the effect of the rules does not only restrict work as being strictly reinforcement-based and punishment-based

but they also mean that the rule statements can function so that individuals comply to the rule to avoid aversive conditions. Likewise, Catania (1989) proposes that the rules should be defined in terms of the effectiveness in controlling behaviour. Malott (1989) points out that although most behaviour analysts predominantly place emphasis on the rule's function as a discriminative stimulus, they tend to overlook the role of the rules as an establishing operation.

Schlinger (1990) also highlights that the interpretation of rules should be focused more in terms of function-altering, or contingency-specifying, stimuli rather than seeking other terms to fit the rules. Blakely and Schlinger (1987) offer an alternative account to interpret the rules where the rules operate as function-altering contingency-specifying stimuli where the rules can change the function of stimuli in many ways rather than viewing the rules merely as discriminative stimuli. This happens because the key element of any RGB is the listener; hence, the effectiveness of the rules is dependent on the listener, whether or not the rules are followed (Hayes et al., 1989).

One of the main factors to rule-following behaviour is the motivation of the listener (Hayes et al., 1989; Malott, 1989). Motivation involves those settings that will actualise the nonverbal functions in coordination with verbal functions (Hayes et al., 1989). Malott (1989: p.291) proposes that the rule should be considered as a "*motivating operation*" rather than as a cue; in other words, the rule statement can increase the reward value of stimuli to stimulate compliance with the rule, or even increase the aversive value of stimuli to stimulate noncompliance with the rule. Moreover, Malott (1986, 1989) adds that the rule-statement's function as a motivating operation is a result of a behavioural history which involves reinforcement for compliance and punishment for noncompliance. Similarly, Michael (1982: p.149) refers to an "*establishing operation*" where the two effects of the rules operational on behaviour increase the effectiveness of some object or event as reinforcement and evoking the behaviour that is followed by such object or event. This is in accordance with the meaning of "rules" in the BPM, which define "rules" as signal of the consequences which have motivating operation power. Foxall (2010a: p.80) defines "rules" as: "*A rule signals the reinforcing and punishing consequences of behaving in a particular manner; it also*

*derives its motivating power from the individual's learning history which determines the meaning of behaviour in the circumstances."*

Accordingly, the behaviour that occurs as a result of the rule statement, or behaviour which is under the control of a rule, is considered as RGB (Malott, 1989; Malott, 1993; Malott et al., 1993). Any behaviour that will be considered as RGB happens when the responses or behaviours are controlled by a verbal description of a contingency of reinforcement, or punishment rather than the contingency itself (Cerutti, 1989). Therefore, behaviour which is controlled by a verbal antecedent is RGB (Hayes and Hayes, 1989).

A significant focal point on the theory of RGB is placed on the speaker and listener. Zettle and Hayes (1982) state that there are two sets of distinct contingencies that are involved with RGB: the first is directly related to the behaviour of interest while the second is related to verbal antecedents of such behaviour. It can be noticed that two sets of distinct contingencies are composed of the verbal stimuli of the speaker and the behaviour of the listener. Foxall (2010a) points out that the verbal behaviour of the listener when considering consumers' RGB should be taken into consideration.

One of the useful accounts for considering verbal behaviour of the listener is proposed by Zettle and Hayes (1982). Zettle and Hayes (1982) offer an account of functional units of listener behaviour which parallels Skinner's functional units for the speaker, their account is composed of pliance, tracking and augmenting.

In this account the first type of rule-following is pliance, which is defined as "*rule-governed behaviour primarily under the control of apparent speaker-mediated consequences for a correspondence between the rule and the relevant behaviour.*" (Zettle and Hayes, 1982: p.80; Zettle and Young, 1987: p.5). The term "ply" is a rule itself for pliance (Zettle and Hayes, 1982; Poppen, 1989). In an observation of the verbal behaviour of the speaker, the statements that imply the expected action from the listener are contained in the words "would" and "should". The statements of Plys can be observed by the words "would" and "should" from the speakers. Moreover, the word

“should” can be used when giving advice from the speaker and it has an effect on the listener (Skinner, 1989).

Examples of pliance can be seen when someone asks a person to do a favour and that person does, or when a person behaves in accordance to their self-rules which come from learning history with reinforcement mediated by others (Törneke et al., 2008). Behaviour (such as following orders and commands) is also considered as pliance (Hayes et al., 1998). Pliance can occur when an individual does something in order to please someone who asks them to do it or when an individual conducts themselves by their own self-rules from their learning history where reinforcement is mediated by others (Zettle and Hayes, 1982). Pliance can also occur despite an absence of social reinforcers whenever a person has seen the effects of their prior history of socially mediated consequences (Hayes et al., 1998).

Accordingly, when the listener is being controlled by the speaker who mediates the consequence, the behaviour of that listener is considered as pliance. In other words, RGB as pliance is established by social mediation of the consequences. As Zettle and Young (1987: p.33) state: “*Pliance is controlled by socially-mediated reinforcement for a correspondence between the ply and behaviour.*” In this sense, social variables play an important role in pliance. Therefore, social variables have an impact on controlling this type of rule-following. Hayes et al. (1998) assert that pliance is imperative in rule-following because persons cannot follow the rules in the first place if there is no pliance.

Tracking is a second type of rule-following. It is the RGB “*under the control of the apparent correspondence between the rule and the way the world is arranged*” (Zettle and Hayes, 1982: p.81). It is rule-following in response to a “track”, which is the rule itself (Hayes et al., 1989; Poppen, 1989). A track functions as a kind of signpost in guiding behaviour which specifies environmental contingencies that already exist before the rule was stated (Hayes et al., 1998). To put it simply, tracking is controlled by a history of contacting such consequences. Therefore, tracking can be reinforced by building a history that can control behaviour by the specification of increasing non-immediate and probabilistic consequences (Hayes et al., 1998). Tracking occasionally

occurs as private event; for example, using manuals or written instructions as a behavioural guideline for individual behaviour (Poppen, 1989).

Augmenting is a type of RGB whose consequences or contingencies are not specified as pliance and tracking (Zettle and Hayes, 1982). The augmental is different from either a ply or a track because it specifies the contingencies that the listener has not yet experienced or even contacted at the present, and the consequences can still be abstract and not necessarily able to be directly contacted to put forth control over behaviour (Törneke et al., 2008). Moreover, the augmental motivates a particular behaviour by pointing to the comparison between the listener's current state of deprivation and the augmental itself and by drawing attention to its outcome, which is to be reinforced or punished (Foxall, 1994, 2008b). Augmenting usually exists in a mixed form with pliance or tracking (Zettle and Hayes, 1982). It can be regarded as the most advanced form of RGB which will result in behaviour when it interacts with another two types of rule-governed behaviour (Hayes et al., 1998; Törneke et al., 2008). People act on an augmental where the consequences may appear at a subsequent time. Consequently, the result of an augmental seems difficult to monitor in terms of performance within a limited period of time. Regarding this study, which is a cross-sectional research, the RGB as augmenting is deemed to be too difficult to trace due to the change in behaviour; therefore, the analysis of augmenting is excluded from this study.

Poppen (1989) refers to the consequences for rule-following that can be mediated by the agent. According to Poppen (1989), the rules can be distinguished into four categories by the agent who conveys the rule and the agent who conveys reinforcement. The first category is a rule which is similar to "track" in Zettle and Hayes (1982) and "advice" in Skinner (1957; 1989). The consequences of this type of rule are mediated by the physical or social environment, while the rule-giver is indifferent to whether or not the rule is followed. For instance, the sign "Do Not Walk" showing the environment is a reinforcer of such a rule. The second category is a rule which is called ply, which was termed by Zettle and Hayes (1982), and is similar to "command" in Skinner's verbal behaviour term. The consequences of this type of rule are only mediated by a social agent who provides the rule. An example of a social rule which requires individuals to conform is combined in this category. The third category of rule is

“congruent”, which is a sort of combination between track and ply. Accordingly, the consequences of this rule are mediated by both the rule-giver and the environment. The fourth category of rule is “contrant”, which is a sort of combination between the reward and punishment. The consequences of this type of rule are administered by both the rule-giver and the environment, but they are in conflict.

In addition to the RGB that is issued by other people in self-governing, there are several rules formulated by the individuals themselves that control their own behaviours. These rules are called self-rules and they represent those rules in which individuals are a non-separate form of the speaker and listener (Zettle and Hayes, 1982). To put it simply, the speaker and listener is the same individual, or the speaker is listener on his or her own (Catania, 1986; Poppen, 1989; Kunkel, 1997; Greer and Speckman 2009). In a similar manner, Foxall (2010a) describes that on some occasions an individual can be both a speaker and a listener who sets one own rules for his/her conduct.

Sometimes people set their own rules, or instructions, which relate to goal-setting and self-reinforcement procedures (Malott, 1989). Persons who conduct self-instructions are likely to describe their own contingencies and act in response to such descriptions as though other people gave it to them (Vaughan, 1985). Vaughan (1985) states that self-instruction can evoke appropriate behaviour quicker than direct contact with contingencies so that it can function as an effective discriminative stimulus for subsequent behaviour. Similarly, Skinner (1969) mentions that individuals can react more effectively by self-formulating rules when their contingency-shaped behaviour weakens.

Zettle and Hayes (1982: 90) state that “*self-tracking occurs when we act as if the rule is to be followed because it is a description of the state of affairs;*” and that “*self-pliance occurs when we act as if the rule is to be followed simply because it has been formulated.*” On some occasions an individual can generate their own self-rules, which can be followed as a guide of their future behaviours under the control of socially mediated consequences (Hayes and Hayes, 1989; Zettle, 1990; Hayes, 1993; Kunkel, 1997; Hayes et al., 1998). Poppen (1989) points out that individuals may add self-evaluative instructions that reinforce themselves to perform, and this transforms

tracking into self-pliance. Consequently, the verbal behaviours which function as plys become self-plys conducting an individual's own behaviour to conform their self instruction (Poppen, 1989). Skinner (1989) points out that plys and self-plys can be observed from the keyword "should", "would", "have to", "ought to" that indicate an individual speaking to themselves and conducting their behaviour.

As described above, the function of the rules and RGB, return to BPM, rules connect the consumer behaviour setting, and the pattern of reinforcement are most likely to reinforce the current behaviour of consumer (Foxall, 2010a). Foxall (2010a: p.83) states that *"rules may act as surrogates for an individual's learning history by relating current discriminative stimuli to the utilitarian and informational reinforcement available in and signalled by the setting"*. This happens because of the ability to generate the rules for rule-following of people comes from learning through a history of social reinforcement (Kanter et al., 2005). The histories of conditioning that are related to favourable outcomes plays a role in individual behaviour to follow instructions (Galizio, 1979). Whether or not the listener will behave in conformity to the rules depends on the contingencies that are specified by the speakers in the rule, the context within which that the rule is presented, and the listener's history relevant to that rule or other rules that similar (Peláez and Moreno, 1999). It is implied from this that learning history plays a significant role in the ability to generate the rules for rule-following and following those rules. As a result, the rule cannot be separated from the consumer's learning history (Foxall, 2010). Therefore, this study will examine RGB from the interviews in order to identify the learning history of consumers and their behaviours in Thai car-consumer clubs.

## **2.8 Operant Interpretation of Consumer Behaviour**

### **2.8.1 Three Levels of Interpretation**

Foxall (1994, 1997a, 2010a) proposes three successive and interactive levels of interpretive analysis which can be used to interpret consumer behaviour. The three

levels of interpretation consist of the operant class, the contingency category, and the consumer situation; they are elaborated in more detail below:

#### **2.8.1.1 Level 1: The Operant Class**

Foxall et al. (1998) suggest that consumer behaviour can be defined in the operant terms by reference to the relatively high/low levels of functional and symbolic reinforcement maintaining it. Consequently, four operant classes of consumer behaviour have been proposed. Each kind of operant class consists of a set of responses that correspond in terms of the pattern of reinforcement that maintain them and irrespective of their topographical similarities or differences (Foxall, 1997a). These four operant classes of consumer behaviour can be described as: accomplishment, hedonism, accumulation, and maintenance (Foxall, 1994, 1997a; Foxall et al., 1998; Foxall, 2010a); as illustrated in Figure 2.4.

The first operant class, accomplishment, relates to the pattern of consequences that contain high levels of both functional and symbolic reinforcement. This involves the acquisition of symbolical consumptions as well as the activities that are able to fulfil sensations. This requires both social and economic achievement to maintain such behaviours.

The second operant class, hedonism, relates to a pattern of consequences that are linked with high levels of functional reinforcement but low levels of symbolic reinforcement. This is an outcome of all forms of popular entertainment and activities to treat state of negative feelings.

The third operant class, accumulation, relates to the pattern of consequences from saving and collecting habits which have low levels of functional reinforcement but high levels of symbolic reinforcement.

The fourth operant class, maintenance, relates to the mandatory activities which are used for survival, such as foods and the duty of citizenship such as paying tax. These

are consequences to control behaviours to be a member of society which are produced by low levels of both functional and symbolic reinforcement.

**Figure 2.4: Operant Class**

	<b>High Utilitarian Reinforcement</b>	<b>Low Utilitarian Reinforcement</b>
<b>High Informational Reinforcement</b>	<b>Accomplishment</b>	<b>Accumulation</b>
<b>Low Informational Reinforcement</b>	<b>Hedonism</b>	<b>Maintenance</b>

Source: Foxall (1997a: p.89)

### 2.8.1.2 Level 2: The Contingency Category

The BPM proposes eight contingency categories which summarise the contingencies of reinforcement concerning to a set of consumer situations (Foxall, 1997a). Each contingency class is considered as three separate binary variables that represent behaviour setting (open-closed), utilitarian reinforcement (high-low), and informational reinforcement (high-low) (Foxall, 2010a) (See Figure 2.5). Foxall (1997a) notes that those consumer situations and behaviours which assigned to the contingency matrix are defined functionally not their structure. He further adds that some similar behaviour can be assigned in more than one category depending on the particular environmental determinants that are to be highlighted, and that identical behaviours may be allocated to other contingency categories in different times depending on the interpretation of the combination contingencies maintaining them.

Accomplishment in an open setting can be described as status consumption (CC1) which consists of the purchase and consumption of status goods, such as luxuries and radical innovations. Accomplishment in a closed setting refers to fulfilment (CC2). The fulfilment category includes personal attainment (which has an element of recreation or excitement) and personal achievements (which are mainly maintained by social rules such as being a part of exclusive social group and conforming to its code of behaviour). This is a closely defined behaviour in order to participate (i.e. obtaining membership and behave in an appropriate manner) (Foxall, 1997a).

Hedonism in an open setting is described as popular entertainment (CC3), such as watching a television shows and reading fiction, which provides hedonic rewards and a sensation. Hedonism in a closed setting refers to inescapable entertainment (CC4), such as in-flight movies; although this behaviour is potentially pleasurable, it is still unavoidable.

Accumulation in an open setting refers to saving and collecting (CC5), such as the accumulation of coupons or other tokens before obtaining a product and instalments payment for full amount return (e.g. instalments for a holiday). Accumulation in a closed setting refers to token-based consumption (CC6), such as air-mileages earned by airline frequent flyers, hotel accumulated points, and credit card points which consumers can collect and redeem for a reward.

Maintenance in an open setting refers to routine purchasing and consumption (CC7), such as habitual grocery purchasing of supermarket items. Maintenance in a closed setting can be described as mandatory consumption (CC8), which includes all forms of behaviour necessary to remain a citizen (such as tax payments).

**Figure 2.5: Contingency Matrix**

	<b>BEHAVIOR SETTING SCOPE</b>	
	Closed ←	→ Open
<b>ACCOMPLISHMENT</b> (High Utilitarian, High Informational)	<b>Contingency</b> Category 2 (CC2) FULFILMENT	<b>Contingency</b> Category 1 (CC1) STATUS CONSUMPTION
<b>HEDONISM</b> (High Utilitarian, Low Informational)	<b>Contingency</b> Category 4 (CC4) INESCAPABLE ENTERTAINMENT/ PLEASURE	<b>Contingency</b> Category 3 (CC3) POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT
<b>ACCUMULATION</b> (Low Utilitarian, High Informational)	<b>Contingency</b> Category 6 (CC6) TOKEN-BASED CONSUMPTION	<b>Contingency</b> Category 5 (CC5) SAVING AND COLLECTING
<b>MAINTENANCE</b> (Low Utilitarian, Low Informational)	<b>Contingency</b> Category 8 (CC8) MANDATORY CONSUMPTION	<b>Contingency</b> Category 7 (CC7) ROUTINE PURCHASING

Source: Foxall (1997a: p.95)

### **2.8.1.3 Level 3: Consumer Situation**

The third level of analysis implements the elements of the consumer situation in which they occur (as previously mentioned). This relates to particular responses, which are: purchasing, browsing, using, evaluating, that are approach (when the behaviour is positively reinforced by rewards), avoidance (when the behaviour is negatively reinforced to avoid aversive event), and escape (when the consumer leaves from a current aversive setting) (Foxall, 2010a). This is a micro-level interpretation which involves identifying the discriminative stimuli that comprise the setting, the consequences to which the stimuli signal (utilitarian and informational reinforcement, punishment), as well as the learning history of the individual (Foxall, 1997a). The analysis in this level is nested within the two aforementioned levels (Foxall, 2010a). After all, understanding the meaning of the observed pattern of the individual consumer behaviour is the ultimate purpose of the BPM (Foxall, 1997a). Therefore, it is imperative to describe all of the BPM variables, which consists of consumer behavioural setting, learning history, behaviour and patterns of reinforcement (as already discussed) in the third level of analysis, in order to achieve the thick interpretative account of consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs.

## **2.9 The Intentional Consumer and Collective Intentionality**

There are currently two leading explanations of behaviour, which are: radical behaviourism and cognitive psychology (Foxall, 2007a). The explanations of behaviour which are offered by cognitive psychology are different from those offered by radical behaviourism: one focuses on individual's thought processes that affect on behaviour whereas another focuses on the observable behaviour. Foxall (2007a) argues that behaviour analysis is derived from radical behaviourism, which is only sufficient to predict and control behaviour in the laboratory but which ultimately fails to give a full explanation of behaviour because it is unable to cope with the personal level of explanation, the continuity of behaviour, and the delimitation of behaviourist interpretations (Foxall, 2008a). Foxall (2008a) asserts that it is essential to adopt intentional language in order to complete an account for behaviour explanation.

Consequently, Foxall (2008a) proposes “intentional behaviourism”, which integrates radical behaviourism and intentional psychology in a single system where they both complement the other.

The central idea of intentional behaviourism is to apply an intentional content which can be legitimately ascribed in the explanation of consumer behaviour (Foxall, 2008a). In the philosophical sense, intentionality is known as aboutness (Foxall, 1998; Crane, 2001; Heil, 2004). Searle (1999) states that any statements that refer to intentional states (i.e. *belief, desire, hope, fear, visual perception, or intention to perform an action*) are counted as intentionality. It is apparent that in fact the intentional states have been mentioned in consumer research in terms of consumer purchase products and service because he/she *prefers* it, *likes* it, *has a positive attitude toward* it, *wants* it, *needs* it, or *intends to* buy it which indicates the intentionalistic terms and describes consumer behaviour by social cognitive psychology (Foxall, 2007b; 2007c). These words represent the intentionality of a consumer towards an object (it) which is similar to intentional objects in the philosophical sense. Intentional objects represent the human mental procedure (which has to have an object or which needs to be directed on an object) towards the existence of objects (Crane, 2001; Heil, 2004). Foxall (2007b: p.130) argues that “*most terms that we think of as mentalistic are intentional in referring to or representing something outside themselves: it is impossible just to know: we know that something; or just to believe: we believe that this or that is the case; or just to desire: again we desire something or other.*” Therefore, the intentional idioms, which have previously been avoided in behaviouristic theories, should be taken into account when explain consumer behaviour.

Foxall (2007a) highlights three imperative needs of intentionality: to account the personal level of analysis, to account for the continuity of behaviour, and to delimit their interpretations of complex behaviour for radical behaviourism which reflect a crucial point of employing intentional language to complete the explanatory elements of human behaviour. BPM has proved its usefulness in the prediction of a range of consumer choices, such as consumer brand choice (e.g. Foxall et al., 2006; Foxall et al., 2007) and the consumer’s emotional responses to consumer situation (e.g. Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005). Although the preceding research of the BPM has mostly

revealed the consumer's situation in the extensional model solely in terms of the scope of consumer behaviour setting, it has only slightly addressed the intentional dimensions in the model. Hence, adding an intentional dimension to the model in order to explain consumer consumption could develop a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behaviour.

Consequently, Foxall (2008b) demonstrates the role of intentionality in the explanation of consumer choice for the rewards and emotion which require intentional terms as remembering and intending to explain the continuity of behaviour in relation to the model. This shows the need of intentional terms in the supplementary of extensional findings. Foxall (2010b) asserts the significant role of intentionality in relation to the pattern of reinforcement, especially the role of informational reinforcement which is central to language that generates symbols which allows people to provide feedback on the performance which affects on behaviour. Foxall (2010b) states that language is intrinsically intentional and is not only used for expression and communication but it also has the capacity to reinforce one's behaviour through the symbols that represent naturally occurring stimuli.

In addition, Foxall (2010b) addresses the significant role of collective intentionality, arguing that it is a prime theory of human society and acknowledged as a foundation of social actions and activities (Searle, 1990; Tuomela, 2002). Collective intentionality describes both cooperative behaviours, and intentional states and intentions that are shared in their group (Searle, 1995). The collective intentionality that is associated with cooperative behaviour is of particular interested here because this study aims to explain the rationale for consumer behaviour. In the same manner, Han and Pereira (2010) suggest that the actions of individuals which infer their intentions and reflect on the mutual expectations between the agents can be observed to confirm the collective intentionality. Research in BC has mentioned those collective actions that are represented by cooperative behaviour which enhances the activities in the community (e.g. Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Devasagayam et al., 2010; Mzoughi et al., 2010; Chan and Li, 2010); however, the notion of collective intentionality which is inseparable on the part of human joint activities (Bratman, 2009) is still less discussed in the BC literature. In a similar manner, Foxall (2010b) mentions collective

intentionality in relation to the informational reinforcement which has an effect on behaviour and which leads to the emergence of social cooperation. Therefore, the notion of collective intentionality is crucial to be incorporated into the interpretation of consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs in order to enlighten these phenomena.

The evolutions of collective intentionality begin with a doubtful “group” and “mind”. The sceptical in the social world and human actions leads to the debate of the ontological of social phenomena regarding ‘human group’. This leads to a controversial question about whether groups can act intentionality. Consequently, the discussions of social reality regarding human beings in social relations and collectivities have been separated into two sides. One is a summative account (i.e. Gilbert, 1989; Tuomela, 2000) which adopts a holistic approach of social phenomena. The philosophers who hold this view believe that human collective behaviour is an irreducible collectively concept which cannot be analysed by a single person or individual. This group is likely to believe that collective action cannot be explained solely by individual intentions. On the other side are the individualists who rely on individuals. The non-summative account highlights that social phenomena are derived from individuals (i.e. Searle, 1995; Bratman, 1992; Tollefsen, 2002). They oppose the idea of a group mind and replace it with distinct mental phenomena. Thus, they believe that collective action and group behaviours should be analysed by concentrating on an individual or individualistic approach.

The individualistic approach is seemingly more appropriate to integrate in the BPM, especially the account of collective intentionality as proposed by John R. Searle (1995) because it aims to provide a rationale explanation of the rewards, particularly informational (symbolic) reinforcement, which are related to a system of symbols (as stated earlier). This happens because the system of symbols is in accordance with the ontological view of the social reality as given by Searle (1995) in the philosophical sense. According to Searle, social reality is composed of two kinds of facts: brute facts and institutional facts. Brute facts are facts that already exist in the world according to their natural elements (such as the sun or a tree) while institution facts refer to those facts which are dependent on human social institutions in the creation of their existence. The examples of institution facts are those such as culture, positions, money, and

government. All of which require language to portray their existence (Searle, 1995). In other words, institution facts are generated by language. It is apparent that the view of institution facts as given by Searle (1995) is in conjunction with the work of Foxall (2010b) in terms of the role of language in creating the symbols which exist and which can reinforce one's behaviour by the meaning attached to these symbols.

Furthermore, Searle (1995) notes those institutional facts which involve collective intentionality of two or more agents. According to Searle, three key elements lie in the structure of institutional facts, which are the assignment of function, constitutive rules, and collective intentionality (Fitzpatrick, 2003). The assignment of function is in a relation to status function. Status functions are created by humans and they are a distinguishing mark to identify institution facts from social facts (Searle, 2006). People and objects can be assigned a status function by virtue of collective assignment of humans. In simplistic terms, people are able to impose function on material things (such as assigning a piece of paper as money for transaction) and persons (such as assigning a person to act as the leader of a society). It can be summarised that the collective assignment of function is involved with assigning the status to things and people, which Searle terms as "status functions" (Searle, 1995, 2006, 2010).

Searle (2010) remarks that persons and objects, which have been assigned status functions, will be able to perform certain functions on the condition that they have a collectively recognised or accepted status that allows them to perform those functions. To put it simply, for the status functions to work properly, they require collective recognition or acceptance of the object or person to have that status. Consequently, status functions are dependent on the collective intentionality of human institutions, which leads to shared desires, shared beliefs and shared attitudes as well as cooperative actions and these make humans a distinct creature from other animal species (Searle, 1995, 2010). Another importance of status functions is that they carry "deontic powers" (Searle, 2010). Searle (2010: p.9) states that "*the deontic powers carry rights, duties, obligations, requirements, permissions, authorisations, entitlements, and so on.*" The status functions are considered to be the glue that holds society together because of the collective intentionality that created them and the deontic powers that carry their functions (Searle, 2010).

The meanings of such institutions are facts derived from constitutive rules. A constitutive rule is a logical form of the imposition of status functions (Searle, 2005). It is important to note that constitutive rules are different from general terms of rules, which often refer to an antecedent of behaviour but which can also produce new forms of behaviour. Searle (1995) distinguishes the rules into two kinds: regulative rules and constitutive rules. Regulative rules are those rules that regulate existing forms of behaviour which are antecedents of behaviour. For instance, the rule “drive on the left” regulates driving in Thailand. Consequently, these regulative rules can be characterised in the form “Do X” (Searle, 2010: p.10). Constitutive rules have a more significant implication because they do not just regulate behaviour but also create the very possibility of new forms of behaviour that they regulate (Searle, 2010). For example, the rules of the club do not just regulate action to participate in the club but they also regulate the very possibility of other behaviours in conformity to a number of the rules which represent condition for being in the club.

Constitutive rules are characterised in the formula “*X counts as Y in context C*” (Searle, 1995: p.28). This formula is a basic form of institution facts which create the possibility of institution facts (Searle, 1995). It is a logical form of the imposition of status functions (Searle, 2005). For instance, a piece of paper counts as a ten pound bill in the United Kingdom because it has been given status functions. However, for the status functions to perform, they require collective recognition/acceptance of that status. To return to the example, the ten pound bill also requires collectively acceptance from people in the country for it to have a power for purchasing. Moreover, the status functions are created by declarations where language is an essential tool to portray them. This happens because the human mind has a capacity to create symbolic representation, but it needs to portray meaning by language otherwise there is a tendency to dispose of the intentional states (Searle, 2010). Consequently, institution facts exist only within human institutions on account of collective intentionality. Therefore, the collective assignment of functions to people and objects by the formula “*X counts as Y in context C*” are an essential application of collective intentionality which will be implemented in the discussion chapters in order to enlighten the phenomena in the car-consumer clubs in Thailand.

It can be noticed that the meaning of regulative rules resembles the “rules” in behavioural analysis as defined by Skinner (1966) and Glenn (1987), which is merely focused on the rules as antecedence of behaviour or a guide/an instruction of behaviour. While the meaning of constitutive rules resembles the “rules” that expand the scope to their function as motivating operation (Malott, 1989) or establishing operation (Michael, 1982) in behaviour analysis which can increase the reward value to stimulate compliance behaviour with the rule that is related to RGB. Their status functions create the existence of objects and people, and assigns value to them, which is portrayed verbally by language by virtue of collective intentionality of human that is a principal element of human society (Searle, 1995). Giddens (2001) adds that language functions as a fundamental to social life. In a similar manner, the symbolic reinforcement in the BPM is performance feedback which is assessed by people. Consequently, it may be possible that the value of symbolic reinforcement relies on collective intentionality in assigning meaning to symbols by verbal communication in order to increase the value of reinforcement to have an effect on behaviour, and the behaviour controlled by this verbal antecedent is rule-governed.

Foxall (2010b) points out that symbols allow the recording of performance feedback, which in turn has an effect on the rate of recurring behaviour. There is a potential that symbolic reinforcement relies on collective intentionality in portraying their meanings and significances. In order to investigate this relationship, therefore, it is imperative to observe intentional language and implement constitutive rules to inform the phenomena by giving the case of Thai car-consumer clubs to empirically demonstrate the power of collective intentionality on the rewards that lead to members’ participation in the clubs.

## **2.10 Application of the Behavioural Perspective Model in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

The BPM suggests that there are three types of behavioural consequences: utilitarian (functional) reinforcement, informational (symbolic) reinforcement, and aversive consequences. As stated earlier, although the aversive consequences are out of the scope of this study, the functional and symbolic reinforcement will be investigated

because people who continue their membership in the clubs are due to the rewards which they receive from their participation otherwise they would already have left the clubs following punishment. Consequently, they are not current members and are thusly excluded from the unit of study.

Wells et al. (2011) state that a distinction of the BPM is made between functional and symbolic reinforcement, which are expected to influence consumer behaviour. This is akin to the benefits provided by BC and VC. Since the two types of benefits are found in the community (i.e. functional value and social value), the consumers participate in BC in order to obtain a purposive value (Sicilia and Palazón, 2008). Sicilia and Palazón (2008) state that consumers can obtain functional value (such as advice, information and expertise) that enable individuals to give and receive information on topics of their own interests and social value (such as friendship, emotional support, social status, social enhancement) that derive from their sharing problems and experiences in the BC. In line with Dwyer (2007), consumers can create information and social networks in these consumer communities, which refers to the functional and social aspects of the communities. Similarly, Kozinets (2002) mentions that the members of a VC are generally focused on social interaction and information exchanges, which also represent social and functional benefits from their participation. Klooster et al. (2004) also mention the social space where individuals meet in BC on a relational basis and functional space where individuals can access to knowledge resources in the BC that show functional and social benefits of the BC. Fournier and Lee (2009) also mention that people join a BC to build new relationships because they are interested in the social connections that come from brand affiliation that reflects on social benefits from BC.

According to the BPM, functional reinforcement refers to the practical nature of the product or services, or functional benefits that consumer derives from consumption and ownership of the product (Foxall, 2004, 2010a), which is akin to functional benefits to which consumer obtain from participation in BC. Likewise, symbolic reinforcement is more concerned about the social aspect or performance feedback (Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005), which is akin to social benefits to which consumer derive from affiliation in the BC. It is likely that both types of reinforcement play an important role in BC participation. Similarly, Watson and Johnson (1972) state that the rewards are the

motivation of people who participate in the group. Thus, it could be possible that the rewards are the members' motivation to participate in the car-consumer clubs. Accordingly, it can be proposed that:

**Proposition I: Members participate in Thai car-consumer clubs due to the rewards that they receive.**

Skinner (1969) reveals that the effect of the reinforcement is on behaviour that is to be increased. Mazur (2006) also states the event that appeared to increase or maintain the likelihood of recurring behaviour. Similarly, Solomon et al. (2002) mention that the event that provides positive reinforcement in the form of rewards can strengthen the response or behaviour because the individuals have learned that the appropriate action leads to a favourable effect. Consequently, the action is strengthened. Thus, they are likely to repeat that behaviour.

Regarding the BPM, it is suggested that both symbolic and functional reinforcement, which is known as the pattern of reinforcement, can strengthen consumer behaviour (Foxall, 2010a). It can be said that the likelihood of recurring behaviour is due to the function of symbolic and functional reinforcement. Furthermore, Foxall (1997a) points out that the behaviour can be maintained and shaped by both types of reinforcement and can be deduced in the form of contingency-shaped behaviour and RGB. The contingency-shaped behaviour is predominantly reinforced by functional reinforcement; whereas, the RGB is predominantly reinforced by symbolic reinforcement.

Accordingly, it is possible that the symbolic and functional reinforcement in the form of rewards have an influence on the repetition of members' behaviours in Thai car-consumer clubs, as pointed out by the literature. It could also be possible that their behaviours are rule-governed because members in the group observe norms and imitate each other as role models is because they have behaved in the form of rules (Skinner, 1989). Algesheimer et al. (2005) also mention that the reinforcement processes plays a vital role in BC because a behavioural pattern tends to be repeated if it yields high benefits from a reciprocal relationship with the BC. Likewise, Scarpi (2010) cites that

repeating and manifesting behaviour of the individual is reinforced due to social reward in the BC. Thus, it is possible to propose that:

**Proposition II: The rewards in Thai car-consumer clubs increase the likelihood of the members' behaviours being repeated.**

Cooper et al. (2005) mention that one aspect of consumption is status, which depends on the meaning that society attaches to it. They also describe that the ability to convey status meanings to others within the sign system is probably the most influential and obvious aspect of consumption in the representation of valued personal trait. Status can be defined as “*the social honour or prestige accorded to a person or particular group by other members of the society*” (Giddens, 2001: p.700). Accordingly, status can be given to person or particular group on the condition that they are given by other people. When status is assigned to a particular group, it will become a “status group” which involve patterns of behaviour that the members of the group follow. Humans are likely to conform and to be like other people because they want to be accepted by others as a member of the group (Searle, 2010). The main reason for this is because people accept institution facts, which make the status become meaningful, owing to collective intentionality (Searle, 2010).

Sukoco and Wu (2010) state that status serves as motivation for members to gain social status and behave favourably in the BC. Baumeister (1998) refers that status is derived from other members' acceptance and approval of their behaviours in the community. This is in agreement with Searle (1995) who recommends that status requires collective acceptance from society. People who participate in a BC are able to achieve several statuses based on their behaviours in the communities, such as: expert status (Muniz and Schau, 2005), leader, guru (Leigh et al., 2006), friend, as well as membership.

Searle (1995) states that friends and friendship also count as a status which is given by the collective intentionality of involved persons. The friendship is an institution fact as it carries a collectively recognised status function (Searle, 2006). Consequently, friend is an institution fact where the friendship carries obligations, rights, and responsibilities for a friend to act (Searle, 1995). This is one of the reasons for people to participate in

the VC and BC, because friendship can provide additional benefits in those communities (Ridings and Gefen, 2004). Likewise, Horrigan (2002) notes that a major reason for people to participate in those communities is because they want to establish friendships and personal relationships. In a similar manner, Moutinho et al. (2007) state that people join in a BC because of membership, which make them feel comfortable from belonging among like-minded people. This happens because members of the BC obtain an essential part of consumption experience through membership in those communities (Schau and Muniz, 2002).

Foxall (1997a) state that status is symbolic reinforcement that consumers achieve by their own efforts. Giddens (2001: p.95) also mention that individuals will gain “achieved status” through their own effort. The status is usually determined by the public or judged by others, or by performance feedback (Foxall, 1997a). One cannot earn status per se, but status requires other people to assign it to him/her. Consequently, status is a socially mediated reward.

In agreement with Scarpi (2010), the status, such as membership, represents a sense of belongingness to a group by which the individuals perceives themselves as an actual or symbolic member of the group, and it is typically seen by members as a reward. This happens because status will be gained through participation in the communities, which brings them into the recognition of a person and this leads to self-esteem (Bross et al., 2007). Consequently, it is likely that status could be the key symbolic reinforcement for members to participate in the car-consumer clubs. Thus, the following proposition is proposed:

**Proposition III: Status counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs.**

Searle (2010) states that the meaning of the status relies on collective intentionality by the constitutive rules or “count as” formula. As previously mentioned, the constitutive rules are akin to rules that are a motivating operation (Malott, 1989) which can increase the value of reward and stimulate more effective behavioural consequences. Consequently, the occurred behaviour is RGB as a result of reward that specified in the

rule. According to Searle (1995), status functions require language to portray its value and meaning. Similarly, Foxall (2010b) states that symbolic reinforcement relies on collective intentionality where the language plays an important role in the creation of social reality. Thus, the status which is presumed as symbolic reinforcement also requires a verbal-social community to portray its meaning and value as well as the collective intentionality of people.

In addition, Foxall (2010b) states that the emergence of symbolic reinforcement has a capacity to generate a wider range of consumer behaviour that controls over behaviour beyond the immediate contingencies. Symbolic reinforcement can also take control of behaviour more firmly within the influence of social interactions and expectations, in addition to increasing the prospect of societal developments rooted in collective intentionality. This happens because collective intentionality is comprised of shared intentions, such as: beliefs, desires, attitudes and cooperative behaviour (Searle, 1995).

With regard to BC, collective intentionality can be observed from the members' behaviours. It is likely that people share their beliefs in their communities as if those communities really exist in the physical world, even though they are situated in the virtual world. For example, Evans et al. (2001) mentioned that people who participate in a VC do not see any difference between the virtual and physical communities because they share their beliefs that the VC exists. Meanwhile, the BC members have a shared consciousness of kind or we-ness feeling because they believe that they are the same tribe. The BC Members also create their own rituals and traditions in order to make their community explicit in society (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz and Schau, 2005). The members also shared a good attitude for their communities by sharing sense of moral responsibility toward one another (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). Consequently, the shared beliefs, desires and attitudes or shared intentions (such as shared sense of moral responsibility) lead to collective action (Devasagayam and Buff, 2008).

Furthermore, Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) found that we-intentions determine member participation in BC. Consequently, BC participation is considered as intentional social action because it is driven by collective intentions to participate together as a group

(Dholakia et al., 2004). Cova and Dalli (2009) state that BC consumers develop we-intentions, which is the willingness of members in the community that brings about their joint activity. In relation to Searle (1995), the nature of collective intentionality is occurred by individual we-intentionality or we-thought that is accumulated. Thus, the we-intentions can be considered as collective intentionality which produces joint actions or collective acts.

Foxall (2010b) states that social cooperation is emerged through mutual rewards, or reciprocal altruism, which reinforces behaviour. In other words, collective action or cooperation is fostered by symbolic reinforcement. As stated above, symbolic reinforcement relies on collective intentionality that takes control of behaviour and increases the prospect of societal development. In agreement with Searle (1995), human society is a construction of collective intentionality and, therefore, it is likely that the status in car-consumer clubs also rely on the collective intentionality of involved people to assign value and function to the status. When the status is meaningful to members of the clubs, there will be an effect on their behaviours to sustain this status in the clubs and for the clubs to call for cooperative behaviours which represent collective intentions to acts leading to subsequent collective action. By the same manner, Rakoczy (2008) states that collective intentionality that represents in the form of cooperative acts lies at the heart of societal existence. As a result, car-consumer clubs in Thailand are emerged by collective intentionality. On a basis of this discussion, it is possible to propose that:

**Proposition IV: The implication of status requires collective intentionality of members in the car-consumer club communities to assign its value and function; therefore, the emergence of Thai car-consumer clubs relies on the collective intentionality of people who are involved in the car-consumer clubs communities.**

## 2.11 Concluding Remarks

The review of previous literature has generated rich, insightful, and descriptive sources of data that reveal individuals' social desire to participate in BC. The BC appears to be a current topic because of technological advancement that connects dispersed people worldwide together into communities based on their consumptions. Since there are two different types of the brand community which are consumer-initiated communities and company-initiated communities, this study will explore a consumer-initiated setting because the best way to find the true, loyal consumers should be from consumer communities that are originated by the consumers themselves.

Another gap in the BC literature is that most of the previous studies have sought to understand the consumers with regards to the group as a whole. Although some of these studies have distinguished types of members based on their observations, they are not assessed in their SC (which represents their sense of belonging and commitment to the community). Consequently, this study will analyse consumer behaviour based on different types of membership by adopting the SCI from the psychological sociology literature to identify active members and non-active members in the car-consumer clubs. Moreover, the extant literature has yet to examine the main leader of BC, or consumers who manage brand communities, in terms of the motivation to create the communities as well as playing a dominant role in the community development. Therefore, this study will integrate the main leaders of BC into the analysis in addition to the members of BC.

The principal case studies of BC have investigated products with a high level of involvement (e.g. cars) (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). Most of the extant literature has investigated BCs in the Western context; little work has been done to date to investigate BCs in an Asia context. This research, therefore, aims to fill the gap by exploring the BC from a different aspect by focusing primarily on the BC in Asian context, in this case Thailand. This research will replicate the previous works by exploring a similar product which is cars to investigate the nature of BCs in Thailand, and also to understand Asian consumer behaviour. Subsequently, this study will offer an additional point of view to scholars, researchers, marketers and executive to

understand consumer behaviour and BC phenomena in Thailand and, perhaps, to some other developing countries which have a similar environment to Thailand.

Most importantly, research into BC has rarely considered behaviourism in the explanation of consumer behaviour in these communities. The present study, therefore, aims to explain consumer behaviour by implementing a behavioural perspective and concentrating on BPM which has been empirically tested in its useful mechanism in the explanation of consumer behaviour. On the basis of the preceding review of the literature, the BPM is deemed suitable to grant a thick interpretive account for consumer behaviour which is beneficial for the study in the investigation of car-consumer clubs in Thailand. In addition, since most of the preceding research of the BPM has been done to reveal consumer situation from extensional construal which cannot deal with the personal level of experience and explanation, this study endeavours to incorporate an intentional dimension to the model. Consequently, this thesis will introduce the role of collective intentionality which is a prime of society because it plays a significant role in concerns to rewards (specifically symbolic reinforcement) that have an influence on consumer behaviour. The collective intentionality is an aspect which remains untouched in the BC literature and which leaves room for the study to contribute additional knowledge to the marketing and consumer behaviour literature. Therefore, the notion of collective intentionality will be combined in the analysis of the case studies in order to present a fruitful interpretive account of consumer behaviour phenomena in the car-consumer clubs in Thailand as an illustration of a BC in Asia. Consequently, four propositions are proposed to examine the car-consumer clubs in subsequent chapters, as follows:

**Proposition I: Members participate in Thai car-consumer clubs due to the rewards that they receive.**

**Proposition II: The rewards in Thai car-consumer clubs increase the likelihood of the members' behaviours being repeated.**

**Proposition III: Status counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs.**

**Proposition IV: The implication of status requires collective intentionality of members in the car-consumer club communities to assign its value and function; therefore, the emergence of Thai car-consumer clubs relies on the collective intentionality of people who are involved in the car-consumer clubs communities.**

The next chapter will explain the research methodology which is implemented in this present study.

## **Chapter Three**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter deals in detail with the methodology which is used in this present study, which is a qualitative multiple-case study that was conducted with seven car-consumer clubs in Thailand. Accordingly, this chapter will illustrate the research design and the philosophy underpinning this study. Firstly, the research paradigm will be discussed and justified. Secondly, the research design and technique will be described. Thirdly, the case study approach will be described, including: the unit of analysis, the case selection process, and the sampling process. Fourthly, the data collection procedure will be outlined, including the exploratory stage and explanatory stage. Finally, the data analysis procedure will be described in order to demonstrate how the study has been conducted and analysed.

#### **3.2 Research Philosophy: Underpinning the Research**

##### **3.2.1 Research Paradigm**

A philosophical paradigm is broadly defined and it is extensively used in many disciplines including the social sciences. Schwandt (2001) defines a philosophical paradigm as a disciplinary matrix of values, commitments, and methods which is applied across a discipline. In this sense, the paradigm means a set of basic beliefs about the world (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003). A paradigm refers to assumptions about the world and the nature of knowledge from the progress of scientific discipline (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). Patton (1990) suggests that a paradigm is a way of clarifying the complexity of the real world. A paradigm reflects how individuals view

the world and what kind of belief the researcher places on it. It is a general outlook and a world perspective of the researcher which will affect the research methodology.

### **3.2.2 Justification of the Research Paradigm**

Several assumptions have first to be taken into account prior to selecting the philosophical paradigm for use in this study. Firstly, the nature of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand might be similar to, or different from, the brand communities in the extant literature. Secondly, although the numbers of the Thai car-consumer clubs has been increasing, only a small number of clubs have gained a lot of attention and become successful in terms of popularity and stability. The reasons behind their success are fascinating to explore and they will be explored in depth in this thesis. Thirdly, the widespread nature of these consumer initiated clubs has become an issue for companies who wish to keep an eye on their consumer's power. Fourthly, the consumer clubs can become so large that they can influence a product, brand, and the company; hence, if companies know how to deal with these clubs appropriately then they can generate a competitive advantage. Fifthly, behavioural studies of consumer BCs are still limited and there is little research which has focused on applying behaviourist approaches and philosophical views to explain the phenomena of consumer BCs in Asia, in this case Thailand.

Since several key assumptions have so far been presumed, answering these assumptions requires an understanding of the context and realities of these cases. Consequently, the method to achieve these criteria is to have a conversation with the respondents and then interpret the data from what has been observed. Foxall (2010a: p.16) suggests that *"interpretation is employed when the use of direct, empirical scientific methodology is inappropriate or impossible."* In a similar manner, O'Shaughnessy and Holbrook (1988) call for an interpretive approach in consumer behaviour research because consumer research is particularly able to deal with research which works with people. Therefore, adopting a qualitative approach enables the researcher to interpret manifest functions of the respondents' social life in their own contexts.

The interpretive approach has been implemented in many areas of scientific research, such as the natural sciences. Popper (1934 cited in Hox, 1997) argues that precise observations are required when formulating theories. Consequently, the use of observations has been widely accepted by the scientific community (Hox, 1997). However, interpretation not only refers to observation and a descriptive report, but it is also refers to a process of transcribing and translating what has been observed (Foxall, 2010a).

The main emphasis of the interpretive research paradigm is placed on understanding and interpreting the phenomena from the context of its occurrence (Carson et al., 2001). Nevertheless, one of the weaknesses of interpretive research is related to structure. Qualitative research is frequently criticised because the lack of structure makes it difficult to divide the researcher's and the respondent's view (Hox, 1997). This problem can be overcome by using a rigorous process when conducting the research.

There are many philosophical stances which are used in consumer research. For example, critical realism is one of the principle paradigms that have been widely discussed among researchers. Critical realism has been developed from realism, with some distinctions. The idea of critical realism is drawn from the view of natural science which observes the world as it appears. As such, critical realists have shared the scientific realist's view towards theories, which is that they can either be true or false depending on the truth of the world as it is (Hacking, 1983). Moreover, they share the social realists view towards reality which is that on top of the reality of social creatures (such as society) are individuals who create them (O'Shaughnessy, 1992).

Critical realism differs from empiricism because it theorises knowledge as a social process. To critical realism there are inconsistent means of representation as well as social processes (Benton and Craib, 2001). Therefore, critical realism is "*a reflexivity of the conditions of possibility for thought, or language, to present something outside itself*" (Benton and Craib, 2001: p.120). The strength of critical realism as a paradigm is that it can be adopted to understand both reality as it is and the meaning of the behaviour of individuals (especially in consumer research). Adopting a critical realism paradigm requires the researcher to be more organised and the research to be more

structured in order to adapt to new ideas or issues as they appear. It also requires the research to be conducted in a natural and changing environment.

Accordingly, the ontological and epistemological view of critical realism is able to be applied in a study of the social world which seeks to describe and analyse consumer behaviour in their natural settings and situational contexts because social beings construct reality and give meaning based on context, and as such the consumers are able to perceive and view information differently (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Critical realism can inspire the researcher to study the customers' society by interpreting their behaviours from the context of their conversation and activities. The facts are required to be observed as they appear in the event, while systematic procedures of interpretation of their complexions are also required. Therefore, the critical realism paradigm is the philosophical underpinning which is used in this study because it is able to provide a better interpretation of the social world. The influence of these assumptions has been reflected in the research design, data collection, and analysis throughout this study.

### **3.2.3 The Ontology of this Study**

Ontology is "*the nature of reality*" (Carson et al., 2001: p.4). It is concerned with how the researcher understands the things that constitutes the world. Guba and Lincoln (1994: p.110) define the ontology of critical realism as follows: "*Reality is assumed to exist but to be only imperfectly apprehendable because of basically flawed human intellectual mechanisms and the fundamentally intractable nature of phenomena.*" According to this statement, the human understanding of reality can be changed in accordance to the situation. Critical realists accept that things have existing realities without knowing. Humans cannot ultimately know the reality of objects because the accumulated experiences have transformed their perception. Therefore, human perception of things is not in the real existence but in the things as they appear to the knower. Bhaskar (1989) finds that the ontological view of critical realists is that reality is stratified and differentiated. Benton and Craib (2001) also state that critical realists view reality as stratified, or layered, and independent from scientific investigation. The ontology of this study is that there is an existence of reality independent from the

researcher and this reality is stratified with its nature and assigned status. Consequently, it is similar to the ontological view of critical realism.

### **3.2.4 The Epistemology of this Study**

Epistemology is “*the relationship between researchers and reality*” (Carson et al., 2001: p.4). It relates to “*the nature of knowledge and justification*” (Schwandt, 2003: p.71). Ritchie and Lewis (2003: p.23) state that “*epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired.*” Therefore, epistemology has an influence on the researcher’s interaction with the study.

Based on the ontological view of critical realists, which believes that the reality is stratified, one technique to perceive objects is passed through the data, which is a combination of the real existence of objects and state of the mind of the knower (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). The data will be reflected in the nature of the objects and the knower’s mind, which are complex but able to indicate the status of objects or things that are known (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Thus, the researcher cannot totally self-separate themselves from the investigated objects.

The emphasis of critical realism is placed on the objectivity to the study, which requires that the findings are rechecked to ensure that they fit to the pre-existing knowledge through falsification and replicated findings (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Objectivity is an ideal for the researcher to consider while trying to achieve the best way to understand reality (Robson, 2002). Therefore, a practical way to access the complexion of reality in this study is through the data, interpretation, and replicating studies while remaining objective. The diversity of perspectives which are gathered from the respondents in the conditions of their lives will increase the richness of the interpretation.

### **3.2.5 The Methodology of this Study**

Because the nature of critical realism is to see reality as stratified but accessible via the data, it requires the investigator to work through a process to reveal the layers. Consequently, knowledge of the study is needed to process and clarify from the surface appearance of things in order to prevent any error arising from misleading appearances (Robson, 2002). Methodology can help to overcome the criticism of this paradigm; consequently, critical realist researchers tend to do research in more natural settings, collecting more information in that circumstance, and adding the discovered evidence to an element in investigation (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

Guba and Lincoln (1994) suggest that the methods to capture this process include replicating the study and appropriate dialogue or conversation between the researcher and the respondents, because adding the internal view of the respondents can help the researcher to determine the meanings and reasons for people's actions from their point of view, which is equally important to qualitative approaches (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, in order to access reality in consumer research appropriate methods (such as interpretations, dialogue and observation) it is essential to apprehend reality in the design considerations. Although there is no perfect way to apprehend reality, Foxall (2010a) states that the researcher can at least seek for a plausible account of an explanation with rigorous qualitative research methods.

Sometimes the qualitative approach is criticised for its focus on enormous data and subjectivity. It tends to focus on the small scale of an individual's actions and consciousness, which is difficult to gain an understanding of at the large scale of society. Meanwhile, interpretive researchers have to deal with enormous amounts of data whose progress is difficult to control and end (Hussey and Hussey, 1997). In the research process, the researcher is an unavoidable part of their own research and they subjectively bring their values and beliefs into the research (Clark et al., 1998). This can be mitigated by applying the reflexivity method in the research (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2009). Therefore, well-planned research and reflexivity will be implemented in this study.

In addition, Foxall (2010a) has suggested two aspects to interpretation which will help the researcher structure plausible accounts. The first aspect is to apply a hypothetico-deductive method into the interpretation. So far, one of the similar methods in hermeneutics is a warrant of assertibility. The concept of warranted assertibility was introduced by John Dewey (1966 cited in Foxall, 2010a). This concept refers to the status that a proposition gains when it is guaranteed on the basis of experience and through the self-correcting processes of enquiry (Foxall, 2010a). The founded truth was warranted by its evidence and context (Taylor and Winkist, 2001). The second aspect is that even though an interpretive account cannot be fully dependent from the external world, it can still be managed to standard scientific testing by employing multiple interpretations which have been accepted as plausible. These additional points should be taken into account to the research design in order to achieve the most constructive method as possible.

Qualitative research techniques provide an opportunity for the researcher in looking for meaning and understanding people's minds and actions. These assumptions are based on the knowledge of the researcher in making use of the participant's stories, their language, descriptions, and metaphors as the subjects of the investigation in order to highlight what is important to them (Garrick and Rhodes, 2000). In summary, this research employs a qualitative multiple-case study approach in order to gain rich information in the data collection and to replicate the findings in the data analysis process.

### **3.3 Qualitative Research**

#### **3.3.1 Justification for Qualitative Methodology**

Creswell (2003) suggests that a qualitative approach is an acceptable method for use in a study where the researcher has little idea about the field. It can increase the chances of accessing an inner view from the respondents (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). The flexible style of a qualitative approach allows researchers to generate data with regards to the meaning of phenomenon (Carson et al., 2001). Consequently, many researchers have

employed a qualitative approach to conceptualise a new concept which is still ambiguous (Zikmund, 2003).

As stated in Chapter 1, the lack of research and prior knowledge in relation to Thai car-consumer clubs brings about consideration of a qualitative research which would allow the researcher to obtain in-depth data from the fieldwork. Moreover, quantitative approaches of data collection would limit the scope of information that the respondents give and they may also function in a way which simplifies, generalises, and limits to explain the complicated process of consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs. Qualitative research is considered to be appropriate for use in research where there is limited experience of the research issue. Consequently, undertaking a qualitative technique is considered to be suitable for use in this study because it will help the researcher to gain rich, insightful and comprehensive data from the respondents.

There are many different types of research, such as: exploratory research, explanatory research, and descriptive research (Aaker et al., 2000; Webb, 2002). These categories are different in terms of research purpose, research questions, and the use of data collection methods (Aaker et al., 2000). As stated earlier in Chapter 1, the main aim of this study is to investigate Thai car-consumer clubs and explain the rationale for rewards which maintain consumer participation in these clubs. Accordingly, the main questions of this study are: ‘What are car-consumer clubs in Thailand?’, ‘How do consumers participate in these car-consumer clubs?’, and ‘Why do consumers participate in these car-consumer clubs?’ In order to achieve this aim, this study has applied the BPM as a framework to portray the consumer’s phenomena systematically and to interpret their behaviours from the verbal content. Consequently, three objectives have been set to progress the study. To achieve the objectives, this study was conducted in two main stages: an exploratory stage and an explanatory stage. Table 3.1 summarises the study objectives in relation to two stages of the study.

**Table 3.1: Summary of Research Questions in Each Research Stage**

Research Stage	Objectives	Research Questions
Exploratory	1. To understand the nature of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand, which are social groups formed by voluntary members, and to explore the reasons why car consumers are interested in these clubs.	1. What are car-consumer clubs in Thailand?
Explanatory	2. To explain the effects of rewards on Thai consumer behaviour towards the clubs, which can lead members continuing their membership in the clubs.	2. How do consumers participate in these car-consumer clubs? <b>Proposition I:</b> Members participate in Thai car-consumer clubs due to the rewards that they receive. <b>Proposition II:</b> The rewards in Thai car-consumer clubs increase the likelihood of the members' behaviours being repeated.
	3. To explain the rationale behind the significance of the rewards which have an effect on consumer behaviour in the car-consumer clubs.	3. Why do consumers participate in these car-consumer clubs? <b>Proposition III:</b> Status counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs. <b>Proposition IV:</b> The implication of status requires collective intentionality of members in the car-consumer clubs communities to assign its value and function; therefore, the emergence of Thai car-consumer clubs relies on the collective intentionality of people who are involved in the car-consumer clubs communities.

Source: This study

The first stage of research is an exploratory stage which is used to assess phenomena in a new light and to generate ideas for the next step of the study. An exploratory stage can be used in the discovery of the ideas, clarifying concepts, and gathering insight (Churchill, 1991; Aaker et al., 2000; Robson, 2002; Webb, 2002). Yin (2003a) suggests that the research questions which deal with “what” questions are generally used in an exploratory stage. The first part of the literature review in Chapter 2 has suggested the nature and characteristics of the BC which relates to the first research question: ‘What are car-consumer clubs in Thailand?’ The first part includes the first objective of the

study, which is to understand the nature of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand, which are social groups formed by voluntary members. It also seeks to explore the reasons why car consumers are interested in these clubs. Moreover, the BC traits in the extant literature which have mainly been conducted in the West are also brought in to be used in comparison with the car-consumer clubs in Thailand. Therefore, this stage is considered as an exploratory stage which is conducted to provide a comprehensive understanding of the background of the case studies.

The second stage of the research is an explanatory stage which seeks an explanation of a situation and which tries to identify relationships between aspects of the phenomena (Robson, 2002). Yin (2003a) mentions that “how” and “why” questions are more appropriate for use in case studies which are more explanatory. The second stage attempts to answer the questions: ‘How do consumers participate in these car-consumer clubs?’ and ‘Why do consumers participate in these car-consumer clubs?’ Consequently, four propositions are proposed (see Table 3.1).

The second stage includes the second and third objectives, which are concerned with the key to explain consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs. The second objective seeks to explain the effects of the rewards on Thai consumer behaviour towards the clubs, which can lead members continuing their membership in the clubs. The pattern of consumer behaviour in the clubs is explained in relation to behaviourism, the BPM (particularly utilitarian and informational reinforcement), and RGB. The third objective is to explain the rationale behind the significance of the rewards which have an effect on consumer behaviour in the car-consumer clubs. The role of collective intentionality is integrated in the analysis in order to interpret the consumer at a personal level. Therefore, this is considered as an explanatory stage to examine the propositions.

### 3.4 Case Study Method

#### 3.4.1 Justification for the Case Study Method

Qualitative research includes many approaches, such as: ethnography, hermeneutics, phenomenology and case study. Lincoln and Guba (2000) report that the qualitative mechanism can transfer knowledge from one setting to another, which is often supplied by a case study report. Bryman (2001) mentions that the research design and data collection process can be justified from the main research questions, which indicate the research direction. Yin (2003a: p.1) states: *“case study research is preferred strategy when ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context.”* Thus, the case study method is taken into account based on the research questions, which contain ‘how’ and ‘why’ questions.

Furthermore, a case study can be employed as an instrument to understand a particular setting (Schwandt, 2001). The main emphasis of the case study is on the rich real-world context where the phenomena take place (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). A case study requires researchers to gather in-depth, comprehensive, and systematic data from individuals or groups (Patton, 1990). This can extend theories by integrating ideas and explaining them from outside the situation of the case studies (Carson et al., 2001).

The case study method is, consequently, considered as appropriate for use in the present study for a number of reasons. Firstly, unlike ethnography, a case study does not require a long time to complete (Yin, 2003a). Secondly, it is suitable to view the reality of human behaviour (Flyvbjerg, 2004). Thirdly, it is suitable for the researcher who has limited resources (Blaxter et al., 2000). Fourthly, it can be used to generate theory from small-scale data (Eisenhardt, 1989).

It is apparent that much previous research has studied BCs through ethnographic research in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the culture and social setting in which the researcher immerses themselves over a long period of time. Nonetheless, the constraints of time and resources are the main issues which need to be taken into

account when undertaking research. These constraints are major limitations in this study. Furthermore, this study intends to illustrate a method to interpret and understand consumer behaviours from their verbal behaviour. Due to the restrictions of time and resources, the research questions are brought into consideration to look for the other options. Having deliberately considered the research options to fulfil the research purpose, a cross-sectional study was conducted because it was considered to be more appropriate than a longitudinal study.

### **3.4.2 Inductive and Deductive Approaches**

Deductive and inductive approaches are related to the method of giving reason to the research logically. An inductive approach starts with more specific observations which are expanded to the general (sometimes called a “bottom-up” approach). On the other hand, a deductive approach typically begins with the general and moves to the specific (sometimes called a “top-down” approach). Seale (1999) states that researchers who employ an inductive approach will enter the field with minimal preconceptions and develop their theories from the ground up. Meanwhile, researchers who employ a deductive approach will have hypotheses which are logically deduced from theories which are then tested in opposition to the observed data. Ritchie and Lewis (2003) also mention that induction seeks for patterns and connections from the observed world, whereas deduction generates propositions or hypothesis from existing theories. Accordingly, both inferences can be integrated into a study that requires a constructive structure and profound interpretations. Hence, this study has employed an inductive approach in the exploratory stage when it gathered data from the natural settings. This was then followed by a deductive approach in the later stage which was used to gather data in a more directed structure.

Although a deductive approach is mainly focused on a quantitative measure, Yin (2003a) argues that it can be employed in a qualitative case study where it will help researchers to scope the study and work with a direction. A deductive approach can be applied to manage and manipulate theoretical propositions (Yin, 2003a). It also has a tighter structure than an inductive approach (Carson et al., 2001). With a rigorous

structure, it assists the flow of the research by giving it a direction. Therefore, the deductive approach is implemented in this study in order to structure the research in the explanatory stage. Consequently, the propositions have been formulated before gathering the data in order to systematically give it a direction.

Another consideration concerns the nature of a case study research. Case-based research which proposes to build the theory after gathering the evidence is often employed in studies which use analytic induction (Eisenhardt, 1989; Stake, 1995). Meanwhile, case-based research which proposes to test the theory is generally employed in those studies which use a deductive approach (Yin, 2003a). This is a controversial issue in terms of which prior theory should be used in the research (Carson et al., 2001). Accordingly, sensitising concepts which serve as a navigator of what to look for (Blumer, 1954) are integrated into this study because they are generally implemented as the starting point of the research (Charmaz, 2003). Moreover, they can also be used in the research process as the foundation for data analysis (Bowen, 2006) and they can be used to formulate theoretical propositions by linking concepts (Hammersley, 1989).

Due to the complexity of human behaviour(s), sensitising concepts can serve as a guideline for a study which uses specific research settings. In this study, these concepts have helped the researcher to gear themselves towards the subjects and this will help to make sense of the nature of human behaviours because of its flexibility. Hox (1997) also suggests that sensitising concepts can be applied as a precursor of any promising direction for the research process in the starting points of conceptualisation. Sensitising concepts are used to shape a study where there is little known because it helps to form the conceptual framework and refine the research propositions (Patton, 2002). Therefore, this study has adopted sensitising concepts in both stages of the research in order to guide the research direction and to formulate the research questions and propositions.

### 3.4.3 Unit of Analysis

Unit of analysis refers to the major entity which will be analysed in the study (Trochim, 2006). Yin (2003a) suggests that the unit of analysis is related to the initial research questions and it can help to guide the researcher to specify the area of investigation. Thus, the unit of analysis of this study is the current members of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand and their participation in these clubs.

The number of cases is another issue that needs to be taken into consideration when conducting multiple case studies. Yin (2003a) suggests that conducting six to ten case studies can provide effective results. Consequently, seven case studies were selected to serve as representatives of data and this number is considered to be sufficient for the analysis.

The use of multiple cross-sectional case studies was adopted in this study in order to follow literal replication logic and to increase the robustness in the analysis (Yin 2003a, 2003b). Following replication logic, each case can be compared as a separate experiment which requires its own analytical unit of a series of related experiments (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). In addition, Yin (2003a: p.47) states that “*a major insight is to consider multiple cases as one would consider multiple experiments*” Therefore, this study has employed multiple case studies where each case serves as a single experiment in order to ensure a holistic investigation. It has also ensured that the interview procedures with the same set of questions were conducted in a similar manner in all seven of the car-consumer clubs.

### 3.4.4 The Case Study Selection Process

Since there are a growing number of car-consumer clubs in Thailand, selecting the case studies to represent the BC is an imperative procedure. There were a number of primary considerations to be made in this study before the representative case studies could be selected, they included: using the literature as an initial idea to find the case studies, the appropriateness of the data to make a case, and the accessibility to the data.

Consequently, the BC traits that were indicated in the literature by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) were applied in this study as the first criterion to select the case studies in Thailand. After the preliminary observation from the websites, fifteen clubs were drawn from twenty clubs for further consideration. The second criterion is that that these communities should have been operating for a minimum of three years and the numbers of website members are required to be more than 5,000 (see Table 3.2). This is done in order to find those clubs that have gained significant attention from the public because this can represent their reputation and stability in Thai society. At this round, there were nine clubs left to be approached. The final criterion is the accessibility to data, especially the accessibility to the club leaders who have the highest authority in the club’s administration. As a result, seven clubs were selected to serve as case studies. Those which still exist should be good representatives because of their stability and reputation.

**Table 3.2: Numbers of Website Members<sup>1</sup>**

Clubs	Year		
	2009	2010	2011
Volvo Club Thailand	14,543	17,744	19,663
BMWSociety Thailand	10,000	10,000	10,000
MercedesMania Thailand	15,838	18,609	21,633
Accord Club Thailand	32,605	35,782	39,056
Camry Club Thailand	18,575	21,063	24,843
Jazz Club Thailand	34,686	37,438	40,329
Yaris Club Thailand	26,253	30,144	33,053

Source: Car-Consumer Clubs’ Websites

### 3.4.5 Data Sampling

#### 3.4.5.1 The Primary Data

The primary data collection method which is used in this study includes: semi-structured interviews, observations, research diaries, field notes, photographs and audio recordings. The set of interview questions were structured by the review of the literature (see Appendix V). They could be changed and modified during the interview as

<sup>1</sup> Please note that these numbers are only approximate. In reality the actual membership numbers can vary by the day. Therefore, the actual membership numbers are difficult to indicate since the club leaders also never done the statistical number of the club members.

appropriate to the circumstance. The face-to-face interviews were conducted with both groups and individuals, at the respondent's convenience. The interviews will be further described in detail in the data collection methods and techniques (see section 3.6.1).

#### **3.4.5.2 The Study Sample**

The final sample size is forty-five respondents who are drawn from the entire population of seven car-consumer clubs in Thailand. Based on the exploratory stage results, the respondents in the study were categorised into three groups: the club leaders (such as administrators, webmasters, or president of the clubs), active members, and non-active members (see Appendix VII for the respondents' profiles). Purposive sampling was employed to indicate the initial interview with the club leaders. Purposive sampling is a technique which is used to select the units along with the researcher's own knowledge and opinion of who are the most appropriate respondents to select (David and Sutton, 2004). This is a productive technique through which the respondents who could provide answers to the research questions were selected (Marshall, 1996). Because the first stage of this study was to explore car-consumer clubs, this group of respondents were purposively selected to gather overall information about car-consumer clubs. Furthermore, the first interviewee should be someone who can suggest the researcher to other engaged people (Carson et al., 2001).

The observations which were made during the screening cases process showed that most car-consumer clubs in Thailand have authority figures who manage the clubs, namely the 'club leader'. The club leaders are the most authoritative people in the club who can give their permission to conduct the research. They are also key persons who can recommend the study to other contacts, which will generate the leads that will enable the researcher to gain access to other members for the next interview (see section 3.6 for more detail of data collection). This snowballing technique was implemented for use with the respondents who are current club members because the exploratory stage indicated that the best way to approach these respondents was through personal connections. In addition, the initial findings indicated that there were two types of club members: on the one hand were the active members who are more engaged in the clubs, on the other hand were the non-active members who are less engaged in the clubs.

However, in reality it was sometimes found to be difficult to identify the active members from the non-active members since the two often were blended in the clubs. Consequently, in the main study the SCI (see Appendix VI) was adopted to indicate the sense of belonging to the club. As a result, three types of membership respondents were sampled in the study in order to examine their behaviours in the clubs. The details of the case study samplings and the respondents are summarised in Tables 3.3, 3.4, and 3.5:

**Table 3.3: Case Study Sampling Frame**

Types of Membership	Sample Size	Technique
<b>1.Club leaders</b>	10	• Purposive Sampling
<b>2. Active Members</b>	32	• Snowball Sampling
<b>3. Non-Active Members</b>	3	• Snowball Sampling
<b>Total</b>	45	

Source: This study

**Table 3.4: Numbers of the Respondents based on Types of Membership**

Clubs	Club Code	Club Leaders	Active Members	Non-Active Members	Total
Volvo Club Thailand	VV	2	4	Not Available	6
BMWSociety Thailand	BM	1	6	Not Available	7
MercedesMania Thailand	MM	1	5	1	7
Accord Club Thailand	AC	1	6	1	8
Camry Club Thailand	CR	2	4	Not Available	6
Jazz Club Thailand	JZ	1	2	1	4
Yaris Club Thailand	YC	2	5	Not Available	7

Source: This study

**Table 3.5: The Respondents Codes**

<b>Clubs</b>	<b>Club Code</b>	<b>Club Leaders</b>	<b>Active Members</b>	<b>Non-Active Members</b>
Volvo Club Thailand	VV	VV1, VV2	VV1Ga, VV1Gb, VV1Gc, VV1Gd	-
BMWSociety Thailand	BM	BM1	BM1b, BM2Ga, BM2Gb, BM3,BM4,BM5	-
MercedesMania Thailand	MM	MM1	MM1Ga,MM1Gb, MM2,MM3,MM4	MM5
Accord Club Thailand	AC	AC1	AC2Ga, AC2Gb,AC2Gc, AC2Gd, AC2Ge, AC3	AC4
Camry Club Thailand	CR	CR1, CR2	CR3, CR4,CR5,CR6	-
Jazz Club Thailand	JZ	JZ1	JZ2, JZ3	JZ4
Yaris Club Thailand	YC	YC1, YC2	YC3, YC4, YC5Ga, YC5Gb, YC5Gc	-

Source: This study

### 3.5 Issue of Entry and Ethical Considerations

Access is the foremost issue that had to be given attention prior to entering the field work. To acquire access the gatekeepers who are able to give their permission to enter the communities needed to be identified (Blaxter et al., 2000). The gatekeepers are those individuals who are able to enable the researcher to access documents, people, institutions and so forth (Blaxter et al., 2000). They are key persons who control the entrance to research settings (Silverman, 2005). Thus, the gatekeepers in this study are considered to be the club leaders who have highest authority in the clubs and they were approached by email and telephone. The emails, which contained information about the study and an introductory letter (see Appendix II), were sent to targeted respondents. This was then followed up by telephone after their reply had been received. Both email

and telephone complement one another: email allows the researcher to provide information about the study while the telephone enhances the trustworthiness and proximity to the respondents.

All research which involves people should be responsible to their respondents. Hence, in this study ethical issues were carefully taken into consideration. Accordingly, the relevant research ethics (such as informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity) have been brought into consideration. The ethics forms and agreements which were used in this study (including the research interview questions) were sent to Cardiff University's ethical committee for approval before the data was collected (see Appendix I). After the forms were approved, emails which described the study were sent to inform the respondents. Consequently, the respondents were contacted in advance either by email or telephone and they were informed about the purpose of the study. In the interview the respondents were asked to read the ethical forms and if they agreed they signed their consent to be interviewed. The ethics forms (including the letter of introduction to the study, the consent form-anonymous data and the consent form-confidential data) are included in the appendices (see Appendices III and IV). During the interview process each interviewee was asked for their permission to have the interview recorded and notes taken (depending on the interviewee's choice and comfort). Moreover, in the event that pictures and short video clips were recorded, the researcher informed the respondents and requested their permission first. All of the data which is gathered in this study is protected with confidentiality and anonymity, as described in the agreement.

## **3.6 Data Collection**

### **3.6.1 Data Collection Methods and Techniques**

Interviews are one of the most popular qualitative research techniques and they are used to collect, analyse, and interpret qualitative data about people's attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and opinions (Carson et al., 2001). The aim of an interview is to understand experience as nearly as possible as its participants feel it or live it (Sherman and Webb,

1988). In general, the main purpose of the interview is to get inside someone's head and enter into their perspective (Patton, 1990). Although conducting an interview is a time-consuming process (Robson, 2002; Oppenheim, 2006), it can be used as a tool to discover the feelings, memories and interpretations of the respondent which the researcher cannot observe or find out in other ways (Carson et al., 2001).

In this study a semi-structured interview is considered to be a preferable method because of its flexibility (Bryman, 2001; Al Qur'an, 2010). The use of a semi-structured interview has enabled the researcher to obtain purposeful, rich, reliable, valid and accurate information from the respondents. The interviews were conducted with both groups and individuals (which are otherwise known as one-to-one interviews). The one-to-one interviews in this study were conducted with the club leaders and club members whereas the group interviews were conducted with the club members. The number of respondents who were interviewed in group and one-to-one interviews can be seen in Table 3.6.

**Table 3.6: The Number of Group and One-to-One Interviews**

<b>Interview Approach</b>  <b>Types of Membership</b>	<b>One-to-one Interview</b>	<b>Group Interview</b>	
	<b>Number of Individual Respondents</b>	<b>Number of Groups</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Club Leader	10	-	-
Active Member	16	5	16
Non-Active Member	3	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>16</b>

Source: This Study

The rationale for using a combination of group and one-to-one interviews in this study is to seek a comprehensive understanding of the respondents' motivations to participate in these clubs, as well as to understand their behaviour in the clubs. The aim of this approach is to gain an in-depth description of the interpretation from diverse approaches since both one-to-one and group interviews have a number of advantages and disadvantages. The advantages of one-to-one interviews are that they allow the researcher to question the respondents in more detail and they tend to give more information because they feel more comfortable and speak more openly without the

presence of group pressure. One-to-one interviews also provide an additional insight of the interviewee's personal feelings and they provide some information which an interviewee might feel uncomfortable about expressing in a group (Webb, 2002). The disadvantages of one-to-one interviews are that they are time-consuming (more than forty-five minutes per each interview) and they cannot provide sufficient data on the respondents' interaction within group and the closeness of their relationship with other club members.

The advantages of group interviews are that they can provide wide-ranging information and more detail in terms of the collective group and their participation in the club. They can do this because the discussions of the topic from group interview are generated by the interaction between groups of respondents, while the researcher acts as a facilitator (David and Sutton, 2004). Moreover, group interviews allow the researcher to observe the group dynamic and their proximity in the clubs in a more natural setting. The disadvantages of group interviews are that some insight information might not be revealed by the respondents and dominant individuals in the group may control the discussion in terms of setting the tone and the talking time (David and Sutton, 2004). This problem can be solved by establishing a friendly atmosphere in order to encourage all of the respondents in the group to give their views and make use of the group interaction to facilitate the interview.

The implications for the data of the use of both interview approaches are that they improve the representativeness of the data and they can enhance the validity of the study. In this study, the one-to-one interviews provided more details and insightful data in terms of personal opinions and information while the group interviews provided more details in term of group dynamic and they also showed the closeness relationship between the respondents which benefit to the study in terms of the representativeness of the data. Furthermore, the use of combination of interview methods can enhance the validity of the analysis because the interview data can be used to cross-check through different approaches of investigation and different source of evidences. As a result, the data from both approaches can be used to triangulate one another, which can further increase the validity of this study.

However, it is essential to be aware of some problems when conducting interviews, such as: bias (Carson et al., 2001), domineering communication style, leading questions (Seymour, 1988; Daymon and Holloway, 2002), and overlooking other necessary data (Flick, 2002). These problems are related to issues of values and judgements of the researcher which can be imposed onto the research. In this study these pitfalls were overcome by remaining open-minded and separated from the data in order to capture data from the real situation with unbiased views.

In this study a number of other data collection techniques (such as field notes, audio recordings, email, telephone and observation) were also incorporated into the data collection process in addition to interviews. The participant observation method, in which the researcher becomes a part of the observed group but remains explicit to the site in an observer role (Robson, 2002; Creswell, 2003; Pothisita, 2006), was employed in this study when participating in club activities (such as New Year parties, motor shows and charity and donation events). The researcher's role in this study was less involved in the community than the ethnography; however, the role was more flexible than the observer-as-participant method because the researcher cannot take part in activities and has to observe the site systematically (Robson, 2002). Furthermore, this method can help to prevent the researcher from introducing bias while still allowing the researcher to interact and develop rapport with the respondents.

### **3.6.2 Data Collection Procedure**

#### **3.6.2.1 Exploratory Stage**

The exploratory stage of this study was conducted with the club leader respondents in Thailand. This stage was undertaken over four weeks between December to January. This phase intended to interview respondents who have authority in the car-consumer clubs, who could be the webmaster, the administrator, or the president depending on the structure of each club. Thus, persons who are responsible for the club administration were purposively selected in order to explore the nature of car-consumer clubs in Thailand and to examine their motivations to establish the clubs. Consequently, semi-

structured interviews were carried out which used interview questions that were developed from the literature review (McCracken, 1988). After each interview was finished, the questions and answers were revised and adjusted as was considered to be appropriate for the next interview.

The outcomes from exploratory stage not only provided insightful data in these settings but they also granted a number of other advantages for the next stage of the study. Firstly, the rapport and connections were established, this is in line with the work of Robson (2002) who found that gaining trust from key members of the group is essential. The club leader respondents provided full collaboration to answer the questions and they granted the researcher access to conduct the study of their clubs. Secondly, aspects of the BC together with aspects of behaviourism and the BPM were explored in Thailand, which is a new setting for this type of research. The results of the primary research indicated that there are three types of membership in the clubs which could be examined in the next stage based on each type of membership. Thirdly, the semi-interview data collection approach was confirmed as a suitable approach for use in this study. Fourthly, the results from this stage led to the formulation of the propositions, particularly those rewards which the respondents receive from the clubs (as indicated by the findings). Consequently, the exploratory stage was considered to be productive in terms of the context of car-consumer clubs in Thailand and a number of factors were confirmed, including: connections and accesses were established; the feasibility for further investigation was examined; the interview questions were refined; and, the interview protocol was practised.

#### **3.6.2.2 Explanatory Stage**

The explanatory stage was undertaken in Thailand over ten weeks between March to May 2010. At this stage the frame of theories in relation to BPM and behavioural theories and the results from exploratory stage were essential sources to organise a constructive pattern for investigation. Accordingly, this phase intended to collect data from current club members who continue their membership status in the clubs by employing a snowballing technique and personal contact in order to obtain adequate levels of data. Face-to-face semi-structured interviews with predetermined questions

were then conducted. These questions were developed from the literature review. The key aim of the semi-structured interviews was to obtain data in response to the research questions and propositions and, more importantly, to fulfil the objectives of the study. Moreover, both the researcher and the respondents were able to directly communicate and modify the questions and answers if there were any unclear points (Robson, 2002). The use of face to face interviews also allowed the researcher to observe the body language and gestures of the respondents during the interview.

Before each interview was conducted the respondents were asked for their consent to record and give information, as informed by the ethics forms. The interview conversations were recorded via short note-taking together with the use of a sound recorder during each interview. Both the written notes and audio recordings were summarised or transcribed verbatim shortly after the interview session while the interview dialogue was fresh in the researcher's mind (Grant, 2000). All of the interviews were conducted in the Thai language and transcriptions were made in Thai in order to preserve the original context and accuracy of the interviewee's meanings and expressions. Regarding the interview duration, Robson (2002) comments that if the interview is less than half an hour it will not be productive but if researchers conduct an interview for too long it will be problematic for everyone involved. Therefore, in this study all of the interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes for the club members, and approximately 60 to 90 minutes for the club leaders.

It is apparent that there is no precise number or definitive answer to indicate the absolute number of total interviews to be used in qualitative research. Oppenheim (2006) suggests that the quality of data should be the criteria to determine the numbers of people interviewed because qualitative research is dominated by quality rather than quantity. In the fieldwork the interviews were conducted until they had reached a saturation stage, which means that the researcher did not find any incremental to the analysis (Marshall, 1996; Mason, 2010). It is crucial to note here that saturation refers to data which has reached the level of analysis where no new information emerges and the level was felt to be appropriate to inform the study (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Thus, the collecting data phase was finished when the data appeared to be similar with no incremental idea and properties, which was a signal to stop collecting data.

### **3.7 Data Analysis Procedure**

All of the data needed to be organised prior to starting the analysis in order to allow the researcher to examine and search the data conveniently and quickly, and to ensure that the data is kept safe and prevented from loss (Grix, 2001; Nopkesorn, 2006). Consequently, the outline of the provisional chapters and literature review were useful because they helped in sifting through and analysing many documents, interview transcripts, and other data from the fieldwork. Miles and Huberman (1994) propose three major stages in qualitative analysis: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Accordingly, these three stages were implemented in this study.

#### **3.7.1 Data Reduction**

Data reduction outlines the method which the researcher should use to select, focus, abstract, and transform the data (Miles and Huberman, 1994). The researcher has to make a decision on which data chunks will be focused on (Silverman, 2005). Consequently, coding, which is a process to review field notes and interview transcripts and to analyse data meaningfully (Miles and Huberman, 1994), was conducted. The lists of codes are normally drawn from the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the propositions in the study (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In this study the themes and related codes were drawn from the literature and the BPM, and they were predefined as start lists in the analysis (see Appendices IX and X). However, some codes could be changed and modified as the study progresses according to the real context and situation in order to allow the data to describe the reality that it finds and to allow the researcher to capture the phenomenon from the empirical work. These codes were checked and verified with the supervisors of this research project (who are experts in the research area).

In this study the process of coding and organising data was carried out manually with the use of Microsoft Office Word and Excel. Because the study was conducted in Thailand where the first language of the respondents is Thai, the data were obtained in

the Thai language. Consequently, qualitative data analysis software packages such as NVivo, Nud\*ist were not used in this study because these computer programs do not support Thai characters. Although the data could have been translated into English, which is one of the languages that is supported by the available qualitative analysis programs, there would have been a significant risk of losing the meanings and perspectives of the respondents during the translation process.

### **3.7.2 Data Display**

Data display outlines the way to present and describe data in a proper form. It is a sequence from the data reduction step which allows the organised data to talk on its own (Pothisita, 2006). Patton (1990) suggests that in order to write a case study in narrative form the researcher can select to present it chronologically, or thematically, or both. It can also be displayed in a visual format, which may include many styles, such as: graphs, matrices, charts, or tables (Miles and Huberman, 1994). This step is a vital part of the analysis which enables the researcher to justify the conclusions systematically. Moreover, providing data in graphical formats can make it easier for the reader to grasp the idea of data presentation. Therefore, in this study the data is illustrated in the form of graphs, charts, tables and statements.

### **3.7.3 Drawing Conclusions and Verification**

Drawing and verification describe the researcher's decision on the meaning of data through interpretation (Al Qur'an, 2010). The researcher has to critically think about the meaning of things and they note any regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, casual flows and propositions (Miles and Huberman, 1994: p.11). One of the tactics to draw the initial meaning from the data is pattern forming. Once the patterns are established the researcher can then make, compare, and contrast them in order to clarify the relationship between setting patterns and the empirical data.

In the research process, pattern matching can be used to decide on the suitable propositions by comparing them with the actual data (Cao, 2007). This tactic is similar to the case study analytical technique which was suggested by Yin (1994) who suggests that theories provide the predicted patterns of events in the earlier stage of the research. The empirical data is then used to compare whether it is a match with the predicted patterns in order to test the theory or to predict the case study situation (Cao, 2007). The pattern matching technique is employed in this study in order to analyse data in the explanatory stage based on the theoretical propositions. By adopting this technique the patterns of consumer behaviour were pre-established from the literature. The results from the exploratory stage (in terms of benefits received from participation) were then integrated in the pattern so that they can be compared with the empirical data.

The analysis began with a within-case analysis by analysing each case independently together with the same set of propositions. Each individual case was treated as single experiment (Yin, 2003a). The results of each individual case were compared with the expected pattern of consumer behaviour. The results of all of the case studies were then compared in a cross-case analysis in order to search for similarities and dissimilarities of the clubs based on the nature of the car-consumer clubs and each type of membership. The results from the multiple case studies were considered as multiple experiments, which follows the concept of replication logic (Yin, 2003a). Consequently, the analysis of each selected case was carried out to predict similar results or literal replication (Yin, 2009). Eventually, the conclusions from the case studies can be used to verify the validity of the research (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

### **3.8 Issue of Research Quality**

#### **3.8.1 Construct Validity**

The idea of construct validity is related to the method to establish correct operational measures by linking data and measurement to theory in accordance with the research questions and hypotheses (Yin, 2003a). With regard to this study, the construct validity was established by designing case study protocol questions with semi-structured

interview questions in relation to the research objectives (Yin, 2003a) and capturing a rich and comprehensive understanding about the Thai car-consumer clubs and consumer behaviours in these clubs.

A credibility check was implemented in this study to affirm the chosen data because the meaning of the text can be interpreted in many different ways. The triangulation technique has been shown in previous studies to enhance the research quality (Bryman, 2001, Silverman, 2001). Triangulation is more reliable and will minimise the chance of bias in the findings (Denzin, 1970; Bryman, 2001; Punch, 2005). Therefore, the chain of evidence that is related to the study was combined in the database (Yin, 2003a, 2003b).

Methodological triangulation was implemented in this study by using both interviews and observations in order to increase the validity of the data. Moreover, data triangulation was also ensured through the use of multiple sources of evidence, such as: data from the interviews, the SCI true-false questionnaires, photos, and club's website (Rowley, 2002; Yin, 2003a). The data obtained from different interviewees was cross-checked to avoid any bias arising from the interviewees. The cross-case analysis was carried out to enhance the insights into each single case. Finally, respondent validation, which goes back to the respondents to refine the results (Silverman, 2000), was applied in order to increase the credibility and acceptability of the research. In other words, the case study report was reviewed by key informants to increase the validity of the interpretation (Yin, 2003a).

### **3.8.2 Internal and External Validity**

Internal validity describes the issue of making an inference in the explanatory research (Yin, 2003a). Accordingly, in this study the pattern-matching technique (which compares the emerged themes with the pre-established themes from the literature) was implemented in the data analysis. In addition, the findings of each case were carefully considered in a number of possible explanations from the propositions before the inference was made.

The external validity or issue of generalisation refers to the ability to generalise or transfer the findings in other contexts (Yin, 2003a). With regard to generalisability (which is extensively discussed in the literature of quantitative research), it can be argued that qualitative researchers are encouraged to produce ‘thick descriptions’ which provide a database for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other environment (Bryman, 2001). In the present study, external validity was achieved by using replication logic in the multiple case studies design and by selecting the cases by using constructive criteria from the literature (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Eisenhardt, 1989; Perry, 1998; Patton, 2002). Each case was reported individually before being combined into the holistic analysis. As a result, the theoretical knowledge from this study can be generalised into other settings.

### **3.8.3 Reliability**

The goal of reliability in this study is to reduce errors and bias (Yin, 2003a). Translation is a considerable issue in this study because the research was conducted in Thailand. The interviews were conducted in the Thai language and transcribed into Thai in order to preserve an original context. The data then needed to be translated from Thai into English. The researcher employed a back translation method to solve this issue (Yani-Soriano and Foxall, 2001; Craig and Douglas, 2002). The data was translated from the initial or source language into English by the researcher (who is a Thai native speaker). This translated data was then checked for errors and the quality of the translation by local bilingual translators who had graduated from a British university and who have experience in conducting research. All of the translated data was afterwards approved by a native English speaker in order to verify the quality of the translation. The back translation method can improve the research quality in terms of reliability.

The next issue to be considered is related to coding. Two obvious criticisms on coding in this study have arisen. One is that researchers construct the categories within each topic and set the code by their own judgements; hence, there is a possible problem of losing the context of what is said (Bryman, 2001). Another criticism of coding is that the narrative flow of what people say may be lost, which results in a fragmentation of

the data (Holloway and Jefferson, 2000). In order to prevent these criticisms, an ‘auditing’ approach was adopted to ensure that the researcher had not obviously allowed personal values in conducting the research (Bryman, 2001). Accordingly, the initial coding frame was developed from the literature and previous research, and it was then adjusted to suit the present study. These codes were checked by the supervisors and other colleagues who are knowledgeable in BPM. The later codes were developed from the interviews and then sent back to the respondents to confirm mutual understanding and to increase the reliability of the interviews.

### **3.9 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has discussed the philosophical underpinnings of this research project. It has also discussed the qualitative multiple case-study approach which was implemented in this research project in order to outline and explain the research methodology. It has also demonstrated how the research was carried out in the Thai car-consumer clubs and how the consumer behaviour in these clubs was analysed. It has further attempted to address the issues of the research quality in terms of validity and reliability of the research, which have been considered throughout the study.

This study was divided into two main stages, which are: an exploratory stage and an explanatory stage. Accordingly, the results from the exploratory stage will be illustrated first, and these are then followed by the results from the explanatory stage in relation to the propositions. The next chapter will demonstrate the descriptions of the findings of each club in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of each car-consumer club before a cross-case analysis is conducted in the following chapters.

## **Chapter Four**

### **FINDINGS - SEVEN CASE STUDIES**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter contains an overview of the findings of the seven car-consumer clubs. The structure of the chapter consists of the cases of: Volvo Club Thailand, BMW Society Thailand, MercedesMania Thailand, Accord Club Thailand, Camry Club Thailand, Jazz Club Thailand, and Yaris Club Thailand.

#### **4.2 Case: Volvo Club Thailand**

The website [www.volvoclubthailand.com](http://www.volvoclubthailand.com)<sup>2</sup> was started in 2000 by a group of Volvo car owners. At that time, this group of people were members of a famous public web-board in Thailand named Pantip. The Volvo Club started on the Pantip web-board when this group of Volvo car owners set-up their own forum about Volvo cars. In 2002 their communications had increased to the point where they had to move the website to [www.bangkokcity.com](http://www.bangkokcity.com) in order to enhance website capacity, but they still had not yet met in person. The numbers of members<sup>3</sup> who joined the forum to chat grew considerably and, as a consequence, people became concerned about establishing a new website to support all of the members' demands. In 2003 the club was moved to a new server which was rented from Siamwaxy at [www.siamwaxy.com/volvoclub](http://www.siamwaxy.com/volvoclub). From this point on the pioneer members also began to meet in person. They met regularly until the

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<sup>2</sup> In the rest of this thesis the website [www.volvoclubthailand.com](http://www.volvoclubthailand.com) will be referred to as the Volvo Club, code VV.

<sup>3</sup> This thesis will use “club members” to specify people who are not club leaders but who are current club members, which include both active and non-active members. Meanwhile, this thesis will use “members” and “members of the clubs” to describe everyone in the clubs who hold membership, including the club leader.

sixth meeting<sup>4</sup>, when the number of members who joined the meeting reached fifty people. After the sixth meeting the large number of members could no longer be supported by the server at the Siamwaxy. The webmaster (who has the highest authority to administer the Volvo Club website) at that time came from Siamwaxy and he offered the Volvo Club an opportunity to assign people from the club to act as an assistant committee to help him manage the club's website. Consequently, the pioneer members felt that they were too dependent on Siamwaxy and in 2004 they decided to move the club once again by renting their own web-server from their own budget. They registered a new domain name, [www.volvoclubthailand.com](http://www.volvoclubthailand.com), which has continued to the present day.

The structure of the Volvo Club has changed over time. The club's present structure is comprised of: two webmasters, consultants (who are committee members), staff (who are permanent members), VIP members (who are permanent members), and general members. The webmasters act as club administrators who control all of the website content; however, some of the main decision-making regarding the club administration still depends on the consensus from the club's consultants. The consultants are able to see all content on the website. The staff can view all content, except for the consultant's content. The VIP members can view some content, except the consultant's and staff's content. The general members cannot view the content of the VIPs, staff, or consultants.

The club is composed of two key components, which are: web-board and activities. The web-board is an essential component in club development because the club is situated in the VC. According to the Volvo Club's website, the web-board is designed for sharing car-knowledge on Volvo cars. The web-boards of Thai car-consumer clubs are generally categorised into rooms which serve different purposes, such as entertainment, relaxation, and other general issues. The web-board is a place for communication where members can exchange their ideas, feelings and opinions, and share car-knowledge. Members are able to support one another and show their good will by helping other members to answer the questions.

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<sup>4</sup> The term "meeting" is commonly used in the Thai car-consumer clubs context. It is a jargon word which refers to activity in the club and the term "meeting" and "activities" are often used interchangeably in the Thai car-consumer clubs. Therefore, this definition will be used in the rest of this thesis.

Another important aspect of the Thai car-consumer clubs are activities which transfers the VC to the physical world. In other words, offline activities create the club's existence in the physical world. There are three types of meetings. The first type of meeting is for entertainment only, such as dining or travelling (i.e. road-trips). The second type of meeting is for social works called Tamboon<sup>5</sup>, these meetings can include charity events and societal development events (such as visiting schools and temples, or collecting donations) that members are willing to take part in because they have a sense of being part of a wider social circle. Their family members can also take part in these events. Even though the members have to pay for each event from their own pockets, they do this voluntarily. The third type of meeting is for car purposes and is called a Do-It-Yourself meeting, in these meetings the members are able to discuss car repairs and car maintenance, they are also able to practice these techniques on the cars themselves. In addition to the main meetings, there are minor meetings which are called Nork-Rorb.<sup>6</sup> The club's offline activities create a chance for members to meet in person and to get to know each other beyond the virtual world.

### 4.3 Case: BMW Society Thailand

The website [www.bmwsociety.com](http://www.bmwsociety.com)<sup>7</sup> was started in 2001. The club is designed as a place for BMW car admirers to exchange knowledge about BMW's car models. The club was started by BM1, who at that time was still an employee in a computer company. Since BM1 had worked in a computer department for years, he was

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<sup>5</sup> Tamboon is a Thai word which means merit-making, it can include charity and donation events. Tamboon is another popular activity which is often organised in Thai car-consumer clubs even though these social activities are not related to cars. In the rest of this thesis, Tamboon will be used to describe charity and donation events which are organised by the clubs.

<sup>6</sup> Thai car-consumer clubs often use the term "meeting" for main activities organised by the clubs. The minor activities or informal activities that are organised by members themselves (such as casual gathering) are called "Nork-Rorb", which is a common jargon in the Thai car-consumer clubs. "Nork-Rorb" comes from Thai and it refers to any casual meeting out of the main meeting. In the rest of this thesis the term "Nork-Rorb" will also be used to describe casual activities that are organised by the members.

<sup>7</sup> In the rest of this thesis the website [www.bmwsociety.com](http://www.bmwsociety.com) will be referred to as the BMW Society, code BM.

knowledgeable as a website designer. In the same year (2001), there were only a small number of car-consumer clubs in Thailand. At that time BM1 wanted to purchase a new BMW car. Although he had been trying to search for a BMW website for car-consumers in Thailand, he could not find any. Eventually, in frustration he decided to set-up his own web-board to discuss BMW cars. Since then, a large number of people have visited the web-board and discussed the BMW brand.

The initial idea of the website was adopted from an overseas website which inspired BM1 to create a similar website in Thailand. Consequently, BM1 encouraged his friends, who were also BMW car owners, to participate in the new club. The club was subsequently named the BMW Society in order to represent the feeling of community and warmth, rather than positioning the club in car racing. The BMW Society was officially started as [www.bmwsociety.com](http://www.bmwsociety.com).

The BMW Society is operated by a webmaster, who is also the club owner and who has the authority to manage the club. The webmaster is in charge of membership applications, so he has the power and authority to screen members. When considering a new member he considers personal connections and existing member recommendations as criteria in addition to the website's screening system. Therefore, the final decision on membership depends on the webmaster's personal judgment.

The webmaster has set the maximum number of members at 10,000. Consequently, members are required to keep their account activate by visiting the web-board at least once every three months in order to maintain their membership status. Otherwise, the webmaster will remove their member identification (ID) and replace that person with a new member. The reason that the webmaster has limited the number of members at 10,000 is due to a domain capacity issue, the website has a limited bandwidth. In general, the club's website is publicly open for non-members to search the pages for car-knowledge; however, if there are large numbers of visitors viewing the website which exceed the capacity of the bandwidth then the current members will be given priority access. Although there is no charge for a membership application, the members are able to donate to the club by purchasing club stickers and souvenirs. The sales revenues are spent on the club's maintenance costs and activities. The webmasters

reported that the members purchase these products voluntarily, without any force or coercion from the club, because they want to support the club.

The BMW Society has created a website which contains the web-board as a communication centre where everyone can follow and monitor the club's movement. The web-board has two main aspects: the first aspect is the members' discussion, while the second aspect is commercial issues. The web-board accommodates members in all areas of practical car-knowledge, such as technical knowledge, and other miscellaneous car-knowledge. The website function is similar to a Google search engine for BMW car consumers. The web-board has been divided into rooms, based on the purposes of web-board use (such as classified adverts, car articles, and a chat zone). Members can exchange their ideas, post their queries and answers, and search for car-knowledge on the web-board (which is seen as a centre of knowledge to members).

All of the systems in the club are structured by the webmasters. The club members acknowledge the webmaster as the club leader who serves both as the president and the club owner. Within the club structure, there are sub-groups which have been set up by the members themselves. These sub-groups sometimes organise their own activities, although they have to inform the webmaster if those activities involve the club's reputation. There is no other officially appointed position within the club except for the webmaster; however, there is an exemption, when the club organises an activity the members' responsibilities are assigned on a case by case basis by the webmaster based on their competency and voluntary contribution.

Activities also play a significant function in the BMW Society club. In the past the club has organised many kinds of activities, such as: car meetings for members to see the cars of other members, dinners for members, sports events for members, car rallies, trips, and Tamboon as well as Nork-Rorb for casual gatherings of members. Participating in activities is an opportunity for members to get to know other members in person and physically communicate with them. These activities can deepen the members' relationship and extend the communication topics on the web-board because the members will often post an update of their activities on the web-board.

#### **4.4 Case: MercedesMania Thailand**

The website [www.mercedesmania.com](http://www.mercedesmania.com)<sup>8</sup> was started by a group of Mercedes-Benz car owners in 2004. For five years before this club was formed MM1 (who is a current administrator) and his friends (approximately thirty people) were members of other car-consumer clubs. They were unable to continue their membership status in these other clubs for a number of reasons. This experience encouraged them to establish a car-consumer club of their own and so they decided to create their own Mercedes car-consumer club for people who are fond of Mercedes cars and car modifications.

The MercedesMania was established by a group of like-minded people who are keen on the same car brand (i.e. Mercedes-Benz). MM1 further added that the idea of the club was inspired by a book that he read about the car clubs in Western countries. He learned how to create the website by himself, and received assistance from his friends in the club. Presently, the MercedesMania is one of the most famous car-consumer clubs in Thailand and it has been in operation for seven years.

There is only one requirement to become a member of the MercedesMania: the members are required to register on the club's website. According to MM1, the club is composed of two types of members: active and non-active. Non-active members are members who register with the club but who rarely participate in the club's activities and hardly contribute to the club. This type of member is likely to remain anonymous in the club. In contrast, active members often contribute to the club by participating in the web-board and activities. Thus, the types of member can be defined by their level of club participation.

The administrative structure of the MercedesMania is composed of: the administrator (who is the leader of the club), the moderators (who are responsible for each car class section), and the club members (who can be active or non-active). Because the Mercedes-Benz is composed of a range of car models (which are known as classes), each car-class has its own room for members to communicate which is monitored by

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<sup>8</sup> In the rest of this thesis the website [www.mercedesmania.com](http://www.mercedesmania.com) will be referred to as the MercedesMania, code MM.

moderators. The moderators are appointed by the administrator. Generally, the administrator will approach likely prospects and ask them to become a moderator. In addition, the prospects need to be accepted by club members in that car-class and they should be willing to act as a moderator. Nevertheless, all contents in the web-board are ultimately controlled by the administrator.

The MercedesMania club is composed of two main components: the web-board and activities. The web-board functions as a car-knowledge centre, which provides not only Mercedes-Benz car-knowledge but also other miscellaneous information. Activities in the club include the main meeting (which is held annually), sport competitions and Tamboon, regular meetings for each Mercedes-Benz car-class, and Nork-Rorb. There are various kinds of activities, such as: car booth sales, charity events, sport events, and dining. These activities are important to the club because they create an opportunity for members to meet in person, which creates a close relationship and feeling of friendship in a real-life context.

#### **4.5 Case: Accord Club Thailand**

The website [www.accordclubthailand.com](http://www.accordclubthailand.com)<sup>9</sup> was started in 2005 by a group of seven Honda Accord car owners. These seven people knew each other through one of the most famous web-boards in Thailand, where they had chatted with each other for a period of time and became friends. Eventually they wished to create a gathering place in the virtual world because of its convenience, so they developed the idea to create their own website.

The initial aim when they created the website was only to exchange car-knowledge on the Honda Accord. They wanted to learn about the Honda Accord from other car consumers, such as: car repair services, how to solve car problems, and the car's pros and cons. Due to the fact that the previous web-board that they had participated in had not met their expectations, they set-up a brand new website which primarily focuses on

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<sup>9</sup> In the rest of this thesis the website [www.accordclubthailand.com](http://www.accordclubthailand.com) will be referred to as the Accord Club, code AC.

the Honda Accord car. Accordingly, the Accord Club was intended to be a car-knowledge centre for Honda Accord car consumers.

The Accord Club has no special requirement for a membership application. Instead, the Accord Club is open publicly for everyone who is interested to participate. Nevertheless, there is a requirement to register via the website and the members are asked to set their login name and password which will be verified by email. For security reasons it is imperative to activate the login name by following a link in the initial registration email.

Information gathered from the interviews and the club's website shows that the club has a president, General Managers (GMs), a VIP, and ACT consultants. The president is the club leader who is entitled to manage the club. The president has the authority to make final decisions in the club's administration, to make policies, and to control the club. He or she has to provide full assistance in club activities. The GMs are a part of the club's committee, they are also able to make decisions in the club administration by voting system and they can assist in club activities at their convenience (i.e. they are not compulsory). In addition, the GMs will be assigned extra responsibilities (such as treasurer or activities co-ordinator) as appropriate. The VIPs are a group of people who assist in club activities when the GMs need some extra help. Unlike the GMs, they do not have the authority to make any decision regarding the club's administration; however, they are encouraged to express their opinions in order to help the GMs to make the best decisions for the club. The ACT consultants are a group of club initiators, plus ex-GMs, who are still visiting the club web-board and who are willing to participate in the club (somewhat similar to alumni). The ACT consultants are people who have experience in managing the Accord Club and they are able to give advice to the current GMs. All of the administrative team are obliged to monitor the club (in both activities and web-board). In addition, they have the authority to manage and dispose of any inappropriate manners by the members which they feel may spoil the club's reputation.

Although the club hires an outsourced webmaster to design and manage the website, the webmaster in this club has no authority in the club administration. The webmaster's role is merely to run the web-board's technical systems. In other words, the club's

management is still controlled by the president and the GMs. The webmaster in this case has no authority in the club because he is not involved in the club's administration.

The Accord Club declares itself to be a non-profit club; however, in practice members can support the club by purchasing club stickers and souvenirs (such as baseball caps, t-shirts, and key-chains). The club has also been supported in the past by sponsors. Therefore, the club's sources of income are: members, commercial sales, and sponsorship. Although the president wants to transform the club into a more business-like organisation, this is difficult in practice because money is a problematic issue. Because part of the club's income comes from the members themselves, it is unavoidable to count the club's finances as everyone's money. If the club transforms its structure from a non-profit organisation to a business organisation which focuses on profit-seeking, it will have to change its managerial system and the club will have to develop an official salary system to hire people to work for the club as employees. This is in contrast to the club's objective because the club's ideology is to be of assistance to the Honda Accord car consumers. Consequently, the president is unable to change the club into a profit-seeking business. As a result, the club remains as a non-profit club.

The two main components of the club are the web-board and activities. The web-board functions as a centre of communication where members can exchange their opinions by posting their views in the forum. The main purpose of the web-board is to make available the member's car-knowledge. The Accord Club has organised the web-board into rooms, which requires members to follow the club's regulation by posting on the right web-board rooms. Members are free to log on to the web-board as often as they wish. The other main component of the Accord Club is activities, which are equally important to the club because the activities allow members to meet in physical world. The activities in the club include main meetings (such as the club's anniversary, a new year's party, and Tamboon), minor meetings (such as trips and sports), and Nork-Rorb. All of the activities are voluntary.

## 4.6 Case: Camry Club Thailand

The website [www.camryclub.com](http://www.camryclub.com)<sup>10</sup> was started in 2003. At that time the trend in Thailand was that many people wanted to belong to clubs in the VC due to the progress of the Internet network in Thailand. This trend inspired CR1 (who is the administrator and the club's owner) to create a website for people who have a common interest in the Toyota Camry to exchange and share car-knowledge.

There are two ways for people who are interested in participating in the Camry Club to obtain membership. The first method is by registering through the website, this type of member is called a 'web-member' and they are generally found to be non-active participants in the club. The second method is by participating in club's activities and buying a club sticker from the club, this type of member is called a 'formal member' and they are generally found to be active participants in the club. There is no restriction on who can obtain the club sticker. Anyone who is interested can become a formal member, he or she can simply orders the sticker from the website and the club will send it by post to the member (which is similar to the typical experience of online shopping). Meanwhile, the web-members can simply apply via the website and create their login name and password. Having a car or not is not a big deal, what matters are if a person is fond of the Toyota Camry because the club always welcomes everyone who is interested in the Camry cars.

CR1 mentioned that the majority of club members are web-members, but the actual numbers of members are less than the apparent numbers on the website. From the administrator's perspective, the actual members are referred to active member who take part in club activities. The other kinds of members, mentioned by CR1 are non-active members who register with the intention of selling their products and who only apply to obtain car-knowledge without taking any action in the club.

The structure of this club is centralised on the club leaders. The administrator in the Camry Club is a club leader who is responsible for the club website and club

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<sup>10</sup> In the rest of this thesis the website [www.camryclub.com](http://www.camryclub.com) will be referred to as the Camry Club, code CR.

administration. All of the club's functions and all of the systems of the Camry Club are managed by CR1, who is the club leader and who is also the club's online administrator. CR2 is another club leader who is positioned as a moderator. Both of these club leaders work in collaboration. Thus far, the administrator has the highest authority in the club and is responsible for all of the management, while the moderator acts as a coordinator and assists the administrator in monitoring the web-board and main activities of the club.

The Camry Club is structured around a number of sub-groups which represent the activities of several special interest groups within the group as a whole. For instance, members who love to play sports have set up their own sport groups (such as a football team, a badminton team, a golf team, and a snooker team) whereas members who love to eat out have set up a sub-group called the Bakery Gang. Members in the sub-groups can organise their own activities, but they have to inform the administrator if their activities involve the Camry Club's reputation.

The main components of the club are the web-board and activities. The web-board is the communication centre of the club. The club has divided the web-board into rooms in order to serve different purposes. For example, the activities room is a room for talking about activities and meetings, and the gallery room is a room for posting pictures and photos. In addition, there are rooms for subdivisions of a discussion, such as the Luxury Car Style room, which is a room for people who like to modify their cars in a luxury style.

The club's activities depend on the purposes of the events, such as: to dine out, to play sports, and to Tamboon. The offline activities provide an opportunity for members to meet in person. Activities can enhance the members feeling of friendship. Therefore, the activities are seen as a necessary component of the club because they play an important role in the club's progress.

## 4.7 Case: Jazz Club Thailand

The website [www.hondajazz-club.com](http://www.hondajazz-club.com)<sup>11</sup> was started in 2004 on the Pantown web-board, which is one of the most popular public web-boards in Thailand. JZ1, a current administrator, said that the club was started by the first administrator. At that time there had been a significant rise in the expansion of car-consumer clubs in Thailand, the car-consumer clubs had become popular and the number of members had been increasing rapidly. Most of the clubs are self-governing and most Thai car clubs have their own logo to represent their identity in the Thai car-consumer society, but the Jazz Club had yet to develop one of their own. This incident inspired the club's pioneer members to become independent of the Pantown web-board because they did not have full authority to manage their own web-board, including the internal systems. Fifteen pioneer members gathered together in order to establish their own club and they registered their new website domain. The main purpose of the club is to provide opportunities for people who like the Honda Jazz model to gather together.

To become a member of the Jazz Club it is necessary to apply via the website. Although the club is open for everyone who is interested and the application process is designed to be simple in order to accommodate all prospects, the prospects are required to register by providing basic personal information and choosing their own favourite login name and password. There are terms and agreements which require acknowledgement prior to the successful completion of an application. The prospects will receive a confirmation email with a web-link and they will become club members as soon as they activate their account from the confirmation email. Members of the club can participate in the web-board and activities at their convenience.

The Jazz Club is intended to be a liberal place for members where everyone is equally important. The club neither has a president nor different levels of membership. The structure of the club is loose and flexible. It consists of the administrator and moderators who are in charge of the club administration and temporary staff who are in charge of club activities. The administrator is responsible for both the website system and the club's administration. The moderators are appointed by the administrator to

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<sup>11</sup> In the rest of this thesis the website [www.hondajazz-club.com](http://www.hondajazz-club.com) will be referred to as Jazz Club, code JZ.

assist in the club's administration. Temporary staff are appointed when the club organises activities, they are only responsible for each event based on their ability. JZ1 noted that this is more of a request for assistance than an obligation.

The Jazz Club is composed of two main components, which are: the web-board and activities. The web-board is designed for members to communicate and share their interests. Members are welcome to discuss all issues and they can express their feelings and opinions liberally. The club performs as a gathering place in the virtual world. The Jazz Club has divided the web-board into various rooms, for example: the buy-sell room is open for commercial purposes, the Jazz Council is open for all expressions and feelings (such as relationship issues and places to eat), the Sport Council is for members who love sports, and Jazz Photo is for posting Jazz car photos. The web-board rooms were created to serve different purposes of discussion as manifest in the website.

The reasons to categorise the web-board into different rooms are to accommodate members in car-knowledge searching and to control the content. Members are required to post their topics in the right room, as is announced in the terms and agreements which are agreed prior to completing an application. Although the administrator and moderators are in charge of the club, in practice the members have collaborated with the administrator in monitoring the club. If there is a mistake in topic posting, such as a topic posted in the wrong web-board room, the other members will inform the administrator or the moderators immediately so they can correct the mistake and post it in the right place. The administrator stated that the club members were nice because they always offer assistance to the club.

The activities organised within the club are composed of the main activities organised by the club and Nork-Rorb. The main activities include an annual sports day and an annual meeting. In addition, there are other meetings (such as photo trips, day trips, sports charity, donation and Tamboon). Occasionally, the club has organised joint-activities with other car-consumer clubs. The aim of these activities is to build good rapport and establish good relationships among members of car-consumer clubs. The activities are the key factor in relationship building with the other members in the physical world. The meetings have created an opportunity for members to meet in

person so that they can increase their affiliation further beyond the website and into the real life context.

#### **4.8 Case: Yaris Club Thailand**

The website [www.yaris-club.net](http://www.yaris-club.net)<sup>12</sup> was officially started in 2006. The club was initiated in six months by the former members (YC1 and YC2) of another car-consumer club. YC1 and YC2 have known each other from that club and have become good friends. The idea of establishing the Yaris Club began from their small discussion about purchasing a new compact car. At that time they heard the news from Toyota Company that the company would launch a new compact car, which was called “Yaris”, to the market. Therefore, they both wished to have a place for the Toyota Yaris discussion. They consequently registered the club website domain and have developed the club’s website ever since. The Yaris Club is intended for everyone who is interested in the Toyota Yaris. It is intended to be a place where the members can find car-knowledge about the Toyota Yaris model, for the Yaris car consumers to meet new friends and to exchange car-knowledge, and for all of the members to assist one another.

The Yaris Club has separated members into two kinds, which are: official members and web-members. Accordingly, the club has different application processes. The first is to apply in person with the club leaders. The prospects will receive a sticker which has an identification number called “YC number”. Members who apply by this method are called “official members”. In general, the club leaders have authority to give permit stickers to members. The club has no policy to send stickers to members by post if members live in Bangkok, or nearby provinces. Therefore, members, who wish to be official members, are required to receive the stickers directly from the club leaders. However, if the members live in other provinces an exemption to this rule will be made and the stickers will be sent to the zone leaders who are responsible for club operation in each part of Thailand. The zone leaders will then distribute the stickers to members in person, as indicated in the club’s rules.

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<sup>12</sup> In the rest of this thesis the website [www.yaris-club.net](http://www.yaris-club.net) will be referred to as Yaris Club, code YC.

The other application procedure is to apply via the website. Everyone who wants to view the web-board is required to register on the website, which requires prospects to provide information such as name, email, login name, and password. The club has set a security system in order to prevent registration with a forged email: the applicant has to activate the account from a personal email sent by the club. Once the account is activated the application process is completed and the applicant has become a member. A person who applies by this method is called a web-member. In practice, most of the official members tend to apply via the website as web-members. The web-members who like to participate in meetings tend to subsequently apply in person to become official members.

The Yaris Club is composed of the club leaders (who are the president (YC1) and the webmaster (YC2)) and the members. The club's administration is centralised in the club leaders. Therefore, all of the main policies come from the club leaders. YC1 is responsible for member applications and activities, he also makes contact with other clubs and sponsors. YC2 is responsible for the website, such as the web-board and the website system. Both YC1 and YC2 collaborate one another when organise the club activities.

The Yaris Club is operated by the club leaders with the assistance of the members. When the club organises an activity, the club leader will seek for assistance from members. They will then distribute responsibilities to members on a case by case basis. YC1 revealed that they did not want to operate the club like a formal organisation or force the members to take part in the activities. Instead, they want them to feel comfortable and be able to participate as volunteers.

There are two main components of the club, which are: web-board and activities. The web-board functions as a centre of communication for members of the club where members can post and exchange car-knowledge. The web-board has been divided into rooms to serve all members' demands, such as: commercial purpose, leisure purpose and knowledge-based. The webmaster has divided the web-board into three main rooms. The first room is for general discussion, it includes all topics in sports, car technical issues, car audio and miscellaneous information. The second room is the gallery where members can post their photos from meetings and events, including their

car pictures and all other pictures that the members want to post. The third room is the classified page, which has been created to serve a commercial purpose. Members and other business partners can buy and sell their car products and accessories. In addition, the club often organises activities for members, which include: rallies, sporting competitions with other car-consumer clubs, Tamboon, a club anniversary party, and Nork-Rorb. In the respondents' view, meetings are necessary because such events provide a chance for members to meet in person and to extend their social connection.

## **4.9 Concluding Remarks**

An overview of this study has been provided in order to provide a grounded understanding of the cases (see Appendix VIII for the respondents' stories). Although each club has its own structure, which differs according to their administration, all of the seven clubs were started on a website. Moreover, the most important elements of all of the clubs are the web-board and club activities. The cross-case analysis of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand will be presented in the next chapter.

## **Chapter Five**

### **CROSS-CASE ANALYSIS - AN OVERVIEW OF THAI CAR-CONSUMER CLUBS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The preceding chapter provided an overview of each car-consumer club in this study. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse the case studies with regards to the nature of car-consumer clubs in Thailand and the members' motivation to participate in these clubs. This cross-case analysis covers the findings from all seven car-consumer clubs. It starts by uncovering the motives underlying clubs' creation and clarifying the pattern and development of Thai car-consumer clubs. In this study the cross-case analysis is based on the information from the seven case studies, using literal replication logic to build an explanation. The cross-case analysis concludes by describing the nature of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand in order to draw the pattern of consumer behaviour in these clubs.

#### **5.2 The Members' Motivation to Participate in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

This section provides empirical findings of each case in relation to the motivation to participate in the clubs before analysing the rationale underlying their participation in the next section.

##### **5.2.1 Case: Volvo Club Thailand**

In general, there are many motives for people to participate in the Volvo Club. All of the respondents reported that they wanted to participate in the club because they were

seeking car-knowledge about Volvo cars. Therefore, car-knowledge search is the first motive for members to participate in the club, as in these examples:

*At first, I wanted to search for car-knowledge about Volvo car maintenance. I think this would be the point of most members joining the club because their first priority is to search for information about their own car. When they find car-knowledge, it also opens chances for them to get to know more people. (VV2, Club Leader)*

*For me, I've driven Volvos for a while. I have been experimenting in this car, whether it is right or wrong, alone all the time until later there were members in the Volvo Club who came to exchange car-knowledge with me. We have contributed many good things together for the club. What happened next is the friendship which came from people who all drive Volvo. I have received good friendship in return. (VVIGb, Active Member)*

Another motive is that they were looking for people who drive the same car brand in order to communicate with one another about their car, as illustrated below:

*Researcher: Why did you join in the club?*

*VVIGd: We had similar car breakdown troubles.*

*VVIGa: At first, we like the car. We like Volvo. Each person finds a way to meet other people who like the same things. So we met one another in the club.*

*VVIGc: As for me, I inherited the car from my father. When I had got this car, I did not know about Volvo at all. So I wanted to talk with people who use Volvo too. Then I found this group of people who use Volvo as well. I had a chance to communicate with them. After that I felt fun with them. Thus, I have been continuously staying in this group - so long that now it has become a part of my life.*

As the extracts illustrate, it can be summarised from this that the initial motivations to participate in this club are to find car-knowledge and to meet people who drive the same car brand. Furthermore, all of the respondents own this car brand which is another main reason for them to participate in the club.

### 5.2.2 Case: BMWSociety Thailand

Because the BMWSociety is publicly open for everyone who is a fan of BMW cars, the members participate in the club for several reasons, including: to search for BMW car details, to find other information, and to search for friends who drive the same car model. Their most common motive is to search for car-knowledge about the BMW. The BMWSociety is not specifically dedicated to any particular BMW car model and it has gathered car-knowledge on all of BMW cars for members, and this is an attractive point for members. For instance:

*We may have car-related problems. If we want to find a solution, we can ask here. Sometimes we have found products and methods which we can be applied to solve our problems. (BM2Gb, Active Member)*

Most of the respondents expressed their affection for the BMW and, consequently, they wanted to search for BMW car-knowledge. For example, BM3 and BM4 said that:

*I have driven a BMW car and I want to search for car-knowledge. (BM3, Active Member)*

*I am interested to search for car-knowledge. (BM4, Active Member)*

The other motivation to participate in the club is following a recommendation about membership made by existing members, such as BM5:

*My brother is a member in this club and also drives a BMW car, so he suggested me to apply here. (BM5, Active Member)*

It can be concluded that the benefits that the respondents expect to receive from the club are car-knowledge and friendship with other people who drive BMW cars.

### 5.2.3 Case: MercedesMania Thailand

The empirical findings show that there are two main motivations for the respondents to participate in the MercedesMania. One is that they participate to search for car-knowledge about the Mercedes-Benz, such as MM3 and MM5. For example:

*Because Mercedes-Benz spare parts are so costly... I wish to have a community to share issues such as good service centre, car parts and accessories. (MM3, Active Member)*

*I joined because I want to find car-knowledge about car modification. That's all. (MM5, Non-Active Member)*

The other main motive to participate in the club is because of the recommendations of friends; such as MM1Ga, MM1Gb, MM2, and MM4. For example:

*One day my car had some problems. MM1 suggested me to find car-knowledge in this club so I joined as well as MM1Gb. (MM1Ga, Active Member)*

*MM1Gb asked me to join in the club. (MM2, Active Member)*

*MM2 suggested me to join in the club. (MM4, Active Member)*

It can be concluded that the members expect to gain car-knowledge about the Mercedes-Benz car brand and they wish to get to know new friends who have similar interests.

### 5.2.4 Case: Accord Club Thailand

There are various motivations for the respondents who participate in the Accord Club. The most common answer from the respondents is that they joined because of the club's extensive car-knowledge in the Honda Accord, which they found through Google's search engine (AC2Gc, AC2Gd, AC2Ge, AC3). For instance, AC2Gc and AC3 said that:

*I found the club from Google Search because I want to find some car-knowledge about the Honda Accord. (AC2Gc, Active Member)*

*I want to have a friend who drives the same car as me. When I have problems regarding my car, I can ask them. (AC3, Active Member)*

The other motivations to join are due to a friend's recommendation (AC4) and a wife who is following her husband who is already a member (AC2Ga, AC2Gb), for example:

*My friend recommended this club to me. (AC4, Non-Active Member)*

*My husband searched on the internet and found this website. He is in the club because he wanted to modify the car. (AC2Gb, Active Member)*

Concurring with this, AC2Ga stated that:

*I followed my husband. (AC2Ga, Active Member)*

Moreover, all of the respondents have mentioned that they own this car brand, which is another reason for them to participate in the Accord Club.

### **5.2.5 Case: Camry Club Thailand**

All of the four members of the Camry Club who were interviewed in this case study had bought a Camry car before they participated in the club, for instance:

*I bought a Camry car and wanted to find car-knowledge about car modification such as garages and shops, so I applied to the club and asked for information. (CR3, Active Member)*

*I searched on Google and found that there was a club for this car, so I decided to join. (CR4, Active Member)*

*I own this car, and then searched from Google. (CR5, Active Member)*

*After I had bought Camry car, I searched for the club. (CR6, Active Member)*

It can be seen from the interview statements that car-knowledge seeking is the first motivational reason for them to participate in the club. Most of the respondents had used Google's search engine to find the club. Therefore, the empirical findings show that before they participated in the club the respondents expected to receive car-knowledge as a benefit from the club.

### **5.2.6 Case: Jazz Club Thailand**

All of the respondents from the Jazz Club reported during the interviews that they had purchased Honda Jazz cars prior to participating the club. They searched for relevant car-knowledge and found the Jazz Club website because they wanted to modify their Jazz cars. After joining the club they were further attracted to the club by friends and club activities. Three respondents, who are members, found the club through the Google search engine. Moreover, they specified that they participated in the Jazz Club because they are fans of the Honda Jazz car, in addition to owning this car model. As stated by JZ3:

*Because I have driven this car model, so whenever we have similar problem we can solve problem correctly. (JZ3, Active Member)*

The findings show that the motivation for the respondents to participate is because of car-knowledge seeking from people who have the same car model. Thus, car-knowledge from other car consumers is a benefit which the respondents expected to receive from the club.

### **5.2.7 Case: Yaris Club Thailand**

The interviews showed that there are several motives for the respondents to participate in the Yaris Club. Firstly, the respondents revealed that they joined because they have a Yaris car. Secondly, they wanted to find new friends who drive the same car model.

Thirdly, they want to exchange their opinions with regards to the Toyota Yaris. This can be seen in the following interview statements:

*I want to know more people from the club. (YC5Gc, Active Member)*

*I want to have new friends and exchange car knowledge with them. (YC5Gb, Active Member)*

*Whenever we have car problems or we want to talk about car, we can only talk to the garages. We will never know whether those garages provide biased information or not. But if we talk to a friend, they will help us to understand and make a sincere comment on it. (YC5Ga, Active Member)*

It can be concluded that there are a number of benefits which motivate the respondents to participate in the club, including finding car-knowledge about the Toyota Yaris and forming friendships with other consumers who drive Yaris cars.

### **5.3 Cross-Case Analysis: The Members' Motivation to Participate in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

From the empirical findings it can be seen that the respondents participate in the car-consumer clubs because they expect to obtain benefits from the clubs. There are two main motives given by the respondents about why they decided to participate in car-consumer clubs: the first motive is that they are looking for car-knowledge about the car brands and car models which they already possess, or in which they already have an interest; the second motive is that they are looking for people who have the same car brands and are keen on the same car brands because they are looking for friendship through consumption. The supporting evidence which is found in the seven case studies is summarised in Table 5.1:

**Table 5.1: Expected Benefits of the Respondents on the Seven Case Studies**

Cases	Expected Benefits from Participation
Volvo Club Thailand	To search for car-knowledge about the Volvo. To meet people who drive the same car brand.
BMW Society Thailand	To search for car-knowledge about the BMW. To search for friends who drive the same car model.
MercedesMania Thailand	To search for car-knowledge about the Mercedes-Benz. To meet new friends who possess and are interested in the Mercedes-Benz car brand.
Accord Club Thailand	To search for car-knowledge about the Honda Accord. To meet friends who drive Accord cars.
Camry Club Thailand	To search for car-knowledge about the Toyota Camry. To meet people who drive Camry cars.
Jazz Club Thailand	To search for car-knowledge about the Honda Jazz from people who have the same car model. To meet friends who drive the same car model.
Yaris Club Thailand	To search and exchange car-knowledge with other Yaris car consumers. To meet new friends who drive the same car model.

Source: this study

It can be seen from the results that the motivation to participate in the clubs of the seven cases appear to be very similar. Even though the dialogue phrases might be slightly different because of the spoken language which was used during the interviews, the respondents referred to similar core benefits from participation in these clubs. As can be seen from Table 5.1, the core benefits which the respondents expected were car-knowledge, and to meet people who drive or possess the same car-brands or who have a common interest, this finding is in agreement with those of Watson and Johnson (1972), and Kozinets (2002). None of the respondents described their clubs as better than the others in terms of the car brand. On the contrary, they showed respect for all of the car-consumer clubs and felt that they are very much alike in terms of the club components and aims to set up the clubs. The majority of the respondents suggested that the car-consumer clubs in Thailand are composed of web-boards, club activities and people who are interested in the same car brands and the owners of those car brands. They shared common interests, similar lifestyles, and comparable tastes.

In the interviews which were conducted during this study the difference between clubs was expressed not in terms of car brand but in terms of friendship and the closeness of

their relationships. An explanation for this can be found in the cultural values of the Thai's, particularly their ego orientation (Komin, 1990). Thai attitudes to ego orientation have an effect on their social interactions, especially in terms of how they respect one another, and this prevents them from criticising the other clubs directly. This finding suggests that, in the context of Thai car-consumer clubs, the car brands have no direct effect on the feeling of exclusiveness because the respondents try to avoid criticism of other clubs. Instead, according to the case studies, the club atmosphere and the friendly environment which is shared with other members in the club has a direct influence on how they feel about the club.

#### **5.4 The Motivation to Create Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

In this study the empirical findings reveal that consumers have created car-consumer clubs using their own experience in order to accommodate the needs of other car consumers. From the point of view of the consumer, and as noted above, the purposes of the car-consumer clubs can be summarised as: firstly to discuss and share car-knowledge about car brands or models that they use or possess; secondly, to be a centre for car consumers who use the same car model and brand, including those who are interested in the same car model and brand; and finally, to be of assistance to other car-consumers. In addition to the car-knowledge sharing, the relationship between the car consumers is a significant factor that the founders wished to generate in the clubs from the beginning.

Examination of the completed case studies reveals that the formation of Thai car-consumer clubs was focused on building a VC where the members can socially engage via the Internet in order to share their common interests and to share a sense of community from interaction (Hagel and Armstrong, 1997; Preece, 2000; Leimeister et al., 2006). It can be seen in this study that these car-consumer clubs are predominantly established to share car-knowledge and for social purposes through a virtual network. Commercial purposes have appeared only subsequently to the formation of the club as their reputation has grown. All of the clubs implement the web-board to exchange car-knowledge and build relationships among members of the clubs in the virtual world.

In summary, the case studies show that: firstly, economic perspectives in the way that car-knowledge is exchanged and is made commercial (i.e. Balasubramanian and Mahajan, 2001; Gupta and Kim, 2004); secondly, social perspectives of members' aggregation and relationship forming via cyberspace (i.e. Rheingold, 1993; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2002); and thirdly, a technological perspective by which technology becomes a dynamic for these car-consumer clubs (i.e. Hesse, 1995; Erickson, 1997; Romm et al., 1997; Gay et al., 2007). All of these perspectives can be treated as multi-disciplinary (i.e. Hagel and Armstrong, 1997; Whittaker et al., 1997; Preece, 2000; Leimeister et al., 2006), which is the most appropriate perspective to describe the typology of car-consumer clubs in Thailand.

### **5.5 The Relationship between Online and Offline Interaction: the Web-board and Club Activities**

Although these car-consumer clubs have no official office or administrative centre in a physical world, they have created their own space in the virtual world. All of the clubs began with a website. In this study, as elsewhere, the Internet is shown as a crucial technological system which connects and ties people together (Wellman et al., 1996; Gruen et al., 2005; Cova and Pace, 2006). As can be seen, geographical limits are no longer an issue and are not a burden for the car-consumer clubs, this result is consistent with the prior literature on BCs (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Schau and Muniz, 2002; Andersen, 2005; Flavian and Guinaliu, 2005; Cova et al., 2007; Dionisio et al., 2008; Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder, 2008; Devasagayam et al., 2010). People who wish to participate in Thai car-consumer clubs are required to register as a web-member in order to gain access to view the web-board. In addition, they are also required to have a login name and password for security and control reasons. The club's web-board offers a variety of topics for members to read and to respond to. Members can interact with one another by posting questions, ideas, and comments on the web-board. This is asynchronous communication where members can communicate at unspecific times, somewhat similar to bulletin boards (Wellman, 1996; Kozinets, 1999, 2002; Maclaran and Catterall, 2002; Lea et al., 2006).

Club activities<sup>13</sup> are as crucial as the web-board in Thai car-consumer clubs. The clubs' activities are an essential component for their development because their existence in the physical world is established by their offline activities. The analysis showed that all of the seven clubs have organised club activities because they create opportunities for members to meet in person, and this extends their online relationships to the physical world. Members are able to contact each other in the physical world and then begin another chapter of their relationship in a real-life context, which can tighten their social connection and community strength (Kozinets, 1999; Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Koh and Kim, 2003; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Shang et al., 2006; Casalo et al., 2007). These empirical findings concur with the results of Rothaermel and Sugiyama (2001) and Rheingold (2003) who found that people begin to know each other on the internet and then broadened their relationship through offline activities. However, these results contradict those of Sicilia and Palazón (2008) which found that the BC generally starts from offline communities which then move online. This current study argues that the evolution of the BC does not necessarily start from offline BC to VC but can instead start from VC to offline BC, or vice versa, as indicated by McAlexander et al. (2002).

With regard to the types of activities that are organised in Thai car-consumer clubs, all of the cases have both major and minor activities (see Appendix XIII). The terms "activities" and "meetings" can be used interchangeably in the context of Thai car-consumer clubs. The major activities are organised by the club and are called main meetings. The minor activities refer to other meetings which are organised by members themselves or sub-groups in the club and which are generally known as Nork-Rorb. There are several types of meetings, such as: car modification, road trips, sport competitions, and Tamboon. The types of activities depend on the themes and purposes of each meeting (such as entertainment, charity and donation for social well-being). Although Tamboon events are not related to cars, these activities reflect the Thai's cultural religious-physical orientation. The Thai's Buddhist beliefs mean that they value the idea of spiritual merit which is gained by doing good deeds in society and by

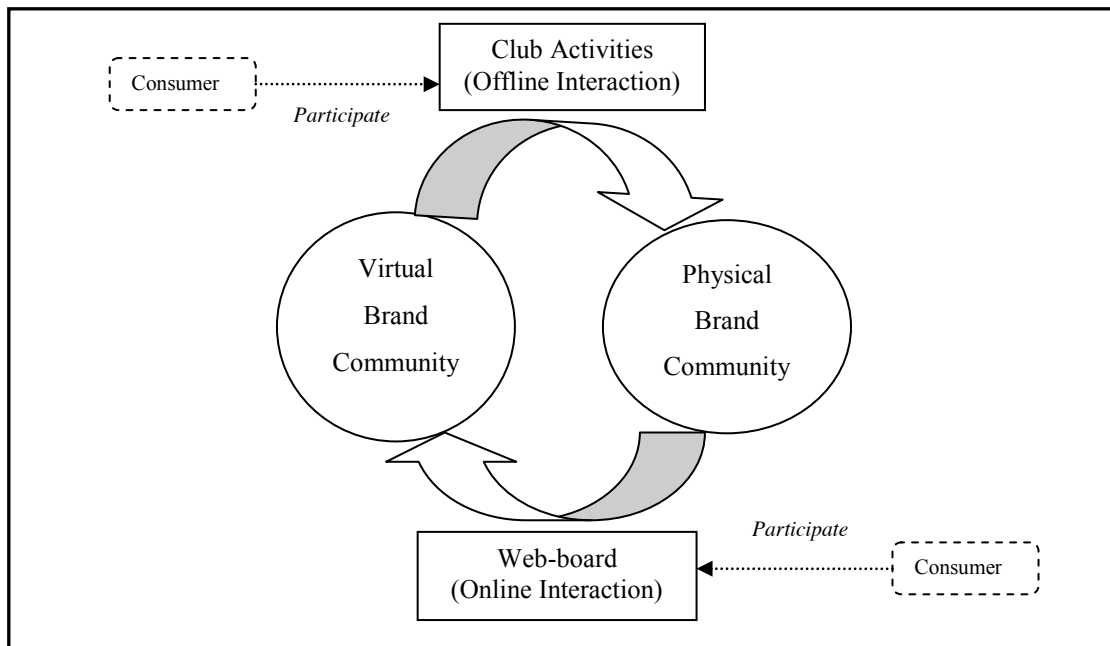
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<sup>13</sup> In this study, club activities refer to all those activities which are organised offline. Therefore, the words "club activities" and "offline activities" have the same implication and they will be used interchangeably in the rest of this thesis.

participating in religious activities (Komin, 1990). This idea of spiritual merit which is gained through social activity, or *Tamboon*, has gained considerable attention from the members of Thai car-consumer clubs. It appears that all of the Thai car-consumer clubs have similar kinds of activities and use similar language or jargon in their activities. These results concur with those of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) and O'Guinn and Muniz (2005), who showed that members in the BC will create their own rituals and traditions.

The findings of this study show that most of the respondents who participated in the meetings are likely to have more association with the club than those respondents who seldom participated. Moreover, the respondents who had participated in the meetings have a tendency to develop close relationships with club friends, which has an impact on their subsequent behaviours in the club. The meetings are regularly discussed and are often mentioned on the web-board right before and after the events. As a result, the meetings have stimulated members' discussion by generating topics and conversation. It can be seen that the web-board is the meeting place in the virtual world whereas the club activities create opportunities for members to meet in person in the physical world. The offline activities are integral parts of the club and can lead it to have a broader existence. Consequently, the web-board and club activities are complementary elements of the Thai car-consumer clubs. Therefore, the relationship between the online and offline interaction is a cycle according to the case studies (as summarised in Figure 5.1).

**Figure 5.1: The Cycle of the Web-board and Club Activities: The Relationship between Online and Offline Interaction**



Source: this study

## 5.6 Characteristics of Thai Car-Consumer Clubs

### 5.6.1 Structure

The Thai car-consumer clubs which were included in this study were either constructed by a single person or a group, a point which is associated with the question of the authority of the club leaders. This issue of the authority of the club leaders concerns the club's structure, the club's ownership, and their authority in making decisions for the club. In general, if the a club is controlled by a single person then that person will have absolute authority of control in the club; as is the case in the BMW Society, the MercedesMania, the Camry Club, and the Jazz Club. In most of the cases this person is the club owner, who becomes the webmaster. On the other hand, if the club is managed by a group then the power of management will be decentralised to a committee; as is the case in the Volvo Club, the Accord Club and the Yaris Club. In order to manage the

club effectively each club has formed its own administrative system. Accordingly, the internal structure of each club varies depending on the club's structural design.

### **5.6.2 The Distinctive Trait of Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

The case studies represent the characteristics of the Thai car-consumer clubs that have similar traits as the BC, as indicated in the existing literature, which are: consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions and shared sense of moral responsibility (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2005). Nevertheless, the empirical findings reveal that there is a difference in an aspect of consciousness of kind in terms of oppositional brand loyalty. The literature suggests that consciousness of kind has two additional features which are legitimacy and oppositional brand loyalty (especially to the competing brand) (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Amine and Sitz, 2004; Muniz and Schau, 2005; Fournier and Lee, 2009). Even though there is evidence of legitimacy, the evidence of oppositional brand loyalty is not found in these case studies. Such oppositional behaviours simply do not appear in these Thai case studies. Instead, comparing other brands or even insulting other brands is prohibited. Such behaviours are controlled by the rules of each car-consumer club. Similarly, the members agree to conform to this rule without any objection. The case studies show that the members of Thai car-consumer clubs do not offend other clubs and brands, including the competitor brands.

#### **5.6.2.1 Oppositional Car Company**

The empirical findings from this study reveals that the members of Thai car-consumer clubs would rather find themselves separate from the car company that they follow than oppose other car clubs and brands. However, even though they do not oppose other car brands, they have drawn the line between customers and the car company. It appears that they tend to be more oppositional to the car company than other car-consumer clubs. This is a fascinating point as the cases show that the respondents are more likely to place their trust in the car-knowledge given by other members than that given by the

car company. For example, when they have car problems they will search and ask for a solution from other members instead of going to a car service centre. The members primarily feel that they are on the consumer's side and so they tend to trust the car-knowledge given from the end-users but they tend not to place so much trust in the car-knowledge supplied from company (which is counted as the seller side). As a result they are more willing to stay in the car clubs which are operated by consumers than become members in car clubs which are seen to be owned by the company. The existing literature mentions that some of the more prominent brand companies have failed to establish themselves within the BC (Flavian and Guinaliu, 2005; Sicilia and Palazón, 2008). The results from this study support this reason why some companies have not succeeded in established their own BC.

In contrast to the extant literature, specifically in the terms of oppositional brand loyalty (e.g. Muniz and Hamer, 2001; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Amine and Sitz, 2004; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2005; Hickman and Ward, 2007), the BCs in Thailand do not oppose competitor brands, instead they have a tendency to oppose the brand company. Furthermore, the BC can be a new kind of business for consumers: the members in the BC can commit transactions within the club and the owners of the BC are also able to benefit from the community's success. The latter point in terms of the owners' advantage still has been little addressed in the literature.

#### **5.6.2.2 Reasons for Harmony between the Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

Two implicit reasons lie behind this phenomenon of lack of conflict between the car-consumer clubs. The first reason is to be found in the Thai culture which places a high value on group orientation. Thai people generally place a high value on smooth interpersonal relationships, enjoyment, and ego orientations (Komin, 1990). These values have a considerable influence on the clubs' policy where comparing or blaming other car brands and clubs is prohibited. All seven case studies have adopted the same policy, they do not allow their members to compare or claim that other car brands are better or worse. Instead, the Thai car-consumer clubs have organised joint-activities between the different clubs (such as sports competitions) in order to enhance unity between the car-consumer clubs. The second reason is due to car segmentation, which

tends to congregate people who have similar interests together. Segmentation is related to social class because the different social classes can reflect income, education, and value orientations of people (Kotler, 2000). Kotler (2003) further states that people in the same social classes are relatively homogeneous in their consumption and they generally share similar values, interests and behaviour. Automobiles are one of the products which Kotler (2003) found can reflect the social classes of the consumers. As manifested in the case studies, the behaviours of the respondents in the same segmentation are rather homogeneous. Car segmentation is a filter to screen people who have similar interest and lifestyles. The case studies indicated that members in the same car segmentations are relatively similar in terms of background, interest and lifestyles. Thus, it may be easy for them to get along with other members in the same segmentation. For example, the club leaders of the Accord Club and the Camry club talked about the good relationship between both clubs during their interviews despite being in direct competition (i.e. Honda and Toyota) in the market, for example AC1 and CR1 said that:

*“We count other clubs as our neighbours. For example, our club (Accord Club) have a good relationship with the Camry Club. I personally also have a good relationship with the Camry Club members.” (AC1, Club Leader)*

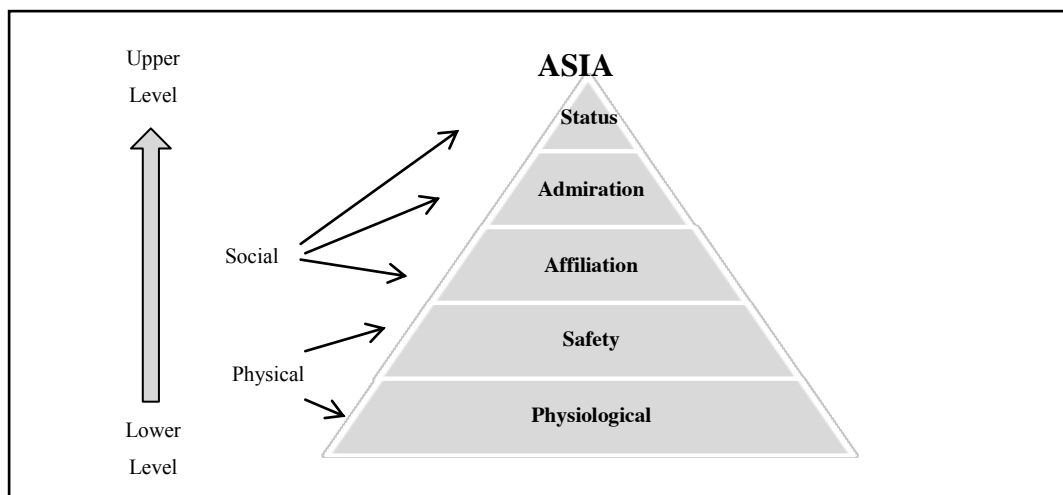
*“Although our car brands are competitor brands in the market, in the car-consumer clubs we are friends. We have a good relationship with the Accord Club.” (CR1, Club Leader)*

## **5.7 The Underlying Motivation of Thai Consumers to Integrate in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

Since the clubs have provided benefits to members from their participation, the members will perceive such benefits as rewards (Watson and Johnson, 1972) which are reinforcements (Rachlin, 1976). The members will have the potential to sustain their membership if they are satisfied in their participation. Accordingly, the respondents are likely to conform to the group with the intention to continue their membership in the clubs. Social group has an influence on consumer consumption as indicated in the existing literature (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1994; Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Lazer,

1996; Laine, 2006; Sukoco and Wu, 2010). Sometimes consumers have a tendency to consume products and services that engage them in a society, or to be a part of social group in responding to their social needs (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 1995; Lazer, 1996; Kotler, 2003). These results are in line with those of Amornchevin (2006) who found that the reason why many Asian people have joined these consumption groups is because they want to be a part of society and they want to represent their social status from the image of the products and the brands. The results of this present study of Thai car-consumers are in agreement with those of Schutte and Ciarlante (1998) who found that Asian people place great importance on social need and that they value affiliation, admiration, and status (as illustrated in Figure 5.2).

**Figure 5.2: Hierarchy of Needs of Consumers in Asia**



Source: Author adapted from Schutte and Ciarlante (1998)

## 5.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has discussed an overview of the Thai car-consumer clubs and their formation. This study has compared the similarity and dissimilarity of the seven case studies. Each club has designed its own administrative system and internal management, which makes the cases somewhat different. However, the overall results indicate that the nature and characteristics of the seven car-consumer clubs are apparently similar in terms of the web-board and club activities, which are the main elements of the clubs. The cross-case syntheses have shown a strong similarity in the

pattern of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand. All of the seven cases have a web-board which is a communication centre in the virtual world, and offline activities which build the members' rapport and which promote the members' relationships in the physical world. This chapter has provided a cross-case synthesis of the nature of Thai car-consumer clubs prior to closely assessing the behaviour of individuals in the clubs. The overview of the case studies has provided essential knowledge of the seven cases in order to establish the valid pattern of consumer behaviour in the Thai car-consumer clubs. The results from each car-consumer club are compiled in a series of proposition analyses. The following chapters will discuss the research propositions in relation to the members' behaviour in the Thai car-consumer clubs.

## **Chapter Six**

### **DISCUSSION - PROPOSITION I**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the analysis of the seven case studies in order to provide supporting evidence for the first proposition, which is:

**Proposition 1: Members participate in Thai car-consumer clubs are due to the rewards that they receive.**

This chapter begins with the results of an investigation into Thai consumers' expectations of membership. This is followed by the empirical results of those rewards which are received by members from participation in the car-consumer clubs. An examination of the functional and symbolic reinforcement will also be provided. The kinds of rewards will be described and explained one-by-one, together with supporting evidence from the interviews. The characteristics of the members of Thai car-consumer clubs will also be offered in relation to both types of reinforcement in order to affirm the first proposition.

#### **6.2 Rewards Received from Participation in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

This study employs BC literature as the main criterion in the case selection. The results show that there are several motivations for car consumers to participate in these clubs (which are representative of the car BCs in Thailand). The previous research on BCs reveals that people participate in them because of a number of anticipations, such as: to share knowledge and obtain information (Wellman, 1996; Romm et al., 1997; Ridings and Gefen, 2004), and to seek for friendship (Armstrong and Hagel, 1996; Rheingold,

2003). In agreement with the literature, the empirical findings in this study show that the consumers participated in car-consumer clubs because they wanted to search for car-knowledge and find friends who drive the same car brand or model (as discussed in more detail in Chapter 5). These findings are consistent with the results of the research of Michael (1982), Hayes et al. (1989), and Malott (1989), who found that motivation is one of the contributing factors of rule-following behaviour of individuals to act upon the rules that direct their behaviours in the club which are governed by the rules (this subject will be discussed further in Chapter 7). Since the main concern of this study is the reasons for the recurrence of members' behaviours in Thai car-consumer clubs, it could be stated that the continuance of consumer behaviours in the car-consumer clubs is a result of the rewards which the clubs offer. In other words, those clubs which offer positive reinforcement in terms of incentives are those whose members perceived the club as rewarding them.

It is of importance to note when investigating the reason why the respondents continue their behaviours in the car-consumer clubs, that they receive a wide-range of benefits from the clubs which reinforce their behaviours in those clubs. How the benefits reinforce consumers in the car-consumer clubs will be explained in more detail in Chapter 7. The empirical findings of this study show that the club leader respondents receive the following benefits: car-knowledge, general assistance with regards to car conditions (including additional support beyond car issues), connections (which could be either social or business or both), social recognition, friends and friendship, business opportunities, earnings from the club, and cost-savings. The active member respondents received the following benefits from the club: car-knowledge, general assistance with regards to car conditions (including additional support beyond car issues), connections (which could be either social or business or both), friends and friendship, business opportunities, earnings from the club, and cost-savings. Meanwhile, the non-active member respondents (which are found in only a few of the case studies) simply mentioned their benefits as receiving car-knowledge and cost-savings.

These findings show that the benefits of the club leaders and active members are homogeneous. The only difference is that the category of social recognition is not found in all of the active member respondents. While the active member respondents have perceived a variety of benefits from the clubs that they belong to, the non-active

member respondents have perceived only two benefits. The results of the seven case studies are divided into three different types of membership, which are summarised in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1: Rewards Received from Participation in the Car-Consumer Clubs**

Cases	Types of Membership	Perceived Benefits from the Clubs
Volvo Club	Club Leader	Social recognition, Friends/Friendship, Car-knowledge, Social recognition, Assistances, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Active Member	Business opportunity, Connections, Assistance, Car-knowledge, Friends/Friendship, Cost-savings.
	Non-Active Member	N/A
BMW Society	Club Leader	Earnings from the club, Business opportunity, Social recognition, Car-knowledge, Friends/Friendship, Assistance, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Active Member	Friends/Friendship, Earnings from the club, Business opportunity, Car-knowledge, Assistance, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Non-Active Member	N/A
MercedesMania	Club Leader	Friends/Friendship, Social recognition, Car-knowledge, Assistance, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Active Member	Friends/Friendship, Earnings from the club, Business opportunity, Car-knowledge, Assistance,

Cases	Types of Membership	Perceived Benefits from the Clubs
		Connections, Cost-savings
	Non-Active Member	Car-knowledge, Cost-savings.
Accord Club	Club Leader	Friends/Friendship, Earnings from the club, Business opportunity, Social recognition, Car-knowledge, Assistance, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Active Member	Friends/Friendship, Earnings from the club, Business opportunity, Car-knowledge, Assistance, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Non-Active Member	Car-knowledge, Cost-savings.
Camry Club	Club Leader	Friends/Friendship, Earnings from the club, Business opportunity, Social recognition, Car-knowledge, Assistance, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Active Member	Friends/Friendship, Business opportunity, Car-knowledge, Assistances, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Non-Active Member	N/A
Jazz Club	Club Leader	Friends/Friendship, Social recognition, Car-knowledge, Assistance, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Active Member	Friends/Friendship, Business opportunity, Car-knowledge, Assistance, Connections, Cost-savings.

Cases	Types of Membership	Perceived Benefits from the Clubs
	Non-Active Member	Car-knowledge, Cost-savings.
Yaris Club	Club Leader	Friends/Friendship, Earnings from the club, Social recognition, Car-knowledge, Assistance, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Active Member	Friends/Friendship, Car-knowledge, Assistance, Connections, Cost-savings.
	Non-Active Member	N/A

Note: N/A = Not Applicable, Source: this study

The benefits perceived from the clubs are the rewards which are passed on to the respondents because the rewards can increase or maintain the likelihood of recurring participation in the clubs as suggested by the literature (Skinner, 1969; Mazur, 2006; Solomon et al., 2002). Consequently, they can be used as positive reinforcement to increase the frequency of members' behaviours in the clubs. The next section presents data to show that the functional and symbolic reinforcement in the form of rewards have an effect on the respondents' frequency of behaviours in the clubs.

### 6.3 Functional Reinforcement and Symbolic Reinforcement of Thai Car-Consumer Clubs

The findings from the cases are in line with the extant literature (e.g. Foxall, 1994; Foxall, 1997a; Foxall et al., 1998; Foxall, 2001; Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005; Foxall, 2010a) which shows that two types of reinforcement which have an impact on behaviour: the first is functional reinforcement (which is also known as utilitarian reinforcement) the second is symbolic reinforcement (which is also known as informational reinforcement). The rewards which are given by Thai car-consumer clubs appear to be both functional and symbolic reinforcement which have an impact on the frequency of behaviours. Table 6.2 lists the rewards which are noted in the seven case

studies which have been studied in this study. According to the overall results, the functional reinforcement which is mentioned in the case studies consists of car-knowledge, friends, cost-savings, earnings from the club, and business opportunity. The symbolic reinforcement which is mentioned by the respondents in all cases consists of friends/friendship, assistances, connections and social recognition. The findings of the individual case studies provide similar results in terms of the perceived rewards. The results also suggest that different types of membership respondents have perceived diverse kinds of rewards from the clubs. As detailed in the descriptions of the clubs in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5, it can be noted that all of the clubs have offered a range of benefits to their members. Nevertheless, different types of membership may recognise such benefits in different ways. It is imperative to note that the degree of perception of these rewards is beyond the focus of this thesis; instead, the kinds of rewards which the members perceived are crucial to this study.

**Table 6.2: Rewards mentioned by Different Types of Membership**

Types of Membership	Rewards							
	Car-knowledge	Cost-Savings	Friends/Friendship	Assistances	Connections	Business Opportunity	Earnings	Social Recognition
<b>Club Leader</b>	10	10	10	10	10	6	6	9
<b>Active Member</b>	32	32	32	32	32	10	9	6
<b>Non-Active Member</b>	3	3	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Total</b>	45	45	42	42	42	16	15	15

Total Respondents = 45

Source: this study

## 6.4 Evidence of Functional Reinforcement

Because functional reinforcement is related to the use-value of the products or service (Foxall, 1997a, 2004, 2010a; Foxall et al., 2006), the analysis of functional reinforcement is primarily focused on the functional properties of the car-consumer clubs which the respondents received and to which they referred. Therefore, the examination of all cases indicates that the functional reinforcement found in the cases is

composed of: car-knowledge, friends<sup>14</sup>, cost-savings, earnings from the club and business opportunities. The following sub-sections present the supporting evidence for functional reinforcement in the study.

## 6.4.1 Functional Reinforcement of Thai Car-Consumer Clubs

### 6.4.1.1 Car-knowledge

Car-knowledge in this study refers to a collection of related information and knowledge about the car in question. The obtained information will eventually come to the knowledge of the members. This meaning covers all of the car-related news, details, information and knowledge to which the respondents' referred. According to the results, car-knowledge is the most recognised reward and it was mentioned by all respondents (N=45) (as shown in Table 6.2); this result is in agreement with Wellman (1996), Romm et al., (1997), and Ridings and Gefen, (2004). One of the explanations for this result could be that sharing car-knowledge is deemed to be one of the primary purposes of all clubs in the case studies and is visibly stated on each of the clubs websites. This view was also stated in the interviews by the club leaders, for instance:

*The purpose of the club is to be a centre for car-knowledge sharing including all technical information and car maintenance especially for Volvo car user. (Volvo Club Website)*

*The website BMWsociety.com has gathered the club members' cars pictures, car-knowledge of BMW cars that benefit your favourite BMW cars. (BMSociety Website)*

*When I first started the website, at that time I just only thought that it should have other people who can share car-knowledge about the Camry cars. (CR1, Club Leader)*

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<sup>14</sup> Friends can be categorised as both functional and symbolic reinforcement depending on friendship and closeness. This subject will be further discussed in section 6.4.1.5 and section 6.5.1.2.

Accordingly, most people who join these clubs expect to obtain car-knowledge. The car-knowledge which the respondents mentioned includes how to repair their car, and where to find car parts and accessories products, for example:

*In our knowledge sharing, the benefits will be onto people who drive the car to obtain car-knowledge such as how to fix your car, garage recommended and price information. (VV1Ga, Active Member)*

*AC2Gc: Car-knowledge.*

*AC2Ge: Car accessories.*

*AC2Ga: Sometimes we want to buy cheap accessories and we got them from here.*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

*It is good. I like the club because it helps the car owners to gain additional car-knowledge and save the budget. (AC4, Non-Active Member)*

*I obtained general car-knowledge that I want to know more of, such as the car service centre, car repair, and garage, because this kind of information cannot be found in the Benz service centre. (MM5, Non-Active Member)*

#### **6.4.1.2 Cost-Savings**

As can be seen in some of the above examples which are drawn from the interviews, car-knowledge also helps the club members to save running and budget costs on their cars. This leads to the next functional reinforcement, which is cost-savings. This was especially reported in car maintenance, and car parts and car accessories, which were mentioned by all of the respondents ( $n = 45$ ). This happens because the majority of the members of car-consumer clubs who participate in these clubs are looking at the prices of car models, car parts, and accessories in order to economise their car budget. Car parts and accessories can be costly because the car brands in the case studies are all imported cars, and even the service maintenance is expensive. If the car consumers have no prior knowledge of the prices and charges then it is likely that they will pay for unnecessary extra charges from the car service centres and they will probably be deceived by the parts shops. Furthermore, some members desire car modifications, so it is important to them to find car parts and accessories at a reasonable and affordable

price by asking for their details from other members and, occasionally, buying from them. In summary, there is a high maintenance cost occurred by the car consumers, thus they participate in the car-consumer clubs in order to economise their car costs, as in the following examples:

*I obtain data regarding car engines, car tyres, car mileage checked and car audio system because the Mercedes car engine is well-designed and complicated. Some accessories can be found in general suppliers which is cheaper than the service centre such as car battery. The price is much different. If you go to the Mercedes car service centre, you will have to pay a lot more. (MM4, Active Member)*

*The rest is a by-product from the club, such as purchasing products from the club website. I can find cheap accessories for my car here. (BM3, Active Member)*

Price information and details on car service garages, and car parts and accessories shops are beneficial to the car consumers in terms of the cost-savings they experience when running their cars. On most of the club websites there is a dedicated room on the web-board for members to buy and sell products. In particular, there is usually a room where members are able to exchange data on car service and maintenance charges, car parts, car accessories and other car-related data. This helps them to save on their costs and budgets when purchasing a car and car products. This can be compared to a by-product in addition to the car-knowledge which is reported to be the primary objective of the car-consumer clubs. Consequently, cost-savings are a fascinating benefit that attracts many car consumers to apply for membership, even if they remain in the club afterwards as non-active members. This is the reason why cost-savings is reported by every respondent in all types of membership.

#### **6.4.1.3 Earnings from the Club**

Similarly, earnings from the club are amongst the rewards reported by the club leaders and the active members in all seven case studies. Because all of the clubs have established a web-board room for members to make purchases (as described earlier) they have created an opportunity for members not only to buy the products but also to sell their products to other members within the club. In the interviews, several of the

active-member respondents who own a car-related business have reported that they are able to take advantage of the club to expand their business via a new sales channel which targets a very specific ‘right group’ of customers. For examples:

*I have obtained more information about the car. Besides, I have an opportunity to sell products. Sometimes, I sell products to people in this website. (BM2Ga, Active Member)*

*I have friends and I have earned money here. (BM2Gb, Active Member)*

Moreover, the club’s reputation can attract the attention of sponsors and business partners who wish to invest in the club. These outside sponsors and businesses view the club as another effective promotion channel while lowering the costs of promotion and advertising. The club leaders will often benefit personally from this income. All of the seven clubs in the case studies have been established more than three years, and the numbers of members have also increased every year. Some of the club leaders saw this as a reason to transform the clubs into a new source of business in the near future; for example, AC1 revealed that:

*Actually, I wish to transform the pattern of the club to become more businesslike. (AC1, Club Leader)*

Some of the respondents described how, even though the original purpose of the clubs are non-profit making, the club leaders can still earn an unanticipated income; For example, CR1 revealed that:

*Frankly speaking, we have earned some profits from advertisements in our club website. Therefore, we are willing to help members. If they need a sponsor or supporting funds for their activities, we are pleased to help them. This is because the members are mutually created the community. So we try to serve them of what we can. (CR1, Club Leader)*

The earnings from the club are ultimately a by-product of the club’s reputation. This is functional reinforcement which encourages the frequency of behaviours of some active members in the club to frequently participate in the club for their business. It also encourages the frequency of behaviours of the club leaders to often participate in the

club's activities and continuously develop the club website in order to maintain the club status and to enhance its reputation. Some of the club leaders may find that this reward is a business opportunity, as was the case in the BMW Society, the Camry Club and the Yaris Club. Even the leader of the Accord Club also mentioned this reward, although they have resisted transforming the club into a business.

#### 6.4.1.4 Business Opportunities

Business opportunities are the next apparent benefit. However, this reward was mentioned only by active members in the Volvo Club, the BMW Society, the MercedesMania, the Camry Club, and the Accord Club, and it was not mentioned at all by the respondents in the Yaris Club and the Jazz Club. Since the clubs provide opportunities for members to buy and sell products in the club, some of the members can find that this is an opportunity to start their own business in the club. The respondents come from different backgrounds and occupations, so the club is an opportunity for them to establish a new connection which can support their business while some members may find an opportunity to do their business from the club, as in the following examples:

*I also have known new friends who have a similar business. (BM3, Active Member)*

*Some members may have a connection in their business as business partnership. (MM2, Active Member)*

*First is friendship. Second is information which cannot be found in other places...Finally is business. Based on familiarity, they trust me and use my company's service. (MM3, Active Member)*

*We allow members to do so because if you come to make your business here, it will be cheaper than the car service centre. Although it may not be the cheapest price, it saves time and is convenient to members as we do not have to go to find such spare parts and accessories elsewhere. (VV1Gc, Active Member)*

*I have received friends, social network and business opportunity. (BM2Ga, Active Member)*

*Some members are the owner of car care centre, garage and restaurant. We will receive a discount from their given business cards. We gain this advantage. All of these benefits are received from the club. (CR4, Active Member)*

Furthermore, it is likely that the members of the clubs tend to support other member's businesses (such as shops, restaurants and non-car related products). This view can be corroborated in that some of the interviews were conducted at restaurants owned by club members, such as VV1Gd and MM4. The club members, including some of the respondents, have become regular customers of these restaurants and have helped the owners to promote their restaurants. Sometimes the club organises the club meetings in these restaurants, which to an extent indirectly supports these members businesses as can be noticed below:

*We used to have a New Year Party which was organised in my coffee shop. There are more than two hundred people who bought tickets to join us. (MM4, Active Member)*

*Apparently, it is a business opportunity. If you sell the clothes and want to sell in the club, club members will buy your clothes before other shop. This is because a friend will buy a friend's products first. (AC1, Club Leader)*

Likewise, the club leaders will also receive this reward because some members are business owners, or even work as managers in other organisations. Moreover, the club leaders can also gain the attention of many companies and businesses, as the club leader of the Camry Club states:

*At the fifth year, what I have received from the club has supported my career because my company run the advertising campaigns for the car company. (CR2, Club leader)*

Therefore, the clubs not only provide opportunities for members to meet each other, they also provide opportunities for members to expand and support their business.

#### 6.4.1.5 Friends

Friends can be regarded as both functional and symbolic reinforcement. The reason why friends can act as functional reinforcement is because the car-consumer clubs are seen as an opportunity to find new friends who have a common interest, as the club leader of the Jazz Club states:

*We generate the website for people who have similar fondness to chat with one another. It is because our society today has changed into community-based. The world becomes narrow. People who shared similar interests are likely to understand each other. (JZ1, Club leader)*

Consequently, the friends could be acknowledged as a functional reinforcement if the primary purpose of the respondents is only to interact with friends who drive the same car models and who can help them solve their car problems as following examples:

*The main reason for me to continue my participation is because I drive a Yaris car. The second reason is to meet other people who drive the Toyota Yaris in order to exchange opinions and to ask about car modification issues. (YC4, Active Member)*

*When I have any car problem, they will provide good support. (AC4, Non-Active Member)*

It is important to note that when the members extend their friendship beyond car related issues that this can be regarded as symbolic reinforcement. This aspect will be explained in more detail in the following section.

#### 6.4.2 Effect of Functional Reinforcement on Members' Behaviours in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs

Foxall (2010a) suggests that functional reinforcement can be observed by verbal reports in terms of satisfaction or a pleasurable response. Verbal expressions which are related to positive feelings (such as 'happy' or 'relaxed') represent evidence of functional reinforcement (Yani-Soriano et al., 2001; Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005). They are

keywords which can be used to back-up their verbal statements when analysing their functional reinforcement. In this research project there are often times in the interview when the respondents mentioned their feelings towards the clubs:

*I feel more relaxed and have more courage to join the meetings for the second, third, and so on. (VV2, Active Member)*

*I feel happy with the club even though I am not as often active in the club as in the past. (BM5, Active Member)*

*The club does not force us to participate in the meetings. I feel happy to meet the club friends and talk to new members when I go to meetings. (CR6, Active Member)*

*Having received friends from the club makes me satisfied. I do not think of other issues. (CR3, Active Member)<sup>15</sup>*

The following examples of data findings from the interviews illustrate how in all of the case studies the results of functional reinforcement have an impact on respondents' participation of the web-board. It was observed during the interviews that the respondents increased their web-board participation rate and that functional reinforcement has an influence on all types of membership respondents maintaining their status in the clubs. Although evidence from the non-active member respondents showed that they rarely participate in the club meetings or interact with other club members, they still maintain their presence in the club in order to check the web-board for car-knowledge and for the prices of car-related products and accessories in order to save their budget. Therefore, the empirical findings have shown that members' behaviours in Thai car-consumer clubs are maintained by functional reinforcement.

*My web-board participation is dependent on my interest. If I have any particular interest, I will often visit the web-board. For example, if I want to change the car tyre, I will find information. I mostly observe and read. (MM5, Non-Active Member)*

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<sup>15</sup> The emphases in the quotes in this thesis are my own and they are used to illustrate the argument.

*AC2Ge: It is automatic.*

*AC2Gd: It is like we have to go home every day.*

*Everyone: Yes! Yes! We have to log in to the web-board every day.*

*(laughs)*

*AC2Gb: Sometimes I do not know what to answer but I want to see or at least just read.*

*AC2Ga: Sometimes answer, sometimes just greeting.*

*AC2Gc: If there is nothing today, we just type something such as greeting each other.*

*AC2Gd: At least...we just login to the club web-board to see the movement.*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

*I visit the web-board everyday to check if there are new issues coming up. (CR3, Active Member)*

*I only enter to the club website when I need to search for information about my car. So I do not often login to the web-board. (JZ4, Non-Active Member)*

## 6.5 Evidence of Symbolic Reinforcement

Symbolic reinforcement is evident from the feedback on one's performance and, consequently, it is usually mediated by society or other people (Foxall, 1997a; Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005; Foxall et al., 2007; Foxall, 2010a). In this study the results of all of the case studies indicate that the symbolic reinforcement found in the case studies is composed of social recognition, friends/friendship, connection and assistance. However, an unexpected finding was that in the non-active member respondents the aforementioned symbolic reinforcement is unidentified; in other words, the non-active member respondents hardly mentioned symbolic reinforcement. This is a major difference between the active members and the non-active members.

The empirical findings imply that the social factor is key to maintaining members and prolonging the life of the club. Sicilia and Palazón (2008) find that the BC cannot be maintained by offering only functional value otherwise members could stop at obtaining information without participating further. In general, functional connections promote shallow relationships and satisfaction; whereas, personal connections promote deeper relationships beyond utility and reliability (Hess and Story, 2005). In a similar

manner, in the case studies behaviours of the non-active members are predominantly reinforced by functional reinforcement rather than symbolic reinforcement, while behaviours of the active members are predominantly reinforced by both types of reinforcement. Accordingly, this is a distinct point of the dissimilarity between the active members and the non-active members. The following sub-sections present the supporting evidence of symbolic reinforcement in the study.

## **6.5.1 Symbolic Reinforcement of Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

### **6.5.1.1 Social Recognition**

In all seven case studies social recognition is predominantly referenced by the club leader respondents and some of the active-member respondents who are in charge of the club's administration. It is apparent that part of this reward comes from the club's reputation. When the club has a good reputation in society then the club leader will be somebody in the club who is an important person and who earns respects from club members, the car companies, and other concerned parties. The club has brought them a new status from the collective recognition of the members and society by collective intentionality (Searle, 1995) (this will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 8 and 9).

Social recognition derives from an individual's position in the club (positions in the club can include webmaster, consultants, and senior members). These positions are established by members of the clubs in association with the club structure. Consequently, a member is accepted or respected by other members, or not, depending on their performance. Other members will give that person positive feedback by acknowledging or paying respect to them if they perform well. The more a person contributes in the club, the more other members will respect that person.

The empirical evidence shows public symbolic reinforcement from the respondent's social honour. This is accorded by other members for their accomplishment in position (Foxall, 1997a). Therefore, social recognition is a consequence of their position in the

club, and their contribution in answering questions and giving information; for example, in the interviews some of the club leader respondents said that:

*I have earned social respect from members because I have some knowledge about car engines. At that point, I have earned social recognition from members. When members have a problem, they will call me. (VV2, Club Leader)*

*Ninety percent of members in the club have heard about me even though they never meet me in person. (YC1, Club Leader)*

### 6.5.1.2 Friends/Friendship

As mentioned earlier in section 6.4.1.5 on functional reinforcement, when friends/friendship is extended further from the club and into personal life it can also be considered as symbolic reinforcement. In general, friendships that have formed while members were participating in the clubs are mainly based on cars; however, their relationships in the club can further develop when they tend add to their personal life and when they considered each other as family members, demonstrating their cohesiveness, as in these examples:

*It is more than friends. It is more than car. We received the whole family. We can approach to everyone such as these brothers [i.e. the other members]. We count each other as family. (VV1Gc, Active Member)*

*I love the club and am attached to it. Since the club had been established by me, I created it from the start. So the club is similar to a home where people who stay here can feel of connection to it. No matter what will happen, we still feel secure in this place. (YC1, Club Leader)*

*I have got friends who can listen to me in everything. I can trust them. It seems that I trust them more than my old friends whom I have known for a long time. When I have a trouble, they give me a perfect solution. This kind of friendship really exists. People may not believe. Hmm...I do not know what to say. It is fantastic. (CR5, Active Member)*

*More importantly, I have received friendship which I never expect to find in the website from club friends. (CR6, Active Member)*

In this study the findings show some support for friends/friendship as symbolic reinforcement, the empirical data is found in the groups of active members and club leader respondents. This is a particularly interesting case because the participating behaviour of the management and the active members are connected to social value. The interview data also shows that when asked about the benefits received from the club, friends/friendship is answered in the first place by the majority of respondents who are active members, which is in agreement with Armstrong and Hagel (1996) and Rheingold (2003). According to the seven case studies the feeling of friends/friendship can increase when members participate in the club activities (such as meetings and Nork-Rorb). The data revealed that the respondents who often join in the meetings would refer first to the friends and friendship. The respondents asserted that they knew more people from the clubs and then become friends afterwards when they participate in the meetings. It seems that offline activities can make members increase their relationship into cohesiveness, which the respondents regard as an invaluable reward. It is apparent that the more members participate in activities the more their sense of connection to other members is developed. Therefore, the empirical data signals that friends/friendship is associated with activity participation.

#### **6.5.1.3 Connections**

Similarly, connections mentioned by the members are considered to be symbolic reinforcement, which is evident from the feedback from the respondents' friendship. The connections could be either a business connection or a social connection, or both. The respondents mentioned business connections when they referred to business opportunity. Having considered the respondents' profiles, one of the possible explanations for this is that, according to the data on respondents' occupation backgrounds, the respondents who mentioned business opportunity are predominantly business owners (see Appendix VII). Although the clubs are publicly open for everyone who is interested to join whether or not they possess the car models or brands, in fact the majority of the members are owners of the featured cars. More importantly, the connections which are often mentioned in the interviews are more likely to concern social connection. Hence, the respondents benefit through the connections which are available in the clubs. However, both kinds of connections share a common ground

where they originate from friends/friendship in the club. Most of the respondents who talked about the connections repeatedly mentioned friends/friendship right before they mentioned the importance of connections during the interviews. The interview data empirically shows that there is a relationship between the friends/friendship and connections, by which the connections are a subsequent reward which results from friends/friendship; for example:

*I received friendship and enjoyment. I have received more social and business connections. We have made contact with other car-consumer clubs and other organisations. For example, our business partners who wish to participate in our club activities. (YC1, Club Leader)*

When the friendship has been developed the members count other members as kinship and family members, they do this despite being a heterogeneous group of people from different backgrounds and occupations. Consequently, the members will obtain social connection through other members and this broadens their society. Close friendship contributes to social connection. The feeling of friendship and trust amongst members formed when they spent a lot of time together, especially in activities. On some occasions the members participate in club meetings with their family members or friends, which can extend social relationship among members. In these examples their relationship has extended to the family level. They count each other as family members and respect one another as if they are an extended family; for example:

*MM1Gb: The relationships do not just mean to us but also our family.*

*MM1Ga: To our wives too.*

*MM1Gb: When we have a meeting, we join altogether with a whole family. (laugh)*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

*YC5Gb: I think what I have received is much more than I want. It seems that I have got a new sister too.*

*YC5Ga: They are a nice sister and brother. I feel that I have received more than I expected.*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

#### 6.5.1.4 Assistance

Assistance is another reward from friends/friendship in the clubs which is found in every single case. There were often interviews where the respondents mentioned friends/friendship and their assistance besides car-related issues. The empirical findings show that only two types of membership respondents (i.e. the club leaders and the active-members) mentioned these rewards, and they are not mentioned by the non-active member respondents. The data suggests that this kind of reward requires friends/friendship to deliver. When their close friendships have developed, members tend to expand their assistance into other topics beyond cars. Furthermore, the friendships have also generated other support and assistance besides car from members, as can be seen in following examples:

*Assistance is always available here. We also have overseas members. It is a precious gift which is invaluable. We can get access to global assistance. Some members are located upcountry. When there is a car which is damaged, there will be members ready to help one another. (BM1b, Active Member)*

*We are close to each other. We help each other and extend our scope to personal matters and social affairs. (CR5, Active Member)*

*I feel great because I have a wonderful group of friends. We are close mates. We are sincere; and that we always help each other. (JZ2, Active Members)*

As can be seen from some of the interview scripts, the respondents offer their assistance to one another, and vice versa. The interviews show that when members have a problem, others are willing to help one another regardless of the problem. They can seek advice from other friends when they are in trouble, not only in the case of their cars but also in other life issues. As the club is entirely related to human society, it is common that participating in the club creates an opportunity for members to have a new community with like-minded people. The car is the item which links members together. Because of the feeling of friendship, the respondents asserted that they help each other in all matters regardless of the car.

### 6.5.2 Effect of Symbolic Reinforcement on Members' Behaviours in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs

The evidence of symbolic reinforcement can be observed in the feelings which are related to social viewpoint (such as esteem, pride, and honour) (Foxall, 2010a). Individuals will reach this emotional stage when they achieve social status, prestige, and social recognition from their own effort (Foxall, 2010a) which can be observed in verbal reactions to the environment in arousal terms (such as aroused, excited, and stimulated) (Yani-Soriano et al., 2001; Foxall and Yani-de-soriano, 2005). Symbolic reinforcement in this study is also found in the form of a feedback from individual performance, as indicated by Foxall (1997a, 2010a). In the interviews there were some examples of symbolic reinforcement in which individuals achieve their performance in the clubs:

*I love the club so much. It is a kind of feeling of connection to the club and people here. (BM2Gb, Active Member)*

*Actually, I am proud of many things in the club. One of them is that there are lots of managing directors from well-known companies who have joined us as members. They include VIP persons who become our members. I am incredibly proud. (AC1, Club Leader)*

*I am more than satisfied with the club. It is more than my expectation was at the beginning. I did not expect that I would come this far. I never expected that people in the South of Thailand were interested in Yaris club like this. (YC3, Active Member)*

Symbolic reinforcement has reinforced the members' behaviours, which can be observed from the frequency of club participation. This is especially true of those members who participate in the club meetings more often. The results show that, in general, the activities participation of the club leader and the active-member respondents have increased while there is a little effect, and perhaps no effect, on the activities participation of non-active member respondents. The empirical findings reveal that the club leader and the active-member respondents have also increased their willingness to contribute to the club spontaneously. Furthermore, the empirical evidence of the respondents' stimulation to participate in the club activities reflects their contribution to the club, as can be seen in the following transcripts from the interviews:

*Researcher: Why did you contribute to the club?*

*VVIGd: Because of love, we did it with heart.*

*VVIGa: Right. It is much like a nursery here.*

*VVIGb: Everyone is voluntarily here.*

*VVIGc: We are provider. We give because we want to contribute. We do not ask for anything in return.*

*VVIGd: We have a new coming activity about car racing called Volvo One Day. We have to pay for incurred expenses. We have to pay for extra costs. However, we are willing to do this from our heart.*

*VVIGb: Heart only! Although we are tired, we are fun and pleasure together whenever we have mutual activities.*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

*Being with friends makes me happy and fun. I would like to participate in all meetings no matter what kinds of meetings will be taken place, i.e. party, Tamboon, even Nork-Rorb because it is fun to meet friends. (CR3, Active Member)*

*Actually, the club never compel or even force us to participate in the meetings. However, I feel excited and happy to meet the club friends, also talking to new members when I join the meetings. (CR6, Active Member)*

*I will try to participate in the meetings as much as I can. (CR4, Active Member)*

*I hardly participate in the meetings. (JZ4, Non-Active Member)*

*I never participate in any club meetings. (MM5, Non-Active Member)*

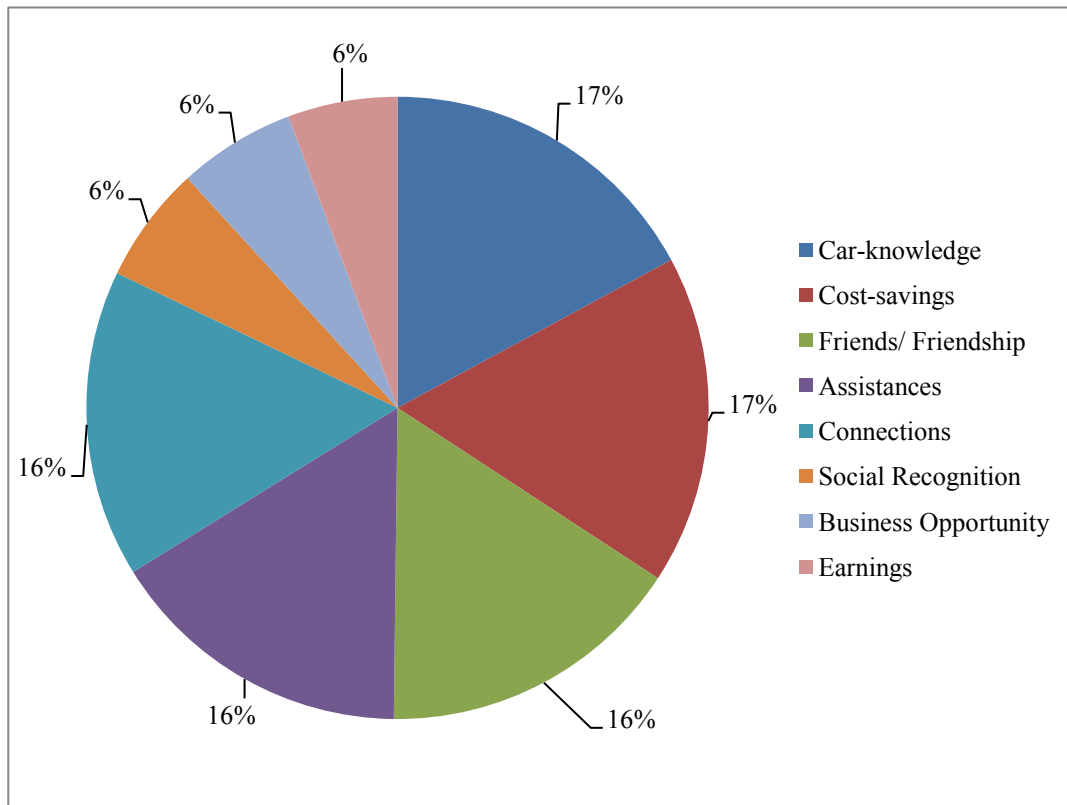
## 6.6 Summary of Rewards Findings

Figure 6.1 compares the frequency of rewards mentioned by the respondents from the seven car-consumer clubs. This chart has combined the answers from the respondents of all types of membership and covers all seven cases. As can be seen from the chart, the most frequent answers (17%) from all types of membership respondents in all of the cases were for: car-knowledge, and cost-savings. It can be seen from this that all types of membership perceive functional reinforcement with satisfaction and, therefore, they are willing to maintain their status and behaviours in the club.

At 16% friends/friendship, connections, and assistance are the second most popular rewards. This may possibly be happening because the second group of rewards are only mentioned by the club leader and the active member respondents, but they are not mentioned by the non-active member respondents. These rewards are symbolic reinforcement which is achieved by members' performance in the club. Consequently, the non-active member respondents, who rarely interact with other members in the club, do not perceive this symbolic reinforcement as rewards. Nevertheless, there is no significant difference in the percentage between the first and second ranked answers.

At 6% the third most popular answers of the rewards are business opportunities, social recognition, and earnings from the club. They are both symbolic and functional reinforcement that are predominantly perceived by the club leader and the active member respondents. None of them are mentioned by the non-active member respondents. Most of the respondents who mentioned business opportunity and earnings tended to refer to one another together which are related to functional reinforcement. It can also be proposed that there is a relationship between these two rewards. As for social recognition, they are only referred to by those respondents who have positions of authority in the club. It is likely that members will gain social recognition from their positions in the club and, therefore, it is symbolic reinforcement from social feedback.

In summary, the findings confirm that both types of reinforcement produce the same results, which is that the response rate is increased. In agreement with the research of Foxall (1997a), the seven case studies appear to have both functional and symbolic reinforcement as patterns of reinforcement, and the effects of both types of reinforcement are strengthening one another. As illustrated in the case studies, the respondents have maintained or increased the frequency of participation in the web-board and club activities (such as participating the web-board regularly and making an effort to participate in the meetings more often).

**Figure 6.1: A Summary of the Rewards in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

Source: this study

## 6.7 The Characteristics of Members in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs

In order to critically analyse the characteristics of members in the car-consumer clubs on the basis of their participation, members can be segmented into five main groups.

The first group is the ‘touch and go’ - which describes those members who seek information regarding the car they already have or which they are considering purchasing. They participate in the club only to gain car-knowledge and do not interact with other members or participate in club activities. The touch and go consumer can be compared to the non-active members. The recurring behaviour of this type of consumer is mainly a result of functional reinforcement.

The second group is the ‘trader’ - which describes those members who have participated in the club for business purposes. They may or may not participate in club

activities. Their membership status is rather unpredictable and it varies depending upon their association with the club and other members. Consequently, they can be either potential active members or turn out to be non-active members. Similar to the touch and go member, the recurring behaviour of this type of consumer is also predominantly a result of functional reinforcement.

The third group is the ‘social networker’ - which describes those members who maintain their status owing to their relationship with other members. They habitually login to the club web-board and keep up to date on information in the club. They are active members who often participate in the web-board and club activities. The recurring behaviour of this type of consumer is mainly a result of symbolic reinforcement.

The fourth group is the ‘car-lover’ - which describes those members who maintain their status in the club because of car-knowledge. These people are in love with cars and car modifications. They are generally keen on discussion with club friends who have similar interests and also regularly participate in club activities. They are active members who often participate in both the web-board and offline activities. The recurring behaviour of this type of consumer is a result of both symbolic and functional reinforcement.

The fifth, and final group is the ‘club leader’ - which describes those members who have authority in club administration. They are persons who are at the core of the club, who take charge of club administration, and who are responsible for the club’s policy. The recurring behaviour of this type of consumer is a result of both functional and symbolic reinforcement.

Table 6.3 summarises all of these characteristics of the member in association with both types of reinforcement:

**Table 6.3: Members' Characteristics and Types of Reinforcement**

<b>Member characteristics</b>	<b>Purposes to continue membership status</b>	<b>Duration in the club</b>	<b>Member type</b>	<b>Types of reinforcement</b>
Touch and Go	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To search for car-knowledge with regards to their cars.</li> <li>• To find information before purchasing a new car.</li> </ul>	Short visit but likely to return their visit when needed.	Non-active Member	Functional
Trader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To trade their products.</li> <li>• To promote their products in the clubs.</li> <li>• To find business partners.</li> </ul>	Can be either short visit and long stay in the club depending on their earnings from the club.	Can be either non-active or active member	Functional
Social Networker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To meet friends who drive the same car brand and/or model.</li> <li>• To have a new social group with people who have similar like-minded tastes and lifestyle.</li> <li>• To interact with friends in the club via the club web-board and offline activities.</li> </ul>	Most likely long stay in the club.	Active Member	Symbolic
Car lover	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To discuss and exchange car-knowledge.</li> <li>• To interact with people who are in love with their cars.</li> <li>• To have activities in relation to cars with club friends.</li> </ul>	Long stay in the club.	Active Member	Functional and Symbolic

Member characteristics	Purposes to continue status in the club	Duration in the club	Member type	Types of reinforcement
Club Leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To sustain a place for car-consumers to discuss and interact.</li> <li>• To manage and control the club.</li> <li>• To earn some revenue from the club's administration.</li> <li>• To have a new social status and connection.</li> </ul>	Long stay in the club.	Club Leader	Symbolic and Functional

Source: this study

## 6.8 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has presented the empirical findings and analysis in support of Proposition I. It can be seen that the functional and symbolic reinforcement in the form of rewards received by members from the clubs have an effect on their participation. Both types of reinforcement have encouraged their participation rate on the web-board and in the club activities. Nevertheless, they have somewhat different effects on each member's participation. The findings reveal that functional reinforcement firstly attracts people to the clubs while symbolic reinforcement strengthens the functional reinforcement in attracting members to continue their membership and encourage their participation in the clubs. Furthermore, the empirical findings show that functional reinforcement has an effect on all types of membership, while symbolic reinforcement has more effect on the club leader and the active member respondents' club participation. The results of the functional reinforcement are to be seen in the web-board participation, while the results of the symbolic reinforcement are to be seen not only in the web-board participation but also in their participation in club activities. Therefore, the empirical findings confirm the proposition that members participate in Thai car-consumer clubs are due to the rewards that they receive. The next chapter will explain how the rewards have an effect on the members' behaviours.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **DISCUSSION - PROPOSITION II**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an analysis of the case studies in order to provide support for the second proposition, which is:

**Proposition II: The rewards in Thai car-consumer clubs increase the likelihood of the members' behaviours being repeated.**

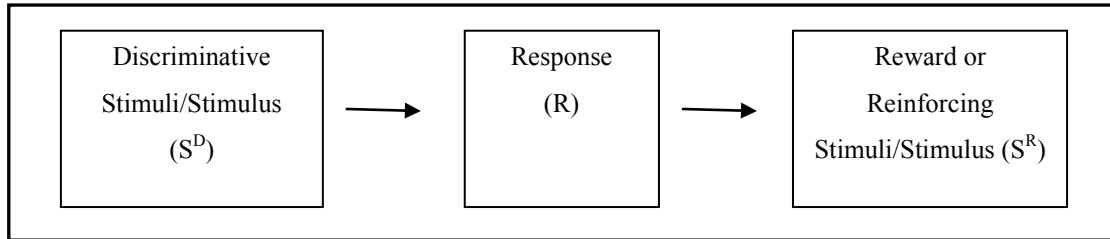
This chapter continues the explanation of rewards while emphasising how the functional and symbolic reinforcement which have been discussed in the previous chapter have an effect on the members' behaviours in Thai car-consumer clubs. Accordingly, the three-term contingency from behavioural analysis is employed to demonstrate consumer behaviour in the Thai car-consumer clubs. The empirical evidence of RGB is presented next in order to assert the members' behaviours in the clubs. This is followed by the evidence of the respondents' participation in the web-board and club activities.

#### **7.2 The Three-Term Contingency of Members' Behaviours in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

The findings of the case studies are consistent with the extant literature in that the behaviours of members in car-consumer clubs are found to be a result of the rewards which are given by the clubs (as proposed earlier in Proposition I, see Chapter 6). The pattern of behaviour of the respondents in the car-consumer clubs can also be explained by using the three-term contingency (Skinner, 1969). The three-term contingency consists of: firstly, antecedence or discriminative stimuli (stimulus) behaviour;

secondly, operant response and consequence; and thirdly, reinforcement/punishment (Skinner, 1969) (see Figure 7.1).

**Figure 7.1: The Three-Term Contingency**



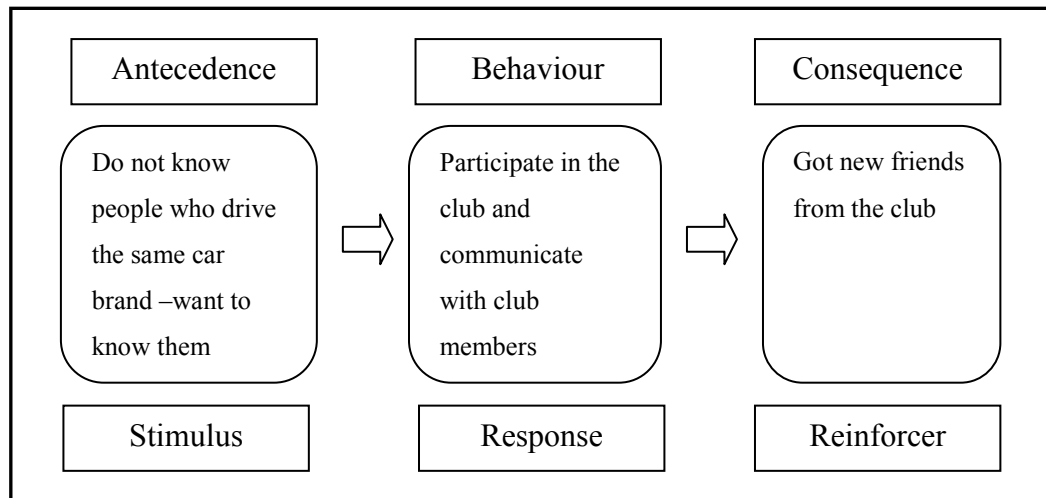
Source: Foxall (2003: p.582)

The operant behaviour of members in the car-consumer clubs is a result of reinforcement and punishment which is selected by its consequences; hence, the three-term contingency is employed in this study because it is a fundamental pattern of human behaviour which is considered to be a good explanation of members' behaviours in the car-consumer clubs. Consequently, the following analysis will develop the sequences of the members' behaviours in three-term contingency, as summarised by Foxall (2003).

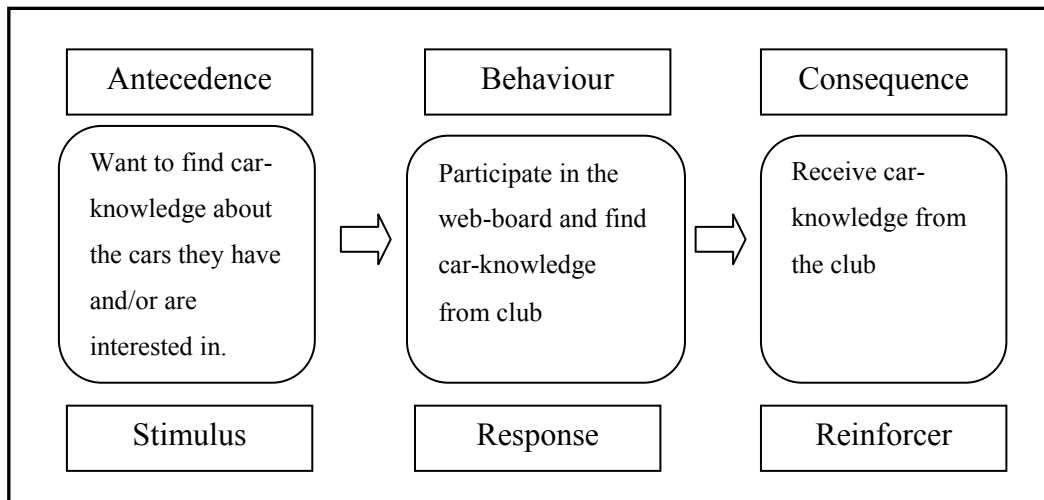
As discussed previously in Chapter 5, the empirical findings reveal that the respondents began to participate in the car-consumer clubs because they wanted to search for car-knowledge and to find people who drive the same car model. Accordingly, the behavioural contingency of the respondents begins with their search for friends and car-knowledge and they have subsequently found that the car-consumer clubs offer car-knowledge and friends to members in the clubs, which are discriminative stimuli that precede their participation in the clubs (Skinner, 1969; Foxall, 2003). Thus, participation in the club is an operant behaviour of the respondents. After the members have begun to participate in the club they have learned that their participation provides them with a favourable outcome which has a number of benefits, which are behavioural consequences that are positive reinforcement. Accordingly, these benefits are rewards which can reinforce the frequency of their subsequent participation.

Figure 7.2 and 7.3 illustrate the sequences of the members' behaviours in the car-consumer clubs, drawn from the seven case studies. According to the results of the seven case studies, the consequences (such as having new friends and obtaining car-knowledge) are positive reinforcement which motivates the repetition of members' participation in the club. This happens because the respondents form friendships with their new friends from the club; the friend and friendships reinforce their behaviour by increasing their interaction with other members who they consider as their new friends (see Figure 7.2). Similarly, when the respondents have obtained car-knowledge from the club's web-board, this car-knowledge reinforces their behaviour by increasing the frequency of their web-board participation (see Figure 7.3). The members have a positive learning history about being members of the clubs, which generate favourable outcomes; therefore, the benefits from the clubs are positive reinforcement or rewards which have an effect on their recurring behaviour in the club (Mazur, 2006).

**Figure 7.2: Three-Term Contingency: Friends**



Source: this study

**Figure 7.3: Three-Term Contingency: Car-knowledge**

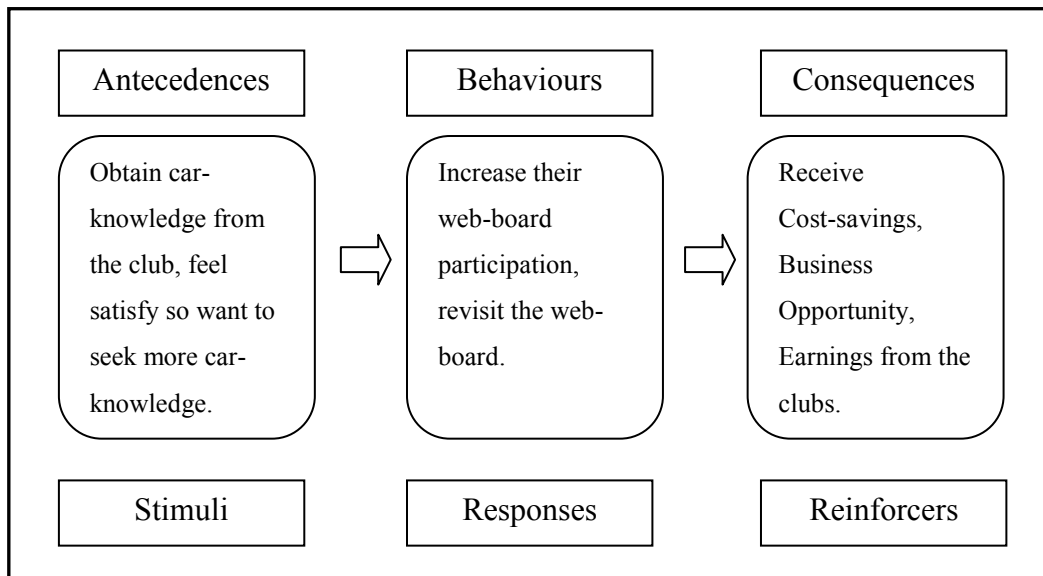
Source: this study

It can be seen from Figures 7.2 and 7.3 that friends and car-knowledge are the reinforcers, and the event that provides these reinforcers is the reinforcement. These two figures show the process of how the reinforcement encourages behaviour. This result is in agreement with Mazur (2006), who stated that when reinforcers are delivered such reinforcement appears to be the process. After they have received what they have looked for, at this point the members may opt to either stay or leave the club. Nonetheless, the empirical findings from the seven case studies show that all respondents voluntarily continue their membership status in the clubs (including the non-active member respondents) since they have learned and perceived that being a member is regarded as positive through experience from their learning history. This is due to the status that membership can bring into other rewards which are conditioned reinforcers, which they receive only if they continue their membership. Members in the car-consumer clubs have learned to associate with these reinforcers positively and this motivates their behaviour in the clubs. As a result, their participation in the clubs is repeated due to their learning process in associating with the rewards.

The empirical data from this study suggests that the repetition of members' behaviours is a result of both functional and symbolic reinforcement in the form of rewards. The functional reinforcement of the car-consumer clubs is composed of: car-knowledge, friends, cost-savings, earnings from the club, and business opportunity. The symbolic reinforcement of the car-consumer clubs is composed of: friends/friendship, assistance,

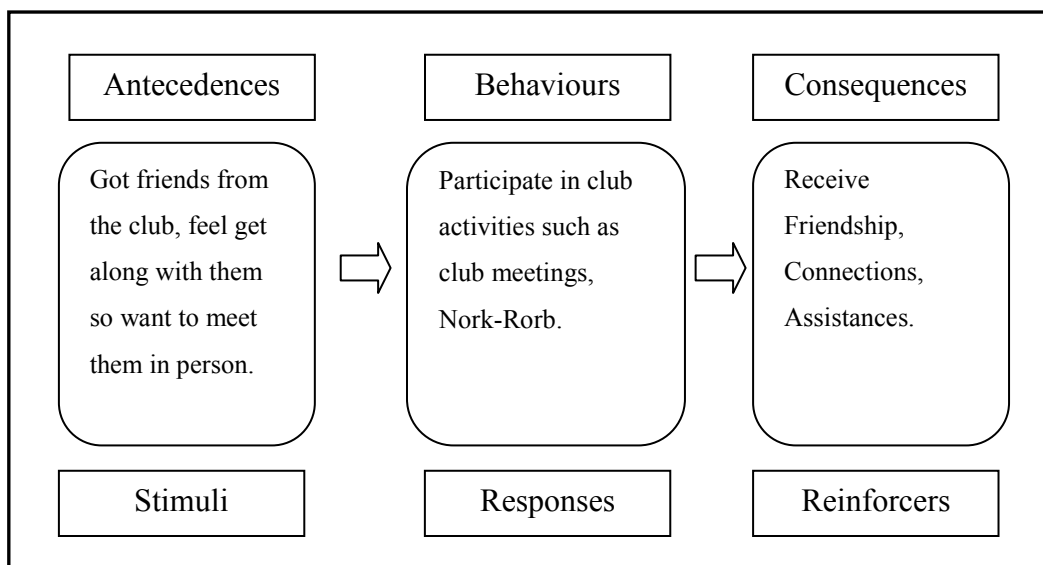
connections, and social recognition. The evidence shows that the rewards can lead all types of membership to participate in the clubs. Likewise, the rewards from the clubs function as positive reinforcement which has an effect on their recurring behaviours. As a result, both functional and symbolic reinforcement can increase the likelihood of future occurring behaviours in the clubs (Foxall, 1990, 1997a, 1998, 2005, 2010a).

**Figure 7.4: Three-Term Contingency: Functional Reinforcement**



Source: this study

**Figure 7.5: Three-Term Contingency: Symbolic Reinforcement**



Source: this study

As illustrated in Figures 7.4 and 7.5, it can be concluded from this that the occurrence of members' behaviours in the club are a result of the functional and symbolic reinforcement which follow their performance and of the member's learning history of the positive reinforcement from their participation in the clubs, which is consistent with the BPM (Foxall et al., 2006; Foxall et al., 2011; Wells et al., 2011). As mentioned earlier in Chapter 4, each club is composed of two main elements, which are the web-board and club activities. When members participate in the club they can observe other members and learn from their behaviour. In agreement with Foxall (1997a, 2010a), the members' behaviours in the Thai car-consumer clubs are found to be results of their learning process, which responds to the events or stimuli that occur in the club. In other words, the members' behaviours which are altered by their own effect on the environment are their operant behaviours as proposed in the BPM by Foxall (1990). The empirical findings in this study have found that the operant behaviours of members in the case studies are related to their web-board and activities participation (which will be discussed further in the rest of this chapter).

With regard to operant conditioning learning theory, Skinner (1969) states that human operant behaviour is selected by its consequences. Similarly, the results also show that the operant behaviours of the respondents are selected by consequences which are the results of reinforcement. Although in the theory the reinforcement can be either positive or negative, in this study the results are only found to be positive reinforcement because the respondents have positively acknowledged the receipt of benefits. Thus, these benefits are considered as the rewards which the respondents perceive to receive from participation. In other words, when members perceive what they receive from the club positively, then these benefits are considered to be rewards for them (Solomon et al., 2002). Due to the fact that members can simply discontinue their membership if they are not satisfied with the clubs, the members who continue their membership are relatively satisfied with the benefits they receive from their participation because their participation are on voluntary basis. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 5 (see section 5.6.2.2), none of the respondents mentioned the clubs negatively, due in part to the cultural values of the Thai's (Komin, 1990) in addition to their positive impression towards the clubs that they belong to. Thus, positive reinforcement is found in the case studies. Consequently, obtaining benefits from the clubs is the positive reinforcement which is a consequence that follows an operant behaviour. The positive reinforcement,

or rewards, can increase the likelihood of the future response of the participation in the clubs. The case studies also show that the respondents voluntarily participate in the clubs in order to produce a desirable outcome. Therefore, it can be concluded that members' operant responses in the clubs are likely to recur as a result of patterns of reinforcement, which is consistent with the BPM (Foxall, 1997a, 2004, 2010a; Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005).

### **7.3 Rule-Governed Behaviour**

The empirical findings of this study are in agreement with Foxall (1997a) in that members' behaviours in the clubs are found to be the results of rule-derived reinforcers. As the car-consumer clubs offer conditioned reinforcers from their membership and participation in the clubs, the rewards from the clubs are secondary reinforcers (which consist of functional and symbolic reinforcement such as car-knowledge, and friends/friendship). Consequently, they acquire rule-derived reinforcers, which are predominantly symbolic reinforcement, that are socially mediated rewards (such as social recognition, friends/friendship, cost-savings, earnings from the clubs, business opportunity, connections and assistance) through their status and/or through their self-esteem from their performance in the clubs. It is worth emphasising here that their status includes their club membership which is a primary status acquire from the clubs. Therefore, status is also to be regarded as symbolic reinforcement that can increase the likelihood of recurring participation because the members strive for other rewards in the clubs (this will be elaborated further in Chapter 8).

Since the rewards in the Thai car-consumer clubs are largely involved with rule-derived reinforcers that mediated by people, the effect of the reinforcement will be on that behaviour which is associated with the rules. The evidence of the respondents' behaviours in the car-consumer clubs which is governed by the rules can be observed in their verbal behaviour (Skinner, 1957, 1969). The findings of this study concur with those of behavioural researchers who found that individuals formulate their rules as an instruction that specify the reinforcing and punishing consequences of behaviour which control their behaviours (e.g. Catania, 1986; Schlinger and Blakely, 1987; Vaughan,

1987; Malott, 1989; Schlinger, 1990; Malott et al., 1993; Kunkel, 1997; Catania, 1998; Peláez and Moreno, 1999; Törneke et al., 2008). The behavioural consequences of the rules are largely found in the case studies since the respondents first entering to the clubs. For instance, the respondents have applied to be members in the clubs due to the club's registration requirement. Moreover, when they are members, they have to conform to club rules and social norms in the clubs. The rules act as an instruction that specify the response which will be reinforced or punished and a controlling device of members' behaviours in the clubs. Furthermore, there are frequently occasions when they generate their own self-rules, which can be followed as a guide of their future behaviours under the control of socially mediated consequences (Hayes and Hayes, 1989; Zettle, 1990; Hayes, 1993; Kunkel, 1997; Hayes et al., 1998). Therefore, the case studies reveal that members' behaviours are rule-governed. Consequently, the following sub-sections will employ the analysis of RGB which was used by Zettle and Hayes (1982) in order to study how members' behaviours in Thai car-consumer clubs are rule-governed and provide evidence of RGB where the analysis puts more emphasis on the listener's behaviour because the effectiveness of the rules is dependent on the listener (Hayes et al., 1989). However, evidence of RGB from the speaker is also provided in order to have an initial idea of how members' behaviours occur.

### **7.3.1 Evidence of Rule-Governed Behaviour: Speakers**

It was apparent in all of the seven case studies that the rules principally involved the web-board and activities participation. Two types of rules are founded in the case studies: formal and informal rules. The formal rules are predominantly related to the web-board etiquettes, especially on posting. These formal rules have been clearly stated on the all of the clubs' websites. The club leaders are the rule-givers who have authority to mediate club members' web-board posting behaviours. The empirical findings confirm that tracks and plys play an important role in the club leaders' role of rule formulation in the clubs (Zettle and Hayes, 1982). The data from the case studies reveals that most of the rules which are employed in the individual clubs have been adopted from other car-consumer clubs, other Thai public web-boards and websites, the club leader's experiences, and the circumstances. The club leaders are authorised

persons acting as rulers who commence the formal rules. Some of the evidence of rule formulating is shown in Table 7.1:

**Table 7.1: Rule Formulating by the Club Leaders**

Cases	Verbal Evidence
Volvo Club	<i>The rules that we employed have been changed from time to time. Most of the rules <u>come from social rules and other standard web-board etiquettes in Thailand.</u> (VV1)</i>
BMWSociety	<i>I <u>copy from other websites.</u> They are public regulations which I think most of the websites are on the same criteria. (BM1)</i>
MercedesMania	<i>The rules come from administrator's contentment. Other part of the rules, I <u>adopted from other sources such as other websites and then applied to the club.</u> (MM1)</i>
Accord Club	<i>The rules that we employ today <u>have been collected from time to time. We have to look at the situation and adapt to it.</u> (AC1, Club Leader)</i>
Camry Club	<i>We <u>noticed rules from a number of websites. We read what they have covered. Then we selected the rules to suit our club. Apparently, there are standard rules or standard code of conducts in Thailand. We just added some rules and adjusted for the Camry club to serve members' needs.</u> (CR1)</i>  <i>At that time we helped each other to <u>search the terms and conditions to apply with our club by observing other websites. Some of the rules we found can be applied to our club but some cannot.</u> (CR2)</i>
Jazz Club	<i>The rules are <u>adopted from members and other websites. Actually, the club had no rules at the beginning except we did not allow members to post topics that: are immoral, infringe on intellectual property and copyright, related to political issues or in a contemptuous manner for the Thai Monarchy. The rest of the rules have been transformed from members when we found that they were not right. The rules came from members by which members facilitate the rules.</u> (JZ1)</i>
Yaris Club	<i>It is <u>the rules and regulations in which we observe from other clubs and other Thai web-boards.</u> (YC1)</i>  <i>We help each other in the rule setting. We <u>adopt from our previous car-consumer clubs and adjust in appropriate to our club.</u> (YC2)</i>

Source: this study

### 7.3.1.1 Tracks

The clubs have a series of formal rules concerning web-board etiquettes, forbidden topics include: vulgarity, invasion of others privacy, posting threatening political topics, and any topic that may be critical of the Thai monarchy or of the Thai nation. These rules and conditions are clearly stated by all of the clubs included in this study on their web-boards and they inform everyone who visits their websites to read and respect their rules. Once the rules have been formulated and declared publicly, these rules are used as tracks for members, and even visitors, to conduct themselves. This result is consistent with the extant literature which advises that tracks include all written instructions (Poppen, 1989) and that these rules function as antecedent to behaviour (Skinner, 1966; Glenn, 1987) as well as guidelines for behaviour change and control (Vaughan, 1987; Catania, 1989; Hayes and Hayes, 1989; Schlinger, 1990; Hayes, 1993). Hence, the formal rules which have been stated in the clubs' websites are predominantly tracks for members to follow. In practice the formal rules are not only stated on the websites, they are also established through the observation of the behaviour of other members; for example, if a new member accidentally posts an off topic message in the wrong web-board room then they will be advised of their mistake by the other members.<sup>16</sup> The following statements show examples of club statement in relation to the clubs' rules or tracks:

*This website does not serve for public posting. We only allow registered member to post in our web-board rooms. If you think this is a public place, please reconsider again... Please bear in mind that this is a liberal place where we welcome everyone who comes to join us with good intention and friendship.* (Yaris Club Website)

*BMWSociety is not a public place. Many people may understand that the websites in the Internet are public places where you can put your opinions without restriction. This may lead to misunderstandings. A good society always has rules and manners of living together. Therefore, the BMWSociety management hope that everyone who comes to join us in this website will provide a good cooperation and*

<sup>16</sup> During the research the researcher deliberately tried posting an off topic message on the wrong web-board, the members quickly told politely the researcher to post in the right room and they also suggested the appropriate room to post the topic.

*respect the majority by learning in our rules, web-board etiquettes and social manners which should behave in the BMW Society.*  
(BMW Society Website)

These examples of verbal behaviour show how the rules, or tracks for members to follow. In the statements above the club leaders referred to a set of basic requirements which recommend to members how they should behave in the clubs. Consequently, members are able to learn web-board etiquettes through: the web-board rooms, the clubs' rules and regulations from the website, and existing members. The other existing members are role models who act as a frame of behaviour for new members to follow their behavioural pattern.

### **7.3.1.2 Plys**

In addition to the formal rules there are a set of unwritten 'informal rules' which are not obviously stated on the website but which members still have to follow. These informal rules are related to the members' standard codes of practice in activities participation and they are similar to the norms of the clubs. In addition to the formal rules, these informal rules help to govern members' behaviours in the clubs and they have been found to be used in all seven case studies in the form of plys. These informal rules are mainly adopted from the norms of Thai society, social manners and Thai social conduct. In agreement with the findings of Solomon et al. (2002), the members of the Thai car-consumer clubs in this study have been found to have developed their own norms, or informal rules, to be applied in the clubs which govern their behaviours. Informal rules encourage members to conform to the group owing to group pressure.

Accordingly, plys have been found in the form of informal rules such as club norms which is in agreement with Zettle and Hayes (1982) and Poppen (1989) who found that they govern and control members' behaviours in the clubs. The rules in this sense perform as verbal stimuli that govern behaviour of the listener by specifying the consequences of rule-following (Hayes and Hayes, 1989; Hayes et al., 1989; Schlenger, 1990) in that they can stay if they conform to the norms or they should leave the club if they cannot follow. The statement of plys can be observed by the word "should" that is

given by the speaker where the effect is on the listener (Skinner, 1989), as in the following examples:

*In our club, members should know what they can do. We do not have to have everything written, like a formal constitution. But they should know what they can do and cannot do. (VV1, Club Leader)*

*It seems like it is one way of screening that if you cannot accept this norm, you should go to another place. Or if you do not like this norm, do not like these people or do not like people who behave like this, you should screen yourself out. (YC1, Club Leader)*

*Members should keep inform the club leader of the club movement. Apparently, they usually do. I am glad that they inform us. So we will know their movement and can see what assistance we can provide. (CR1, Club Leader)*

These examples show evidence for plys of the speakers (who are the club leaders). Despite the fact that the case studies do not present an instant conversation between speakers and listeners, they do represent the way in which the rules can govern members' behaviours indirectly and show statements of plys from the speakers. In the statements above the club leaders referred to the norms of the clubs. Consequently, members should have to conform to the norms if they want to stay in the clubs since their behaviours are mediated by the speakers such as the club leaders.

### 7.3.1.3 Punishment

From the results of the examination of all seven case studies it can be concluded that the main speakers in the clubs are the club leaders. As described in the example of the statements in section 7.3.1.2, this group of respondents has sent the plys (statements) to the listeners/club members. This implies that if the club members do not comply with club norms then the club leaders and other club members will mediate their behaviours by asking them to leave the club. These statements show that society has an influence in controlling rule-following.

Since the clubs have provided rewards for members who behave well in the clubs, granting the rewards are positive reinforcement which has an effect on members' frequency of behaviours. On the other hand, there is a punishment system for those members who breach the rules which have an effect on members' behaviour extinction (Mazur, 2006). The seven case studies have indicated that, to a certain degree, the club website system controls members' behaviours through the web-board control system. In most of the case studies the clubs will set a dateline for topic correction, in case a member has posted something by mistake and want to make a change (e.g. the Volvo Club, the BMW Society, the Camry Club). However, once the post exceeds a given time the member are no longer able to change anything and the statement will then exist on the web-board room. In general, the website software that each club utilises will systematically detect offensive wordings. If the system does not detect offensive words or violent sentences then the club leaders and/or in-charge controllers of all cases will intervene by warning and notifying the deadline for correcting that posted message. If that member still does not make a correction then such messages will eventually be deleted.

The findings also reveal that all seven clubs have set typical levels of punishment which are used by the club leaders. Although the rules differed slightly in detail, all of the case studies present similar systems of punishment. At the first level, if the club leaders notice a suspicious person who behaves in an unacceptable manner then they will be warned by a personal message. If they continue with this behaviour then the club leaders are able to block their suspicious posts and they are then deleted from the system. The next level of the punishment is that if that person still does not behave appropriately in the club, the club leaders will then ask them to leave the club. Thus, their membership status in the club will be immediately removed by the club leaders. Moreover, if a person who has already been asked to leave the club tries to return to the club by using other usernames to disturb the club, then the club leaders will block the Internet Protocol address of that person in order to protect the club. However, most of the time the members screen the behaviour of other members by themselves as a result of plying. They act as witnesses to the club and help the club leaders to monitor their clubs, as stated by the club leaders in following examples:

*If that person has a high level, the administrators will have some allowance. But if he or she is a new member, the administrator will delete that web-board post at the soft level. For the hard level, he or she will be banned from the system from three days to a year. (MM1, Club Leader)*

*We rarely have to screen out trouble members because most of them are left by other members. Most of the members screen one another by themselves. I will warn the trouble members by a personal message when it is a big problem in the club. (YC2, Club Leader)*

*Since the rules are enacted in the club, it is rare to find persons who breach the rules because the members help the club to monitor the rule-breakers. (JZ1, Club Leader)*

In summary, the evidence of verbal behaviour shows that the club leaders of the seven case studies are the rule givers or speakers who have the authority to mediate members' behaviours. The rules in the case studies can be either formal or informal rules which act as instructions that specify response will be reinforced or punished, and they have a controlling effect on members' behaviours in the clubs, which is in consistent with the literature (i.e. Schlinger and Blakely, 1987; Vaughan, 1987; Catania, 1989; Cerutti, 1989; Malott, 1989; Schlinger, 1990; Malott et al., 1993; Foxall, 1997a; Kunkel, 1997; Catania, 1998; Peláez and Moreno, 1999; Törneke et al., 2008; Greer and Speckman, 2009). Consequently, members who wish to keep their membership status in the clubs have to comply with these rules and, therefore, the members' behaviours in the clubs are controlled by the rules. The next section will present additional evidence to explain the RGB of the listeners.

### **7.3.2 Evidence of Rule-Governed Behaviour: Listeners**

From the analyses of the seven case studies it is apparent that members' behaviours in the clubs are rule-governed by the physical environment (or tracking) and by verbal-social community or other persons (or pliance) (Zettle and Hayes, 1982; Hayes and Hayes, 1989; Zettle, 1990; Hayes et al., 1998). With respect to the listeners' side, or the active-member and non-active member respondents, the RGB, which can be observed in all of the case studies, are found in a combination form of tracking and pliance.

However, in reality it is relatively difficult to clearly distinguish between these two types of RGB. There are often times when the respondents expressed their verbal behaviours as tracking other people paths while pliance to follow them. This is consistent with Hayes et al. (1998) who found that it is necessary to be pliance otherwise they are unlikely to follow rules. Moreover, a number of previous studies have illustrated that behaviour which is controlled by verbal stimuli is RGB (e.g. Brownstein and Shull, 1985; Catania, 1989; Malott, 1989; Skinner, 1989; Malott et al., 1993). In comparison with the case studies, the behaviours of the respondents in the clubs are also rule-governed because they act by the given rules which are instructions of their behavioural consequences, and this can be observed from their interviews. This section intends to present the evidence in relation to RGB of the listeners in order to explain how the rules have governed their behaviour in the clubs.

### **7.3.2.1 Tracking**

Tracking, which is the RGB between the listener and the arrange direction in verbal behaviour, is noticeable in all seven case studies (Zettle and Hayes, 1982; Zettle and Young, 1987; Hayes and Hayes, 1989; Hayes et al., 1998). In these case studies the empirical evidence of tracking can best be seen when the club member respondents learn how to behave in the clubs from their own experience in the clubs, this learning takes many forms. The findings show that some of the respondents have read the rules from the beginning when they applied to the club, they reported that they had read through the terms and agreements and had accepted them (Situation A, n = 9). Meanwhile, other respondents reported that they had read the rules that are posted on the club's website (they are usually on the web-board rooms) (Situation B, n = 3). Some respondents have observed the rules from their web-board interactions and have noticed that the club leaders give warnings to member's who misuse the service or who make a mistake (Situation C, n = 5). Other respondents reported that they had learnt from the senior members, existing members and/or club friends who gave them instructions and advice on how to behave in the club (Situation D, n = 2). Similarly, those respondents who are pioneer members and active members reported that they wish to serve as a good role model for other members. The way that these more senior members post on the rooms, or otherwise help other members, is due to the fact that they want to be a

pattern for members to follow by transferring their experience to other members. This signals that these senior members want to serve as role models so that other members can follow in their example, they also act to control the younger member's behaviours in the club (Situation E,  $n = 4$ ). The majority of the club member respondents ( $n = 12$ ) reported that they never read or observe the rules but they had already known how to behave in the club which is considered as pliance (see section 7.3.2.2 for further discussion of pliance). Table 7.2 details the evidence of RGB, particularly tracking.

**Table 7.2: Evidence of Rule-Governed Behaviour: Tracking**

	Situations	Evidence of Rule-Governed Behaviour
<b>A</b>	<b>Members have read the rules in the form of terms and agreements which they accept before they participate.</b>	<i>The rules are stated when you apply to the club as agreements. If you click accept, it means that you agree with them. (CR6, Active Member)</i> <i>There are rules stated for us to read. I read and follow them. (JZ3, Active Member)</i> <i>I follow the rules. Most of the members ignore to read the rules and regulations. But I have read them. I read them from the first day because if I want to do anything, I am kind of person who will read and learn everything first. (YC3, Active Member)</i>
<b>B</b>	<b>Members have read the rules that are posted on the club website and on each web-board room.</b>	<i>I read the rules in the club website because I want to know which types of questions I can ask in the club. People generally do not read this page. At this club, if I post any question which seems to be wrong then the moderator will tell you by a message to read the rules. For example, he will tell you that this kind of question cannot be post. However, I mostly find that an inappropriate picture cannot be posted; offensive words or vulgar cannot be used in the web-board; lessees Majesty is forbidden. (AC3, Active Member)</i> <i>The rules have been clearly stated on the first page of the web-board rooms. Just read and follow them. (JZ2, Active Member)</i>
<b>C</b>	<b>Members notice other members' web-board interactions and have learned from their mistakes.</b>	<i>Sometimes I found people who breach the rules in the club web-board. So I have learned from them. It appeared that the administrator would remind members of the rules in which that rule-breaker person did to show which reason he/she is guilt for. I read from that post so that I know what I have to do in the club. (MM1Ga, Active Member)</i>

	Situations	Evidence of Rule-Governed Behaviour
<b>D</b>	<b>Members learn from other members' instructions and advice.</b>	<i>YC3 told us about the rules and manners of the club. (YC5Ga, Active Member)</i>
<b>E</b>	<b>Members wish to perform as a good role model for other members to follow their example.</b>	<i>Today, we still have knowledge sharing as our ritual because members may vary from time to time. There are new members who join here all the time. These new members can read information which we shared from our experiences. We have transferred our experiences to the next generation. This is our philosophy. (VVI Ga, Active Member)</i>

Source: this study

### 7.3.2.2 Pliance

The empirical findings also reveal that members' behaviours in the club are predominantly rule-governed by social mediation of the consequences, which is also called pliance (Zettle and Hayes, 1982; Zettle and Young, 1987; Hayes and Hayes, 1989; Hayes et al., 1989; Hayes, 1993; Hayes et al., 1998). The findings are in accordance with Skinner (1989), who found that the reason why members in the group observe norms and imitate each other as role models is because they have behaved in the form of a rule. The desire to retain their membership status in the club is a stimulus, and the rewards given by the clubs are the reinforcement which increases the likelihood of repeating behaviours of the individual (Scarpi, 2010). The present study will address the view that most of the rewards are socially mediated by associated members and parties of the car-consumer clubs. Consequently, there are often times when the respondents referred to their behaviour (such as complying with club rules) because of social monitoring by other members. Aside from those respondents who have read the rules and follow the club's instructions, there were also found to be a number of the club member respondents (which are twelve from thirty-five club member respondents) who have not yet read or noticed the rules and who do not yet know how to behave in their club. Many of these members refer instead to the social code of conduct, and the social manners, that require individuals to perform in order to stay in the society. Table 7.3 demonstrates the evidence of RGB from the seven case studies which is observed

from pliance in the interviews with respondents who are active members and non-active members. The evidence suggests that most of members' behaviours in the car-consumer clubs can be considered as pliance, or rule-following under the control of socially mediated consequences (Hayes et al., 1989; Hayes et al., 1998). This happens because their behaviour is controlled by the social system that signals the consequences of their behaviour, whether they will receive the rewards or punishment from their behaviour in the clubs. In other words, the consequences of behaviour which is indicated by the rules in the case studies specify the rewards for the members who follow and conform to the rules as well as the punishment for members who do not follow the rules.

**Table 7.3: Evidence of Rule-Governed Behaviour: Pliance**

Cases	Evidence
<b>Volvo Club</b>	<p><i>It is <u>general rules</u> to live in the Thai society. (VV1Ga, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>I just behave myself. <u>We should respect other people</u>. (VV1Gb, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>I do not want to make any trouble. I still want to stay here so I <u>ought to conform to the club norms</u>. (VV1Gc, Active Member)</i></p>
<b>BMWSociety</b>	<p><i>I just behave in a proper manner within the <u>social frame</u>. I do not want to <u>bother other people</u>. <u>We should be</u> considerate to one another. (BM2Gb, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>Just <u>behave within the social frame</u>. (BM2Ga, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>I myself learned from experience of <u>how I should behave with people in the social</u>. What I <u>should do</u> to make them respect me. (BM3, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>It <u>should be a commonsense</u> such as <u>do not insult or blame others</u>. (BM4, Active Member)</i></p>
<b>MercedesMania</b>	<p><i>I hardly read the rules but when we often use these websites, we <u>should know</u> as they [the rules] are <u>social manners</u>. (MM1Gb, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>It is just <u>a nature of human being to not trouble others</u>. (MM2, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>It is <u>the standard rules of car clubs in Thailand</u>. You <u>should post</u> the topics in proper rooms. For example, if you want to ask about cars, you <u>should visit the different</u> car sections. If you want to sell the products, you <u>should go to</u> classified room. Moreover, you <u>should avoid</u> talking about political issues. Although you like the same car brand, you may have a different</i></p>

Cases	Evidence
	<i>view on politics. Referring to the monarchy system is prohibited as well. (MM3, Active Member)</i>
<b>Accord Club</b>	<p><i>I did not read the rules because they are <u>mainly related to group behaviour</u> and that <u>we know what we should do</u>. (AC2Gb, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>We are just gathering for fun and enjoyment. We <u>should not</u> breach the rules. (AC2Ga, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>Of course, I follow the rules because I have no idea <u>why I should not</u>. It would be better not to make any trouble. (AC3, Active Member)</i></p>
<b>Camry Club</b>	<p><i>All of us perceived such rules even though they have not read them. <u>We knew what we should do to behave</u> in the club. (CR6, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>I skim read the rules because I do not like to read. (Laughs) But we have known the <u>basic norms</u>. For instance, <u>you should not make any conflict</u>. In other words, you can tease and play with other members but you should keep it well manner. <u>You should not harm</u> anybody and use inappropriate language. (CR3, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>It is a <u>social manner</u> that we <u>should have known</u> already. There is nothing in particular. (CR5, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>In my opinion, the online community is really similar to a new society. We automatically know by instinct of what <u>we should behave</u> in the club. It is similar to the code of practice in the society. (CR4, Active Member)</i></p>
<b>Jazz Club</b>	<p><i>A person who breaches the rules <u>should be considered</u> as an irresponsible person. (JZ2, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>I never read it... but it is <u>the general rule of the web-board</u> such as cannot post impolite topics. (JZ4, Active member)</i></p>
<b>Yaris Club</b>	<i>It is the <u>universal rules</u> of joining in the clubs and the web-board. There are many prohibited actions. (YC4, Active Member)</i>

Source: this study

As stated earlier, it can be noticed in most cases that the respondents have described a way of tracking while adding pliance, which may happen when the speaker and listener is the same individual (Catania, 1986; Poppen, 1989; Kunkel, 1997; Greer and Speckman, 2009). Occasionally, an individual can be both a speaker and a listener who sets his/her own rules for his/her conduct (Foxall, 2010a). The example of verbal

behaviour which is given above shows self-tracking of the respondents by which physical environment mediated his behaviour. The respondents may add self-evaluative instructions that reinforce themselves to perform, and that transform tracking into self-pliance as pointed out by Poppen (1989). Furthermore, the verbal behaviours of the respondents function as plys controlling their behaviour, which turn to be self-plys to conduct their own behaviour to conform their self-instruction (Poppen, 1989). The evidence of self-plys is also found by detecting the keyword “should”, “would”, “have to”, “ought to” that indicate the respondents’ speak to themselves and conduct their performance (Skinner, 1989). It is in line with Vaughan (1985, 1989), who found that individual self-talk and self-instruction sometimes determine the form of behavioural response as if other people gave to them. The self-instruction makes members learn the rules more rapidly than the contingencies describe (Skinner, 1957; Vaughan, 1985). Consequently, the respondents learn how to behave in the clubs quickly. It is likely that behaviour of the respondents are considered as pliance and self-pliance to the clubs where they wish to belong by conforming to other members and their self-instruction as a result of their social history of reinforcement through the mediation of individuals (which can be other people or the individual themselves) (Skinner, 1957; Zettle and Hayes, 1982; Foxall, 2010a). As a result, there is evidence of rule-following behaviours as pliance and self-pliance, which are socially mediated consequences, in the case studies.

The rewards, or benefits, from the club, and the punishment (such as the removal of membership status) are socially mediated by the club leaders and other club members. Consequently, members who wish to maintain their membership status are compliant to the rules in order to avoid aversive consequences. Therefore, the respondents’ behaviours in conformity to the rules of the web-board can be seen as both tracking and pliance for their membership status in the clubs.

## 7.4 Web-Board Participation

Having provided evidence of the verbal behaviours of members' in the Thai car-consumer clubs, and having described the rationale behind their participation, this section offers the results of the respondents' behaviour in the web-board participation. The respondents' frequency of the web-board participation is a response to the rewards, mainly the functional reinforcement. Analysis of the seven case studies reveals that the respondents find the web-board beneficial to them when they receive the rewards of their web-board participation. Consequently, they are likely to increase their web-board participation. The many examples of this which were found during the group interviews and individual interviews in the seven case studies are proof of their enthusiastic web-board participation which can turn into a habitual behaviour, as in these examples:

*VV1Ga: Every day*

*VV1Gd: Me too. Every day.*

*VV1Gb: It is like a part of me already. Like ...when I get up in the morning, I switch on my computer and check Volvo Club homepage first.*

*VV1Gc: We visit the Volvo website every day. Whenever we cannot see the homepage, we will call to VV1 [the webmaster] to tell him right away. So he can see me online every day (laugh).*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

*AC2Ge: It is automatic.*

*AC2Gd: It is like we have to go home every day.*

*Everyone: Yes, yes. We have to log in to the web-board every day. (laughs)*

*AC2Gb: Sometimes I do not know what to answer but I want to see or at least just read.*

*AC2Ga: Sometimes answer, sometimes just greeting.*

*AC2Gc: If there is nothing today, we just type something such as teasing each other.*

*AC2Gd: At least...we just login to the club web-board to see the movement.*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

*MM1Ga: At least twice a week. Even though I have no time to play, I find time to visit the web-board twice a week at least.*

*MM1Gb: Every day.*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

*This club is a good society. If it is not good, I will not stay here. It makes me addicted to it. I have to check the club website every day. If I do not check, I will feel like Oh! I miss something. I have not checked the web-board today. Is there any update or new information? Something like that. (BM3, Active Member)*

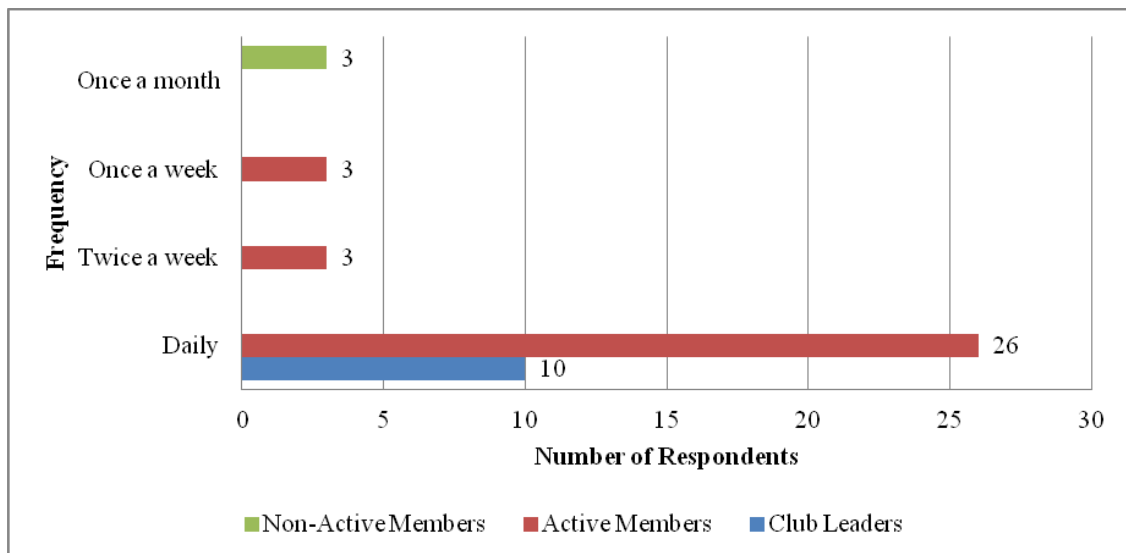
*It appears to be my routine life that I usually check forum, classified, information update from the club to check what's going on in the club. (BM2Ga, Active Member)*

*I check the web-board on daily basis. (CR5, Active Member)*

*It is fun. I want to participate here more often. (BM4, Active Member)*

*I visit the web-board everyday to check if there are new issues coming up. (CR3, Active Member)*

**Figure 7.6: The Respondents' Frequency of Web-board Participation**

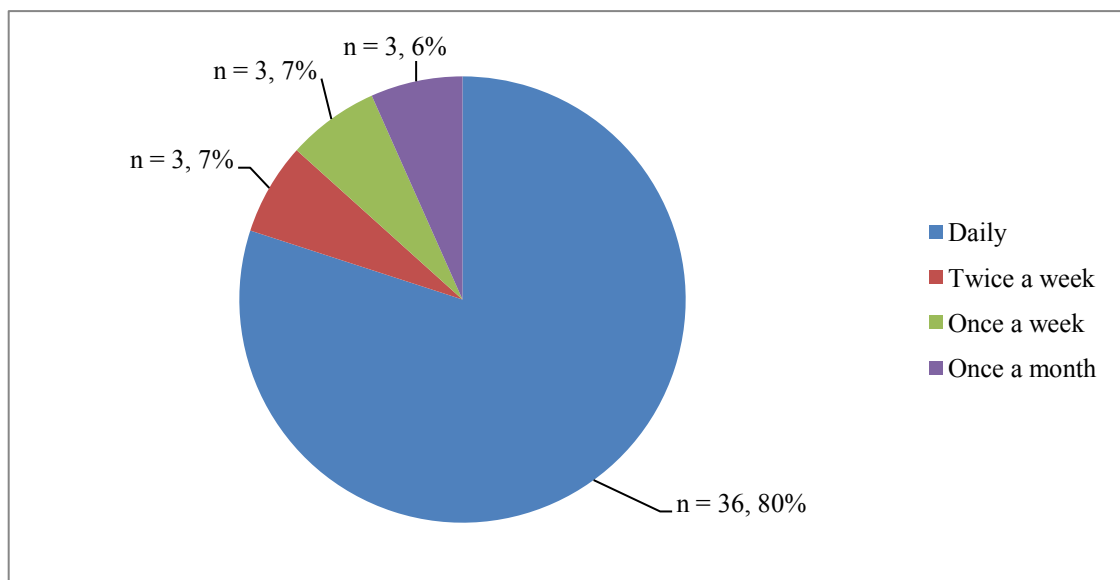


Source: this study

The supporting evidence of the respondents' web-board participation is summarised in Figure 7.6. The bar chart compares the frequency of the web-board participation in different types of membership. As can be seen from the chart, all of the club leader respondents (n=10) and most of the active member respondents (n = 26) visit the web-board daily. It is manifestly shown that the behaviours of the majority have been increased by the rewards. Three active member respondents visit the web-board twice a week, and three active member respondents visit the web-board once a week. The behaviour of these six respondents is relatively reinforced by the symbolic

reinforcement which they gave as the reason why they prefer to participate in club activities than participate in the web-board. It can be noticed that all of the non-active member respondents visit the web-board once a month. The frequency of their web-board participation shows that they are relatively reinforced by the rewards, particularly by the functional reinforcement from the clubs (as already described in Chapter 6). They do not contribute as much to the clubs as the other types of membership respondents because their behaviour is not as reinforced by the clubs' symbolic reinforcement as the behaviour of the other members. In summary, it is clear that the frequency of web-board participation of three types of membership are due to the rewards, and this is comparable to the evidence of their RGB (i.e. pliance and tracking) in order to receive rewards.

**Figure 7.7: A Summary of the Respondents' Web-board Participation**



Source: this study

The chart in Figure 7.7 summarises the frequency of web-board participation as estimated in the results of all of the respondents. It is clearly seen in this chart that 80% ( $n = 36$ ) of the total respondents ( $N = 45$ ), which is the majority in the case studies, participate on the web-board daily. Meanwhile, 14% ( $n = 6$ ) of the total respondents participate on the web-board twice a week and once a week (each shares the same percentage of approximately 7%). As discussed earlier, despite their activities preference some of the active member respondents still visit the web-board occasionally. It can be noticed that approximately 6% ( $n = 3$ ) of the total respondents

visit the web-board once a month. The results show that they participate, albeit at a low level. Therefore, the results show that all of the respondents who were involved in this study have continued their participation in the car-consumer clubs.

## 7.5 Club Activities Participation

This section offers the results of the respondents' behaviour in the club activities participation. The empirical results show the similar results of the web-board participation in terms of the frequency of the club activities participation which is a result of the reinforcement, mainly the symbolic reinforcement. Analysis of the seven case studies reveals that most of the respondents assert the importance of the club activities which provide them with an opportunity to meet one another in person and to establish a relationship in the physical world; in other words, the club activities are perceived as generating rewards to the members, as in following examples:

*Besides the web-board, it is imperative to meet in person otherwise people can write anything on the web-board. But if we meet in person, we will know who they are. When they make a comment on the web-board, we can identify those persons. We will have a well-mannered society. (BM1, Club Leader)*

*It is important because most of people in the web-board can only post messages, they hardly see each other in person. (MMIGa, Active Member)*

*Activities are factual. We can meet and talk physically. Sometimes chatting in the virtual world, we cannot hear their voice; we cannot see their face so they maybe fake. There will be less in the closeness and sentiment to the club. In contrast, if they can meet in person and touch the real feeling from a person directly, it will strengthen the relationship and become a closer group. (JZ1, Club Leader)*

*Activities will reinforce our closeness and cohesiveness. If we have a chance to meet one time and once we have met one another, it is most likely that we will try to meet each other again. If we never meet at all, we will not have this chance to meet other and the relationship will fade away. (MMIGb, Club Leader)*

*The meetings make the club lively, move forward, and serve needs of people who use the same car brand. (CR1, Club Leader)*

*The meeting is an important element of the club that allows us to meet people who are similar to us. We can see each other in real-life. We can talk to one another. We can know how sincere we are and know how we feel. (CR5, Active Member)*

*It is important because if we are only chatting via the web-board, we will never know other people in person. (JZ3, Active Member)*

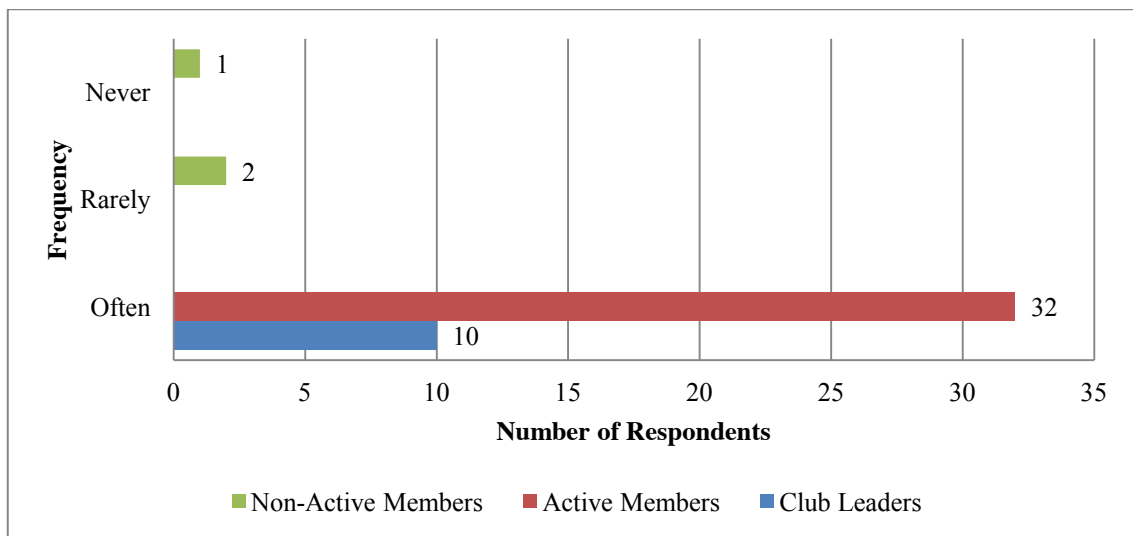
*I find meetings very important. When we have meetings, we meet club friends and know more people. (YC3, Active Member)*

*We should participate in activities. It makes me feel closer to club friends. I also get more knowledge together with closeness relationship with other club friends. (VV2, Club Leader)*

The examples in the statements above show how the respondents find activities important after they have experienced those activities. They find them important from their learning history in which they receive rewards from activities participation. The desirable outcomes make them feel that the activities are important to participate in. Consequently, this will transform into the rules that govern their activities participation. The rule appears to be an instruction for them to continue their participation in club activities. These findings are in accordance with Galizio (1979), who suggested that the past histories of conditioning that produce favourable outcomes can evoke individual behaviour to follow instructions. The rule that describes the behavioural contingency of the respondent here is to participate in activities. Because the respondents find that activities are important, a particular response (i.e. participating in activities) will produce a particular outcome (i.e. connections, assistance, and friendships from other club members). Accordingly, club friends are the reinforcers. The reinforcers can include connections, assistance, and friendship from the members. Because the members have perceived these as benefits or rewards, they are more likely to participate in other club activities. In line with Kanter et al. (2005) that human have ability to generate the rules for rule-following from learning through a history of social reinforcement. Therefore, the respondents formulate self-pliance which controls their activities participation.

Figure 7.8 compares the frequency of club activities participation of the respondents in the different types of membership, which is counted on an average of the respondents' frequency in participating meetings and Nork-Rorb (based on their own assessment). It is crucial to note that participating in activities such as meetings and Nork-Rorb is optional. It is not compulsory for members to participate. The results from the seven case studies support the view that most of the respondents are willing volunteers who participate in the meetings whenever their time permits.

**Figure 7.8: The Respondents' Frequency of Club Activities Participation**

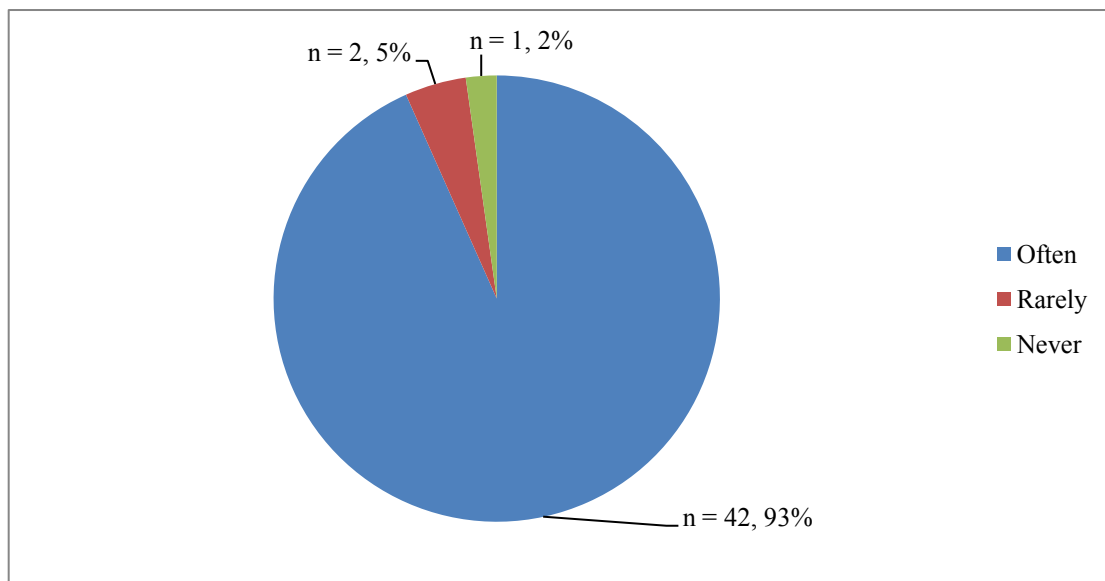


Source: this study

As can be seen from Figure 7.8, all of the club leader respondents reported that they often participate in the club meetings because they are in charge of the club main events and they are willing to organise and participate in such activities. The results also show that all of the active member respondents frequently participate in the club meetings. Most of the respondents reveal that they have tried to participate in club activities as often as they can when they have free time. Some of the respondents reveal that they participate less often than previously because they do not have free time, but they said that whenever they have the time they will participate. The results indicate that the time-constraint is a factor which can decrease the frequency of activity participation in the car-consumer clubs. These results are in line with those of Foxall et al. (1998) which showed that the temporal context in relation to time allocation and timetable should be taken into consideration because they have an impact on behaviour. The

results of the group of non-active member respondents show that they rarely, if ever, participate in the club activities. This result is valid with their rewards perceived as functional reinforcement rather than symbolic reinforcement. Therefore, they are not keen on the club activities and this shows in their behaviour. The evidence clearly shows that symbolic reinforcement has an impact on the members' frequency of behaviour, especially in club activities participation.

**Figure 7.9: A Summary of the Respondents' Club Activities Participation**



Source: this study

Figure 7.9 summarises the results of activities participation based on the total respondents. It is obvious from this that the vast majority of the respondents reported that they often participate in club activities (93%). Meanwhile, only 5% of the total respondents reported that they rarely participate in club activities. Only 2% of the respondents reported that they never participate in club activities. In fact, in this study there was only one respondent who had never participated in the meetings. The reason that he gave for this was that he does not find it interesting to participate. The result of the SCI indicates that this person is a non-active member and so this behaviour is valid to the analysis. Similarly, the findings of the RGB of the other respondents appear to be the same, which is in line with the results of activities participation. In conclusion, it can be seen that the majority of the respondents in the case studies participate in club activities, and this recurring behaviour is a result of symbolic reinforcement.

## 7.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has discussed how rewards specifically have an effect on members' recurring behaviour in the Thai car-consumer clubs. It has demonstrated the respondents' behaviours in the clubs by giving examples which are drawn from the empirical evidence of this study. These results are consistent to the BPM in terms of those behaviours which have been maintained, increased and which are likely to recur as a result of both types of reinforcement (functional and symbolic) (Foxall, 1990, 1997a, 1998, 2005, 2010a). The empirical results have shown that the response rate of respondents (particularly the groups of the club leaders and the active-member respondents) have increased and are more likely to recur in the future (as can be seen by their web-board and activity participation). The results indicate that both types of reinforcement have strengthened their behaviour via the rules that connect the behaviour settings and the pattern of reinforcement (Foxall, 2010a). In a similar manner, the participations of the non-active member respondents in the case studies are also repeated by the reinforcement. Although the number of the non-active respondents is small, the data still indicates that their recurring behaviours are results of rewards. These data supports the validity of the analysis. Furthermore, the overall results are valid to the statements of RGB given by the respondents in patterns of self-ply, pliance, self-pliance, tracking and self-tracking. When they receive rewards from the clubs (which are predominantly socially mediated) they are likely comply to the clubs' rules (pliance) and tracking other members in order to avoid punishment and to continue receiving rewards. The development of pliance and self-pliance is based on a history of arbitrary socially mediated consequences for the members' correspondence between their behaviour and rules about what is appropriate in the clubs. It can be concluded from this that consumer behaviour in the car-consumer clubs is predominantly RGB as a result of the pattern of reinforcement and consumer behavioural settings which is connected by the rules from members' learning histories, as suggested by Foxall (2010a). The overall results show that the data of the respondents' RGB and their web-board and activities participation are in congruence, which shows the validity and reliability of the analysis. Therefore, the present analyses have empirically confirmed Proposition II: The rewards in Thai car-consumer clubs increase the likelihood of the members' behaviours being repeated.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **DISCUSSION - PROPOSITION III**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents an analysis of the case studies in order to provide support for the third proposition, which is:

**Proposition III: Status counts as Symbolic Reinforcement in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs.**

The previous chapter has shown the effect of both types of reinforcement on the likelihood of recurring members' behaviours in Thai car-consumer clubs. It has also examined the evidence of RGB. This chapter addresses the symbolic reinforcement that underpins members' behaviours in the car-consumer clubs (essentially their "status"). The aim of this chapter is to explain how status acts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs. The focus of the chapter is on supporting propositions and a set of empirical evidence from seven case studies showing how status is associated with behaviour. Accordingly, three supporting propositions are offered in order to provide support for the main proposition in this chapter.

#### **8.2 Status: A Reward for Members in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

Most of the members' behaviours in the car-consumer clubs are the results of rule-derived reinforcers (as discussed earlier in section 7.3 of Chapter 7). The case studies reveal that members' behaviours occur because of rule-derived reinforcers from their status in the club. These findings corroborate the research of Foxall (1997a) in that the essence of the rule-derived reinforcers is that they involve social and verbal interaction, and they are an individual's level of achievement of socially (or personally) prescribed

goal which derives power from the social status and/or self-esteem that is related to symbolic reinforcement. The empirical evidence of the respondents' behaviours in their web-board and activities participation, including RGB (see Chapter 7), has clearly shown that their behaviours recur as a result of both functional and symbolic reinforcement, which is the pattern of reinforcement that is indicated in the BPM. However, it is crucial to note that people are the heart of the club's progress and success. In other words, the existence of these clubs is dependent on the people who are involved in them.

All of the car-consumer clubs in this study started in the virtual world as websites (as described earlier in the overview of the seven cases in Chapter 4). Consequently, they are considered to be VCs. Their reputation was originally established in the virtual world. Many of the members in the VCs then desired to expand their clubs contact into the physical world, which was a starting point for their experience of offline BCs. Many of the members in the car-consumer clubs have created their common symbol systems (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Bess et al., 2002) to represent their own identities (such as a logos, stickers, and club souvenirs), reflect their we-ness feeling (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Nilsen, 2005; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2005; Dionisio et al., 2008), and represent themselves to the public through their cars as rituals and traditions for their conduct (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2005; Schau and Muniz, 2007). The clubs' existence has been expanded to Thai society, even though the clubs have neither official buildings nor work place artefacts. These clubs have obtained recognition from involved parties in the Thai society despite the fact that their administrative centres are still located in the virtual world, and they have continued to be recognised in Thai society. The underpinning reason for this is because the members are able to creatively make things happen in society, which is in accordance with institution facts (Searle, 1995, 2010). Hence, it can be inferred from this that the existence of the clubs is dependent on their members' performance.

Because people are the most essential asset of the clubs, all of the clubs' administration is involved with people. Consequently, the rewards in the clubs are given by people (i.e. they are social). Members in the clubs prescribe the rules for individuals to behave in their society with good-manners. If there is an individual who does not follow these rules of social conduct then that person will be sanctioned from the clubs. Hence,

society can provide punishments as well as rewards. The rewards are positive reinforcement which encourages the frequency of behaviour; for example, in this study the members participate in the club more often. In order to obtain the rewards it is essential for individuals to continue their membership status. It is imperative to note that the members may perceive the value of the membership status differently. The effect of membership status on the members' participation may be different for each type of membership; however, the degree of effect on different types of membership is not within the scope of this study. Nevertheless, all of the respondents in this study may still find that the membership status is necessary for them. Consequently, they continue their membership status in the clubs because their desires will be fulfilled through group membership, which is agreement with the results of McMillan and Chavis (1986) and Bess et al. (2002). Membership status can be compared to an entrance through which the members progress to receive other following rewards. As a result, membership status is a fundamental reward which the members seek to maintain.

With regard to the seven case studies, status was found to be classified into three sorts. The first status is achieved from position (this sort of status is found in the club leader respondents). The second status is acquired from the respondents' behaviours in the clubs, and they are named and recognised by other members (this sort of status is largely found in this study, especially in the groups of the active members and the club leader respondents). The third status is automatically obtained from the clubs after applying to the clubs for membership status; however, maintaining this status is up to the behaviours of individuals by virtue of social judgement (this sort of status is associated with all respondents in the case studies and, therefore, it is found in all types of membership of the car-consumer clubs). The first and the second sort of status is in line with the achieved status that individuals achieve through their own efforts; whereas, the third status is in conjunction with the status groups which individuals acquire when they become members of a particular group (Giddens, 2001).

The following sections will further explain the status and each type of membership in this study in order to show how status is symbolic reinforcement and has an impact on members' behaviours.

### 8.3 Club Leaders

In this study the role of the club leaders is defined as an authority figure that is the head of the club and who is responsible for all of the club's administration. It is important to note that in this study only the head of the club who holds the most authority will be examined, the leaders of the sub-groups will not be considered to be club leaders because they are not at the centre of the club's administration. In most of the case studies the club leaders are also the individuals who initiated the clubs, in some of the clubs they continue to run the club administration by themselves (as described in Chapter 4). Meanwhile in two of the clubs (i.e. the Volvo Club and the Accord Club), the club leaders are persons who are selected from the club's committee who are appointed to responsible for the club administration. Consequently, each club has a different administrative system according to its structural design and club establishment, and this has a direct influence on the club leader's position in the club. Although their authority may be acquired from different sources, the club leader respondents in all of the cases all shared a common ground in that they are authorised and entitled to manage the clubs. Accordingly, the position of the club leaders in the case studies may have similar or dissimilar designations and responsibilities to other clubs. All of the designations are accorded by the structure of each club.

The findings from the seven cases indicate that the status of the club leader is obtained from the respondents' position in the clubs. The results show that the club leader's status in the clubs can include serving as a webmaster, administrator, or president. These are their positions in the clubs and they indicate the respondents' roles and responsibilities in the clubs that are related to their behaviours in the clubs. For instance, the webmaster and the administrator are different in terms of title but similar in terms of the responsibilities; for example, both the webmaster and the administrator are responsible for the club's website design and control. In the case studies, the club leaders of the BMW Society, the Volvo Club, the Yaris Club and the Jazz Club are known as the webmaster because they control all of the club's online system (e.g. where to host the website). Thus, the club website is a significant platform in which the clubs locate their centre of administration. Similarly, the club leaders of the MercedesMania and the Camry Club are known as the administrator. Although this title sounds different from the webmaster, the administrator is also responsible for the club's online systems

(specifically the club website). In contrast, the club leaders of the Accord Club and the Yaris Club are appointed to serve as president and they are responsible for the club's administration; however, in these examples the club leaders are not necessarily capable of using the technical systems of the club website, they still need to watch over the clubs' websites while the webmaster in these clubs may not have authority to control or manage the club, as they would in the other case studies. From these case studies it can be seen that, although the title of the positions may vary depending on the club's structure, the main role of the club leaders is to be responsible for all of the club's administration.

The club leader respondents have a duty to monitor the clubs and look after the members. The position comes with a number of obligations and responsibilities in the clubs. Nevertheless, the findings reveal that the respondents are willing to take on these responsibilities and contribute to the clubs. The underlying reason for the club leaders' behaviour is due to the symbolic reinforcement that they receive from their own efforts accorded by status (Foxall, 1997a). In addition to the other rewards that they receive from the clubs, being in a position of authority and responsibility means that the club leader respondents have gained social recognition (Baumeister, 1998; Bross et al., 2007; Searle, 2010). During the interviews all of the club leader respondents mentioned social recognition as a reward (see Table 6.2 and Figure 8.1). Therefore, it can be proposed that the status "the club leader or the club leader's position" counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs.

### **8.3.1 The Status "the Club Leader or the Club Leader's Position" counts as Symbolic Reinforcement in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

From the view of behavioural analysis, it can be stated that the behaviours of the club leader respondents are examples of operant conditioning on account of reward and punishment (Skinner, 1969). However, the results from the seven case studies suggest that most of the behaviours of the club leader respondents are due to rewards rather than punishment. The findings of this research project show that the club leader respondents

have mentioned a number of rewards that they perceived as accruing from their status in the clubs.

According to the seven case studies, the respondents are entitled to management positions (such as webmaster, administrator, or president) in the prominent car-consumer clubs in Thailand. When there is an increase in the clubs' recognition then they will develop a good reputation and social acceptance in Thai society. Consequently, the persons who are the club leaders will appear to be somebody who are important to the clubs because of their positions. This position has given them a new social status in the car-consumer clubs context, as indicated by Sukoco and Wu (2010). For example, some of the club leader respondents have described how they have been recognised in public by members and involved parties, such as those held by car companies and other car-consumer clubs. Some of the club leaders have become well-known public figures, as can be noticed from these interviews:

*I have earned social respect from members because I have some knowledge about car engines. At that point, I have earned social recognition from members. When members have a problem, they will call me. (VV2, Club Leader)*

*Most of the members know me... I feel great because members trust and pay respect on me. (JZ1, Club Leader)*

*The ninety percent of members in the club have heard about me even though they never meet me in person. (YC1, Club Leader)*

The club leaders have been widely acknowledged in Thai society because of their performance in the club. The empirical evidence of their popularity can be seen in the membership numbers that are published on the clubs' websites. As can be seen from Table 3.2 the membership numbers have continued to rise since 2009. The growth of these website member numbers can be used as proof of the success of the club's performance. The verbal evidence of the interviews is further proof that the continuance of members' participation in the clubs is a result of the symbolic reinforcement of the success of the clubs as for example:

*I feel great. I am proud of the club when it has gained lots of public attention. We started from four members but today we have more than*

*twenty thousand website members who registered with us as you can see in our web-board login names. (YC2, Club Leader)*

In the interviews some of the club leader respondents (such as the club leaders from the Camry Club, the Yaris Club and the Accord Club) described their fame outside their own clubs. The respondents referred to a number of involved parties (such as the car companies or the club's sponsors). Because of the clubs' reputation the car companies (i.e. car dealers and the headquarters) pay attention to the clubs and pays them respect. Consequently, the club leaders are also respected by the car companies because they are the acting head of the clubs. Therefore, the position of the club leader obliges them to act on behalf of the clubs and this in turn gives them a new social status. This new social status means that they are recognised by the car companies. As a result of their position in their club they have gained social recognition and they have been extensively accepted by society, including a number of organisations (such as the car companies), for instances:

*I am so proud of what I have done so far. The club is expansively acknowledged by society. My name has been recognised by prominent organisations and sponsors, including the Toyota Company. I have achieved a social status in a level that people tend to believe me when I express opinions. They respect me. (CR1, Club Leader)*

*I received a lot of new statuses such as a car guru, former president and senior person in the club. Toyota Company has place high hope on me. This is my new social status outside this club. (CR2, Club Leader)*

The verbal evidence of the interviews show that the pride of the respondents derived from their performance. During the interviews the respondents expressed their feelings with an excited voice and a smiling face, showing their sense of esteem to the researcher as well as convincing the researcher of how successful they felt they are. The verbal responses of the respondents express their excitement from their experience of arousal which is related to symbolic reinforcement (Yani-Soriano et al., 2001; Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005). Foxall (1997a) state that symbolic reinforcement is a performance feedback of the individual's performance; therefore, the findings imply that they have earned social recognition that is symbolic reinforcement. Their prominence is not just limited to the clubs, it has also expanded to the Thai society and

this is a performance feedback from society as a whole, they achieve social honour and prestige which is accorded by others. The result of acknowledgement from wider society can be seen in the club leaders' recurring behaviours and because of this they are likely to increase their contribution and participation in the clubs.

Serving as the club leaders of a prominent club not only provides them with social recognition, but it also offers a number of other rewards (which can be both functional and symbolic reinforcement). This happens because when the respondents have been widely accepted in the society, their social recognition will enhance their business opportunities and connections, as can be seen in following examples:

*I received many things from the club. I have got friends, car knowledge and a lot of connections including a contact from the management of Toyota Company. (YC2, Club Leader)*

*In the first and second year, I never thought of what I would receive from the club. Rather, I thought I gave them more than I received. In the third and fourth year, I had got entertainment and friendship from the club. Moreover, I received more information about car modification for my new car. At the fifth year, what I received from the club has supported my career because my company run the advertising campaigns for the car company. On some occasions, the Toyota Company asked me to deal with the customers for them since they knew that I have involved with the club. When the company needs some cooperation from car-consumer clubs, I will contact with other car-consumer clubs for the company. (CR2, Club Leader)*

From these statements it can be noted that the respondents gain both social and business connections. Enhanced social connections mean that they obtain more friends and get to know more people from the clubs' network, whereas enhanced business connections are a by-product from their status. For example, CR2 received a business connection from the Toyota Motor Company because he has run advertising campaigns for Toyota's cars. Information received from the club and members are useful to him because he can create advertising campaigns which are designed to match with the expectations of target customers. At the same time, he has gained credentials from the Toyota Company. Although he did not join the club for business purposes, he reported that acting as a club leader has supported his career. Moreover, CR2 confessed that he put

himself forward to be a candidate in the club leader position because he wanted to achieve a new social status which can be noticed from the interview below:

*Actually, I entered as a candidate because I wanted to have a position in the club. I was so proud of myself when I was elected by the majority of people in the club even though I did not know them in person. The new status had changed me from nobody into somebody who was recognised by many members in the clubs and other car-consumer clubs parties. So there is no reason why I should not be proud, right? (CR2, Club Leader)*

He felt proud of the new status he has achieved because he was elected with a majority. He said that his new status can turn him from a nobody into a somebody who is important. It is implied from the evidence of his interview that CR2's behaviour in the club occurred as a result of status which is symbolic reinforcement.

Furthermore, the new status brings with it a new source of income from sponsors and business partners who wish to place their advertisements on the club's website; for example:

*I can say that all of the sponsors 100% come to us by themselves. (YC1, Club Leader)*

*Most of the sponsors and advertising companies come to us by themselves. (YC2, Club Leader)*

*I have known more people, definitely. I have received a new status as the administrator and the club owner. One thing that I never expect is the earnings from advertisement in the club. (CR1, Club Leader)*

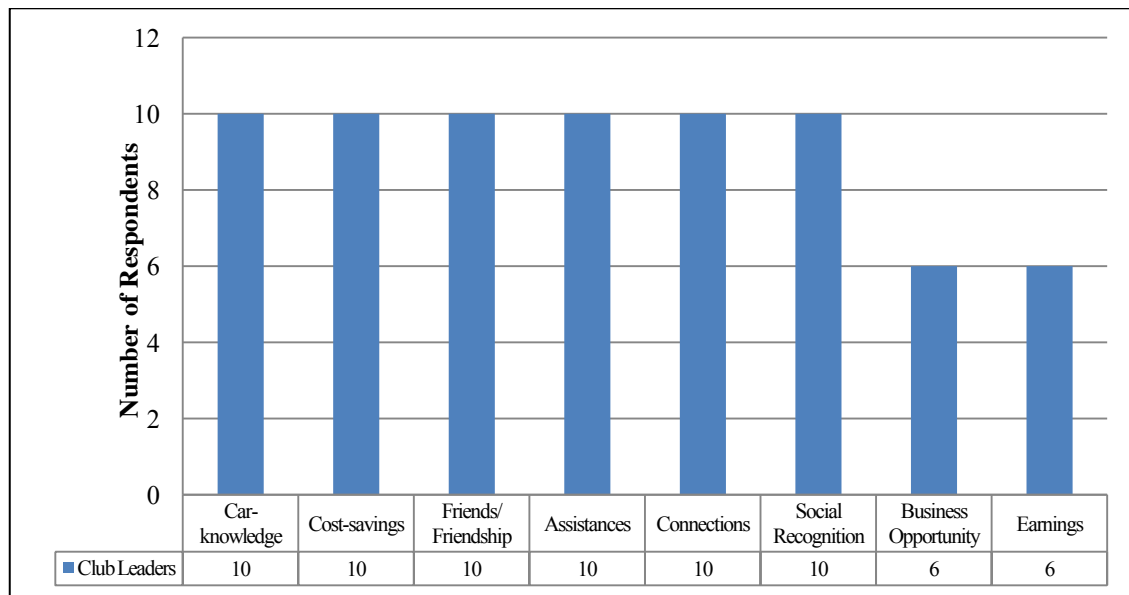
The club leaders are the recipients of this benefit because they receive sponsorship and advertising fees. Although many of the club leaders have said that they did not intend to run the clubs for profit at the beginning, the financial incentive can be strong enough to persuade them to run the club as a business (as was found to be the case of the BMW Society, the Camry Club and the Yaris Club). Even those clubs that were not run for profit still received earnings from sponsorship deals and advertising fees. Therefore, the empirical findings reveal that the respondents earn income from the club administration, and this is functional reinforcement. Accordingly, the financial

incentive reinforces the respondents' behaviours in the club's administration. However, in practice, the respondents reported that most of the club's earnings are spent on the club activities in order to prevent any conflict from money matters arising, as in the following examples:

*The earnings from the club belong to everyone. So the money is spent on club activities to prevent any conflict from money affairs. (AC1, Club Leader)*

*I have also earned income from club management. However, the main point is that when we receive budget to the club, we will return the benefit to members by organising meetings. (YCI, Club Leader)*

In addition, the findings show that the club leader respondents of the seven cases also receive other rewards (such as car-knowledge, friends/friendship and cost-savings) from the clubs (as can be seen in Figure 8.1). Figure 8.1 summarises the frequency of the club leader perceived rewards. It can be noticed that all of the respondents (N= 10) mentioned social recognition as well as other rewards (such as car-knowledge, friends/friendship, cost-savings, assistances and connections). Only six respondents from a total of ten club leaders mentioned business opportunities and earnings from the club. The interview data reveals that those who mentioned business opportunities also mentioned earnings from the club (i.e. they find that the club is another source of business venture as mentioned earlier).

**Figure 8.1: A Summary of the Results on Club Leaders Rewards Received**

Source: this study

Based on the empirical evidence provided, it is clear that earning the status of the club leader or the club leader's position (such as the webmaster, the administrator and the president) is symbolic reinforcement. These titles gain from their positions in the club and because of their positions the club leaders also receive other additional rewards (both functional and symbolic reinforcement). These positions are the status that the respondents achieve from their behaviours and they are approved by other people and, therefore, their behaviours in the clubs are likely to recur as a result of symbolic reinforcement, as stated by Foxall (1997a, 2010a). The emotional responses which show pride and esteem prove that their behaviours in the clubs have increased at some point (Yani-Soriano et al., 2001; Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005). The evidence of the club's prominence is further proof of their behaviours, it is a feedback from their performance. Therefore, it can be concluded that the status "the club leader or the club leader's position" is symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs.

## 8.4 Active Members

In this study the role of the active member is defined as a member who has a high SC to the club (as assessed by SCI) and who often participates in the club, either on the web-

board, in club activities, or in both. The findings of the seven case studies indicate that most of the active member respondents often participate in both the web-board and club activities. In addition, the results reveal that, apart from the car-knowledge that they expect to receive when they decide to apply in the clubs, the main reason why they stay longer in the club is friends/friendship. Many of the respondents reported that they are willing to contribute to the clubs because of the friends that they have made there, and this can impinge upon their behaviours in the clubs. Furthermore, in the community of Thai car-consumer clubs the members always call one another ‘friends’ or ‘club friends’. Becoming a friend of other members or a club friend can be compared to a new status which is achieved from participation, as indicated by Searle (1995). The status ‘friend’ can generate other following rewards, such as assistance and connections. Therefore, it can be proposed that the status “friend” counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car consumer clubs.

#### **8.4.1 The Status “Friend” counts as Symbolic Reinforcement in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs**

The results of an analysis of the data show that all of the active member respondents ( $N = 32$ ) of all of the seven case studies consider friends/friendship to be a reward which they gain from their participation in the clubs. Friends/friendship is a very significant reinforcer because the car-consumer clubs are not only maintained by the desire for car-knowledge but also by friends/friendship or social relationship (Kozinets, 2002; Horrigan, 2002; Klooster et al., 2004; Dwyer, 2007; Sicilia and Palazón, 2008; Fournier and Lee, 2009), which is at the centre of the success of the clubs. The clubs are maintained by their members’ support and contribution. The evidence of the importance of friends is found in that members are willing to offer assistance to members regarding their car-related issues, including other issues out of the car topics, even though they may or may not know one another, as shown in their web-board discussions and as was observed from the interviews. All of the seven car-consumer clubs call their members ‘club friends’. Therefore, members are assigned a new status as friends.

In general, friendship is involved with the issue of relationships. If members apply to the clubs only to get information on what they want to know and do not have any interaction with other members then this cannot be considered as “friends” in terms of symbolic reinforcement. In contrast, if the members apply to the clubs and take action, such as interact with other members and participate in activities, then this is considered as “friends” in terms of symbolic reinforcement. Hence, the friends that would be considered as symbolic reinforcement come together with friendship. Consequently, this concept of friends and friendship is related to the behaviours of individuals in the clubs. The status “friend” is received when a member contributes to the clubs, which is shown by their actions. Most of the time during the interviews, the respondents referred to friends before they mentioned the other rewards of club membership. Similarly, some of the respondents assert that they have stayed in the clubs to date because of their friends in the clubs. It can be seen from this that the participation of the active member respondents who mentioned friends as a benefit of club membership is increased as a result of symbolic reinforcement, as in the following examples:

*I have got friends and personal assistant like when I have a car problem; I can call MM1 anytime. There is a story which makes me proud whenever I thought of it. It was happened a while ago. There was a member from MercedesMania drove his car from Bangkok to my hometown. Unfortunately, his car was broken down. He then searched in our website and found that I was there. His car was out of order in my hotel. He called and asked for assistant from me. I was so surprised. (MM1Gb, Active Member)*

To interpret MM1Gb’s behaviour, it is necessary first to know the learning history of the respondent as summarised in personal stories of the respondents (see Appendix VIII for more information about the respondents’ stories). According to the respondent’s background, MM1Gb is a hotel and a department store owner. The story that he told occurred in his own hotel. A club member who had car breakdown searched for assistance from the MercedesMania website. He then found that MM1Gb is the owner of the hotel where he had parked his car. He made contact with MM1Gb and got assistance from him. MM1Gb felt proud of this example of friendship in the club. During the interview he told the story to the researcher with an excited voice. Based on this story, it can be interpreted that the behaviour of MM1Gb in providing assistance to the club member is likely to recur as a result of symbolic reinforcement. The feelings of

pride and excitement are a consequence of their behaviours, which is proof of symbolic reinforcement (Foxall and Yani-de-Soriano, 2005) as observed by his verbal behaviour.

Since friends/friendship is considered as an invaluable asset by a significant number of the respondents, it reinforces the frequency of their behaviour in club participation as well as maintaining their behaviour. For example, in the interview JZ2 said that although he has less time to participate in the club than he had previously, he still makes contact with club friends and visits the club's web-board occasionally. Accordingly, friendship reinforces his behaviour to find time to spend with club friends. Another obvious example of evidence is that a strong bond and sentiment with the club and club friends has an influence on the respondents' behaviour; as reflected, for example, in this conversation:

*VV1Gb: We paid more on subsistence cost. (Laughing) It is due to friendship. As an example of VV1Ga, he wanted to change a car tyre. Actually, he could change in Bangkok but he came to my hometown in Saraburi.*

*VV1Ga: I drove to see friends although it was far because I thought we could have fun with them. I was pleased to do so.*

*VV1Gb: VV1Gc also joined us. They were crazy. Just wanted to change a tyre but they came to Saraburi. They spent 2 nights on changing a car tyre. (Everyone laughs out loud)*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

It is interesting to note here that the respondents' friendships formed while they participated in the club. Their relationships in the club tended to add to their personal life. Consequently, this manifests itself in their behaviour. In the example above, it can be interpreted that the respondents (VV1Ga and VV1Gc) are devoted enough to go to change a car tyre at VV1Gb's hometown even though it is far from Bangkok. This level of devotion to the club is due to the friendship. In this case, they have received friends/friendship as symbolic reinforcement. Therefore, they are willing to go to see VV1Gb and stay over at his house in order to get the new tyre and meet friends due to symbolic reinforcement.

In addition, the findings show equivalent results in every single case: the behaviour of active member respondents is reinforced by the status "friend" that comes together with friendship. Because of the status "friend", the respondents also receive other rewards

such as connections and assistances. Likewise, it stimulates their behaviour to help other members and contribute to the clubs (as can be observed in the interview scripts which follow). It is important to note that the interview atmosphere when they talked about friends was full of pleasure, excitement and affiliation among the respondents, and this was reflected in their interview dialogs, as in following examples:

*Researcher: What do you receive from the club?*

*All: Friends. (Everyone answers at the same time by coincidence. They then look at each other and laugh out loud).*

*AC2Gb: Yeah, got friend.*

*AC2Ga: Friend*

*AC2Gb: Got boyfriend too*

*AC2Gd: Like AC2Gb, she got boyfriend too.*

*AC2Ga: Some members got boyfriend and girlfriend. Some members just married because they met in the club.*

*AC2Gb: Some club members have son or daughter. Then they go after one another until they break up. (Laughs out loud)*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

*It means that we know each other via website. We never know each other before. I never thought that they would be kind to me like this. They help me in many issues. It seems that we are much closer than college friends. (CR6, Active Member)*

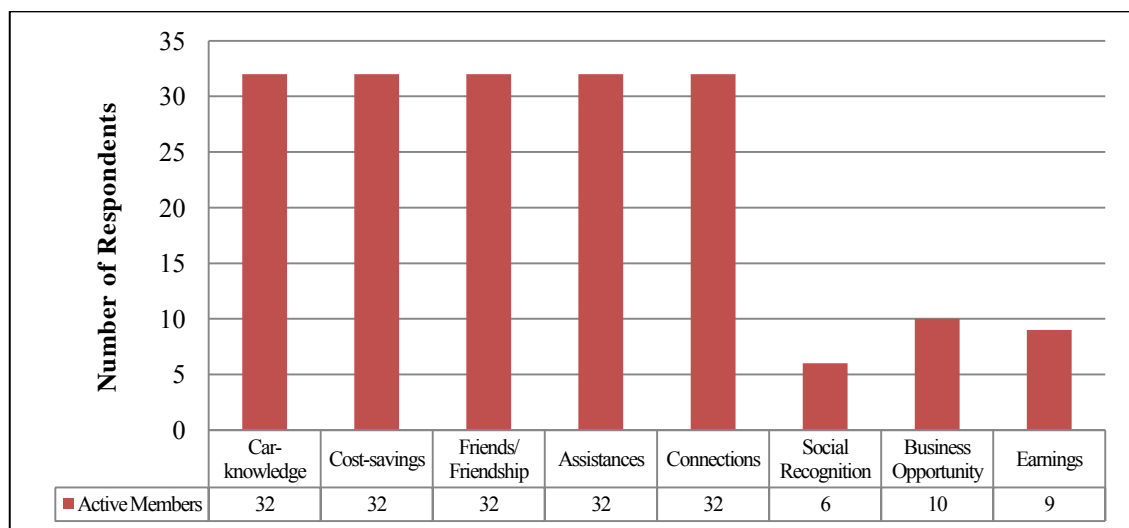
Furthermore, because of the close relationships, sometimes members give a nickname to a member. Most of the time the nickname is generated from the behaviour of that person in the club, such as: car guru, advisor, and the webmaster's wife. Consequently, the nickname represents their character and behaviour in the club. When people are familiar with them under that name, the nickname becomes a new status to that person. With the new status, the verbal evidence indicates that the respondents are proud of their given status. This implies that symbolic reinforcement has an influence on their behaviour in the club, as was the case of BM1b and CR3. BM1b is a wife of BM1, the webmaster of the BMW Society. When BM1 became a more prominent person within the club, BM1b (who usually goes along with BM1) was also recognised by other members. CR3 often participates in the club meetings plus he is knowledgeable in car modification. He always provides assistance to other members. Thus, other members have given him the nickname 'car guru' from his expertise in car which is in agreement with the research of Muniz and Schau (2005) and Leigh et al. (2006). For example:

*Sometimes while we were walking, people came to greet us even though we don't know them. (BM1b, Active Member)*

*Sometimes members ring me to ask for my opinion about a car modification. I feel esteem when they call and ask me. At least, I have helped another member. I feel good when other people say that my modified car is beautiful, so they want to ask for my opinion. They call me a "car guru". (CR3, Active Member)*

As stated by Ridings and Gefen (2004), the status "friend" grants other rewards, such as connections and assistance (as mentioned earlier in section 6.5.1.2, Chapter 6). Figure 8.2 shows the summary of the active member respondents' rewards received. As stated above, the active member respondents who perceive friends/friendship as a reward also mentioned assistance and connections. The bar chart indicates that the same results in that all of the active member respondents (N=32) mention friends/friendship, assistance and connections. Six respondents who mentioned social recognition are persons who have received a nickname that represents their new status in the club.

**Figure 8.2: A Summary of the Results on Active Members Rewards Received**



Source: this study

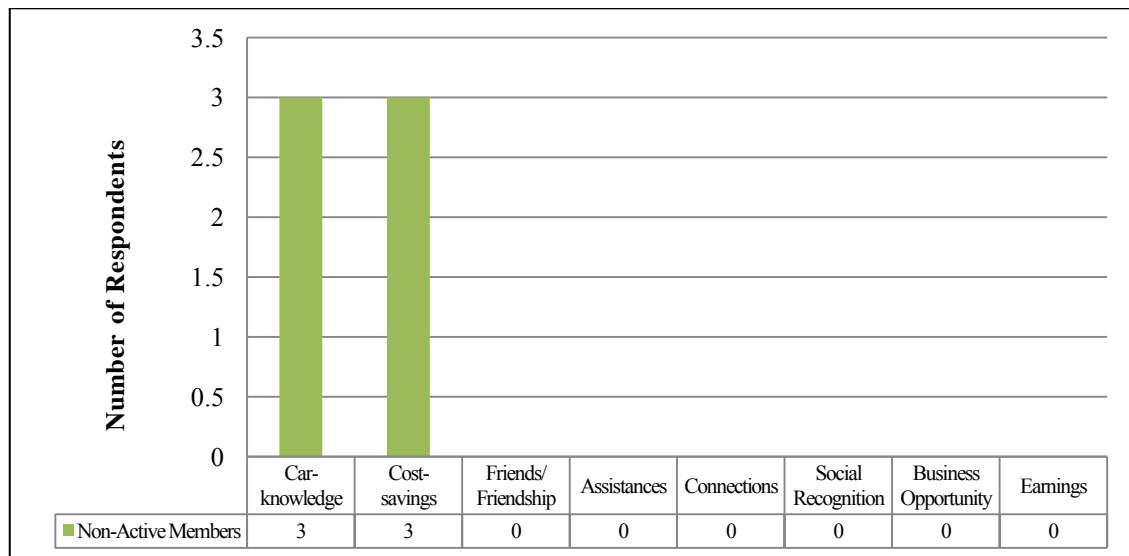
The likelihood of recurring behaviour of the respondents is also a result of functional reinforcement. As can be noticed in the chart above, all of the active members mentioned car-knowledge, and cost-savings. Likewise, some of them mentioned business opportunity and earnings from the club. These results can be explained because through their friendships most members are able to collectively help each other

in all issues (from car to other matters). This reflects their collective intentionality which can be observed by their cooperative behaviours (Foxall, 2010b). The respondents reveal that they have received car-knowledge plus various kinds of assistances because the members generally provide answers to help one another. They also got some assistance with regards to finding car accessories and spare parts. Moreover, they are often able to purchase car accessories at a discount rate from other members. These reciprocal benefits come from the status “friends” that lead individuals to act for each other while they receive both symbolic and functional benefits in return which is in accordance with Algesheimer et al. (2005). Therefore, based on the evidence provided, it is clearly that the status “friend” is symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs.

## **8.5 Non-Active Members**

In this study the non-active member describes a person who rarely participates in the web-board and club activities but who still continues their membership status. This type of member has a low SC to the club (as assessed by SCI). According to this study three respondents from seven case studies are categorised in the non-active member type, which is a relatively small amount when compared to the numbers of other types of membership. In light of this, the findings of these three respondents also give information to determine the pattern of behaviour of the non-active member type.

As discussed earlier in Chapter 6, the behaviour of the non-active member respondents is predominantly maintained as a result of functional reinforcement. The bar chart in Figure 8.3 confirms the assumption that these respondents only mention car-knowledge, and cost-savings. In conjunction with the results in Chapter 7 (see section 7.4), it can be seen that the non-active member respondents still visit the club’s web-board once a month at least, although they rarely participate in the club meetings. This happens because the web-board offers car-knowledge that can help members save their budget when maintaining and modifying their cars, which basically shows the influence of functional reinforcement on this type of membership.

**Figure 8.3: A Summary of the Results on Non-active Members Rewards Received**

Source: this study

The interesting point here is that they still maintain their status as club members despite having small participation in the web-board and club activities. An explanation for this can be found in the rewards which their membership status offers them. Individuals can obtain the status “membership” by applying to the clubs and they behave in conformity to the rules and the norms of the club, which is consistent with McMillan and Chavis (1986). When they do obtain their membership status, they are able to seek car-knowledge from the web-board, view the web-board, as well as receive other rewards. In line with McMillan and Chavis (1986) and Bess et al. (2002), the needs of individuals will be fulfilled through group membership and that is a motivator of behaviour to maintain the sense of togetherness. Accordingly, for the non-active members it is the membership status itself which is the reward. Consequently, it is not only the non-active member respondents who maintain their participation in the clubs because of the membership but also the club leader and the active member respondents. These empirical findings are in agreement with Laine (2006) who found that people participate in BC because of the need of status as membership. Therefore, it can be proposed that the status “membership” counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs.

### 8.5.1 The Status “Membership” counts as Symbolic Reinforcement in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs

In this study membership status is found to represent the belongingness of individuals and the car-consumer clubs. These results are in accordance with Koh and Kim (2001, 2003) who found that members feel a sense of belonging to their VC through membership. According to the case studies, all of the seven clubs have created their own symbol to represent their identity (such as a club logo, stickers, t-shirt, and souvenirs) to represent their sense of unity and belongingness to the physical world. They are markers of the club boundaries representing the clubs as the offline BC. Members have the option to purchase these markers without any force by the clubs. These results also reveal that most of the active member respondents are willing to purchase these objects in order to support the clubs and promote the clubs by attaching these items to their cars (as illustrated by the photos in Appendix XI). They are able to know if they are in the same club by observing the sticker attached in the cars. Sometimes, when members drive pass one another they greet each other, whether or not they know that cars. This agrees with the shared rituals and traditions in the BC literature (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Muniz and O’Guinn, 2005; Schau and Muniz, 2007). Furthermore, members assist one another when they see a club sticker, which represents the shared sense of moral responsibility (Muniz and O’Guinn, 2001; Lawer, 2005; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006; Szmigin and Carrigan, 2006). As a result, the club’s symbol appears to be imperative to members in the clubs, as in these following examples:

*It is like individuals who came to apply...hmmm...I don’t know but nowadays almost all cars have their own clubs. It is the feeling like at least they want to have something to say that this is my club. This is where I belong to. I tell you what, that sticker is very difficult to get. (YC2, Club Leader)*

*Sometimes members assist other members when they notice the club’s sticker, even though they do not know each other. (BMI, Club Leader)*

Likewise, on occasions, members pay for the meetings from their own pocket in order to subsidise the clubs. Moreover, they often do voluntary work for the clubs; for example, on the web-board by answering other member’s questions and in the activities

by acting as stewards and assistants when needed, as illustrated in the group interviews below:

*VV1Gd: When I visit the homepage, the first thing I do is to see if there is a new topic that has still not been answered.*

*VV1Ga: We will help them to answer. Help each other to look at it.*

*VV1Gb: I will look at 'About Your Volvo'. If there is a new topic, I will see it right away to see what they ask. If I can answer, I will. As I understand that if your car is broken, the owner will be worried and stressed. Of course, they may wait for an answer. So when there is a question, we respond immediately. It may sometimes exactly help them.*

*VV1Gc: Sometimes people who are waiting may look for some hope like the light in the tunnel.*

*VV1Ga: There are occasions when people cannot answer but help others to bring that topic up again....This is an indirect assistance.*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

*AC2Gb: I used to receive some assistance. At that time, I had a problem...err...I needed to buy medical equipment. Then other members helped me to search for it.*

*AC2Gc: We just help each other.*

*AC2Gb: For example, when someone has a trouble on any issue, you can find the answer here. It is like my home. This place is more than Google. It has everything.*

*AC2Ga: Yes it is.*

*AC2Ge: Yes.*

*AC2Gb: Because there are many kinds of Accord members who have different needs, we have provided assistances, suggestions; such as when a member needs road direction, we posted a map on the web-board as a direction guide.*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

The evidence of the verbal behaviour of members in the car-consumer clubs is consistent with the shared rituals and traditions, and shared sense of moral responsibility in the BC, as previously mentioned (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2005). Moreover, these results agree with those of McMillan and Chavis (1986) who found that membership is represented through indicators of boundaries (such as club t-shirt and rituals), a common symbol system (such as logo and name), and a personal investment (contribution to the clubs). The success of the community, the status of membership, and the competence or capabilities of members in the club are rewards that reinforce members' behaviours in that community, as indicated by McMillan and Chavis (1986). The competence or

capabilities of members in the club expands the club boundary to other societies. The prominence of the club makes that club exclusive. Consequently, being a member in a prestigious club is symbolic reinforcement because it can generate the feeling of pride and esteem from social feedback, as suggested in the BPM (Foxall, 1997a). For example:

*When I drive a car and see our club sticker on the other car, I have a feeling that Wow! That is our club sticker. I feel so proud. (JZ1, Club Leader)*

*Our club logo has an influence on the service centre. This is the truth. The logo has high power indeed. The service centre is afraid of us. (AC1, Club Leader)*

When members perceive that their membership is valuable from their learning history of club membership, then this affects their behaviours to secure their place in the clubs. This is in agreement with Moutinho et al. (2007) who found that people participate in BC due to the membership that makes them feel comfortable from belongingness among like-minded people. Consequently, members' behaviours are rule-governed because of social mediation (as explained earlier in Chapter 7). Rosenbaum et al. (2005) and Searle (2010) state that membership comes with rights and responsibilities, and these are apparent in the case studies of this research project. People in the car-consumer clubs have set their own social rules and norms as codes of conduct. They support behaviour that generates benefits to the clubs and punish inappropriate behaviour that defames the club. In other words, the members monitor one another. One could argue that in theory everyone could be a member of these car-consumer clubs, but in reality other members or society as a whole will determine their membership status. They are then given a reward by accepting their membership, or they are punished by being rejected from the clubs. As a result, members' behaviours are exposed in forms of RGB (such as pliance and tracking) as stated by Zettle and Hayes (1982) (which is governed by the rules that are mediated by society in order to remain in the clubs). Therefore, it can be concluded that the status "membership" is symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs.

As discussed in sections 8.3, 8.4 and 8.5, it can be seen that status is an incentive which members in the car-consumer clubs desire. The status in the clubs can be created for free, yet they are of value to the members because it grants other rewards. Status in the car-consumer clubs includes: club leader's position, friends and membership. Here status is a reward granted by the public through participation in the communities (Bross et al., 2007). People in society are the judges of individuals' performance and they assign status to individuals. This is a performance feedback which is symbolic reinforcement (Foxall, 1997a, 2010a; Foxall et al., 2007). According to three supporting propositions, the empirical results show that the status in Thai car-consumer clubs can increase the likelihood of the members' behaviours being repeated. Therefore, it can be concluded that status counts as symbolic reinforcement in the Thai car-consumer clubs.

## **8.6 Concluding Remarks**

This chapter has offered an account of status and symbolic reinforcement. The empirical findings of the seven car-consumer clubs reveal that status in the club is a reward to all types of membership. To support the third proposition, three supporting propositions are formulated to be discussed in the light of the empirical evidence. Firstly, the status "the club leader or the club leader's position" counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs. The club leaders' status generates social recognition in society, and this is related to the club leader respondents. The club leader status can also be received other rewards such as friends/friendship, connections, earnings to the respondents. Secondly, the status "friend" counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs. The empirical results show that the status "friend" is significant to the active member respondents. The friend status that comes with the friendship often connects to assistance and connections. As a friend a member will also be granted other rewards. Thirdly, the status "membership" counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs. Membership status plays an important role for all types of membership, even the non-active members, as it is the gateway to other rewards. It is an essential reward which reinforces members' behaviours in the clubs. Their membership reflects the sense of belonging of individuals that is shown in behaviour to support the place where they belong to (McMillan and Chavis, 1986;

Blanchard and Markus, 2004; Scarpi, 2010). Consequently, all of the respondents in this study maintain their behaviours in the clubs so as to maintain this status. The public will determine their performance depending on whether or not a person will receive the membership status. Thus, a person who wishes to receive membership status always behaves in the social frame. As a result, members' behaviours in the Thai car-consumer clubs are rule-governed. The empirical results indicate that behaviour of members in the clubs is reinforced by the status which is a public given reward. The status of the club leader or club leader's position, friends and membership is symbolic reinforcement because it is a performance feedback from society, as indicated by Foxall (2010a). Therefore, the three supporting propositions have validated the proposition III: Status counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs. The next chapter will clarify the rationale behind the significance of status and explain why status should count as symbolic reinforcement in the Thai car-consumer clubs.

## Chapter Nine

### DISCUSSION - PROPOSITION IV

#### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis of the seven case studies in order to provide supporting evidence for the fourth proposition, which is:

**Proposition IV: The implication of status requires collective intentionality of members in the car-consumer club communities to assign its value and function; therefore, the emergence of Thai car-consumer clubs relies on the collective intentionality of people who are involved in the car-consumer clubs communities.**

The previous chapter explained how membership status associates with symbolic reinforcement. From the evidence, it is apparent that membership status is a reward for members in Thai car-consumer clubs. This chapter aims to explain why status is significant to the members in the Thai car-consumer clubs. The analysis in this chapter adopts the philosophical perspective of collective intentionality to enlighten these phenomena, as well as to provide supporting evidence from the seven case studies. The discussion starts with describing the rationale of the meaning of “status”. It is then followed by the explanation of collective intentionality (which could be found in shared beliefs, desires and attitudes as well as in the form of cooperative behaviours) that plays a significant role in the emergence of Thai car-consumer clubs.

## 9.2 Evidence of Collective Intentionality of Members in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs

Status plays an important role in the repeating behaviour of the members in Thai car-consumer clubs (as discussed in Chapter 8). The underlying principle of the status appears to be significant to car-consumer clubs members' behaviours because of the collective intentionality which distinguishes human from other animal species by using language as an instrument to portray the meaning and existence of the facts (Searle, 1995). Status in the clubs is similar to the intentional objects that show the mental procedure of the members towards the existence of objects (Crane, 2001; Heil, 2004). By the same manner, the value of status which counts as symbolic reinforcement is portrayed by language and social feedback (Foxall, 2010b). Status in the clubs exists when the members collectively believe that they exist. The implication of this is that status is collectively assigned by members in the car-consumer clubs. Consequently, the value of status can be decreased and increased by other people, who can make a judgement. Thus, status in the clubs will become important when people in the clubs collectively acknowledge them. In light of this, it can be said that the value of the rewards comes from the collective intentionality of members in the car-consumer clubs communities.

Before explaining the case studies on account of collective intentionality, it is imperative to first prove whether or not collective intentionality exists in the case studies. In order to confirm the account of collective intentionality, it is possible to observe it in the actions of individuals which infer their intentions before then checking on those actions that reflect on the mutual expectations between the agents (Han and Pereira, 2010). Furthermore, in order to fulfil the explanation of consumer behaviour in the car-consumer clubs, it is imperative to explain it from their personal level (which is called intentional behaviourism) (Foxall, 2007a, 2008a). In order to interpret consumer intentional behaviourism, it is possible to be observed in the language of intentionality because it can be ascribed to the intentionality of each individual (Foxall, 2007b). The language of intentionality (which is those statements that refer to intentional states such as belief, desire, hope, intention to perform and so forth (Searle, 1999)) can infer the collective intentionality of individuals when they express their intentional language

towards their groups. These techniques could be combined in the analysis in order to complete the understanding of the members' behaviours in their clubs. Therefore, in an interpretation of consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs in terms of collective intentionality and their intentional behaviourism, it is necessary to detect these two from the member's intentional language and RGB towards the clubs to which they belong, as suggested by Foxall (2007b, 2008b).

When applied to this present study, the findings of the seven case studies confirm that there is collective intentionality on behalf of the members in Thai car-consumer clubs and this can be observed in their intentional language which reflects on their desires or beliefs, or even expectations (Foxall, 2008b), and their cooperative behaviours (such as providing assistance to one another, supporting the clubs by their personal investment, conforming to the clubs' rules and helping the clubs when organising mutual activities such as meetings) which represent their collective action as found in BCs (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Devasagayam et al., 2010; Mzoughi et al., 2010; Chan and Li, 2010). All of these behaviours have occurred because they want to maintain their club's presence in society. This is shown in the mutual expectations of the individuals involved in the clubs to maintain the existence of their clubs. The underpinning reason for this are the rewards which they received from the clubs that make them feel appreciated. The rewards attract them to the clubs and eventually reflect on their behaviours. This can be seen in the following examples which are drawn from the interviews (Table 9.1):

**Table 9.1: Evidence of Intentional Language in terms of Shared Expectations to Maintain Membership Status in the Clubs**

<p><b><u>Club Leaders Example:</u></b></p> <p><i>I expect members to think the same as us, that I wish the club will continually remain and be maintained as long as it can...I want to continue working on the club administration. (BM1, Club Leader)</i></p> <p><i>I intend and wish the club to be maintained. I want the club remain in the society as long as it could be. But if asked for how long, there is no dateline. All is up to members. If the club has no members, the club cannot be maintained. (JZ1, Club Leader)</i></p> <p><i>I wish to maintain the club website until there is a new car come to replace this car. (YC2, Club Leader)</i></p> <p><i>I wish the club to be maintained until this car model is not produced in the market. (CR1, Club Leader)</i></p> <p><i>I love this club so I want it to be maintained. If I did not join in this club, I would have no idea what should I to do after the office hours. (CR2, Club Leader)</i></p>
<p><b><u>Active Members Example:</u></b></p> <p><i>I will stay with the club until the club is no longer operated. (AC2Gc, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>I intend to stay in this club as long as I can. (MM4, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>I want to stay in the club as well as I want to club to stay in the society. (YC3, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>We will stay in the club for a while no expiry date. (MM1Gb, Active Member)</i></p> <p><i>I will continue my status in the club because I enter to the club's web-board every day. Whenever I have free time, I will logon the web-board and leave it on my monitor. (CR3, Active Member)</i></p>
<p><b><u>Non-Active Members Example:</u></b></p> <p><i>I want the club to be maintained. I intend to stay in this club until I change my car. (AC4, Active Member)</i></p>

Source: this study

Based on this evidence it is apparent that the respondents have similar expectations, reflecting their collective intentionality which can be observed from the interview statements. Furthermore, the empirical findings from SCI indicate serendipitous results

in that all of the respondents (N= 45) in the study agreed that *“I think my car club is a good place for me to stay”*. This is indicated in the reinforcement of needs from their participation in the clubs and statements, such as *“I expect to stay in this car club for a long time”*, which shows shared emotional connection (McMillan and Chavis, 1986; Chavis et al., 1986). These statements signal the member’s collective intentionality in terms of individual mutual expectation to stay in the clubs because they are satisfied with their clubs so far. Even though the interviews were conducted at different times and places, the results are consistent in all types of membership in all of the case studies. Accordingly, the empirical evidence is sufficient to prove that there is collective intentionality of the respondents in the case studies.

According to the case studies, the respondents come from different backgrounds and most of them did not know each other before participating in the clubs. Although they may have similar or different motivations to participate in the clubs (as discussed in Chapter 5), the findings reveal that when they participate in the same clubs they have the same goal, which is to maintain their clubs and continue their status in the clubs. Consequently, this reflects on the members’ behaviours, both on the web-board and in the club activities. The empirical findings are based on findings from the respondents, it could be possible that group behaviour can be analysed by individualistic approach (Searle, 1995; Bratman, 1992). Accordingly, the results point out that the collective intentionality of members in the study is not summative account but instead rely on individuals or non-summative account. These results are in contrast to those of Gilbert (1990) and Tuomela (1996) but they are in line with the findings of Searle (1990), Bratman (1992), and Tollefsen (2002).

It is crucial to note that, although the results suggest an individualistic approach in the investigation of the members’ collective intentionality, this study neither agrees nor disagrees in the controversial issue of holism versus individualism, which is still problematic and beyond the scope of this study. Rather, this study considers the plausible account which can be adopted to interpret these consumers behaviour in this context.

The results of this study indicate that in Thai car-consumer clubs the membership status is symbolic reinforcement, and this has an impact on recurring behaviours. These

results concur with Searle's collective intentionality which finds that people and objects are able to perform certain functions by virtue of collective recognition of the status by people (Searle, 2010). In other words, the roles of people and objects depend on the status assigned to them where it is collectively recognised by people. This means that the individuals' performances are controlled by society, who prescribes the rules of what to do and what not to do. Thus, the following analysis in this chapter will concentrate on Searle's notion of collective intentionality, which is considered to be suitable to interpret the phenomena in this study.

In the case studies it was found that lots of appearances in the clubs can be considered as institution facts by virtue of collective intentionality of the members in the car-consumer clubs. Consequently, many institutional facts (Searle, 1995) are found in seven case studies (such as the club leader's position, friends/friendship, and club logo). All of them come by their given status, and become symbolic reinforcement to individuals, when they place value on status in such context. In this sense, it can be said that all of the statuses assigned to people and substances in the clubs (such as the club leader's position, friends/friendship, membership, club logo and sticker) are institution facts that associated with collective intentionality of people.

The results of this study show that status counts as symbolic reinforcement in Thai car-consumer clubs (see Chapter 8). The reason why the status is symbolic reinforcement to the members is because people in the clubs assign meaning to this status. When the members collectively believe and accept the status to be the case, the status will exist and come together with its functions. As a result, the members' willingness to cooperate with others and the sense of acting together are accorded by the status. Having established the case that collective intentionality is found amongst the respondents, the following sections will provide analyses the findings using Searle's 'count as formula' in the form of "X counts as Y in context C" to show the process of the system of symbols, which is proposed by Searle (1995, 2010), in Thai car-consumer clubs.

### **9.3 The Status of the Club Leader: The Club Leader or The Club Leader's Position**

The fundamental idea of the connection between status and collective intentionality of the members in the car-consumer clubs shows that status in this study is an institution fact, which is produced by collective intentionality (Searle, 1995). This happens because the members perceive their status as a reward which reinforces their behaviours in the clubs (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). However, status will be considered as a reward only when individuals have collectively assigned its value and importance. Searle (1995) states that humans can impose function to status by constitutive rule, also known as 'count as formula'. Hence, the following explanation will employ the constitutive rule to convey the collective intentionality of the members in the car-consumer clubs.

The preceding analyses show that these clubs are managed by people. To sustain the existing clubs it is essential to have people in charge of the club administration. The case studies show that the club leader's position (such as webmaster, administrator and president) is assigned to selected persons. Accordingly, these individuals have acquired a new status as the club leader, but they may be assigned title differently upon the club administrative structure.

As stated earlier in section 9.2, for any objects to have status functions requires collective acceptance or recognition. In this case, these status functions are assigned to individuals. In the case studies, it can be ascribed that the status of the club leader or the club leader's position is a result of collective intentionality. When people mutually create the club, they also collectively design the club structure and then find persons who are able to take charge of the entire club. Consequently, they give the status function which is the club leader of their club by assigning that status to particular persons.

The constitutive rule (which is "X counts as Y in context C") can be applied in the case of the club leaders as in the following examples from the BMW Society and the Accord Club in section 9.3.1 and section 9.3.2.

### **9.3.1 The Function of Constitutive Rule: An Example of Status “the Club Leader” in the BMW Society**

“BM1” counts as “the club leader” in the “BMW Society”; where  $X = \text{BM1}$ ,  $Y = \text{the club leader}$ ,  $C = \text{BMW Society}$ .

According to this formula BM1 is assigned to act as the webmaster who plays a leadership role in the BMW Society. By the constitutive rule, he has a new status as the club leader of the BMW Society. The status functions of BM1 as the club leader exist in the car communities by a declaration which requires verbal utterance to portray its value. This is because the human mind has a capacity to create symbolic representation, but it needs to portray meaning by language otherwise there is a tendency to dispose the intentional states (Searle, 2010). The deontic powers play an important role in giving right, obligations, and authority (Searle, 2010) to the club leader. Consequently, the deontic powers have given BM1 the power to manage the club.

When club members continually collectively recognise the status assigned to this person, BM1 will be known as the club leader, where the position comes with obligations and authorities in the club. Consequently, he is an authority person who manages the club by the status function, which comes from the collective acceptance of people involved. As a result, BM1 becomes the club leader of the BMW Society by virtue of the collective intentionality of people in the BMW Society.

Once he has this new status it reinforces his behaviour in the club. His performance in the club is judged by other people. If he performs well then he will receive rewards from the club (such as social recognition, earnings, friends/friendship, and other rewards as already described in earlier chapters). More importantly, his recognition has been expanded outside the BMW Society to other involved parties (such as the car company and sponsors who are involved in the Thai car-consumer clubs). Consequently, he has been recognised as the club leader of BMW Society by virtue of the collective intentionality of involved parties in the Thai car-consumer clubs. Therefore, the status of the webmaster or the club leader of the BMW Society relies on

the collective intentionality of the people involved. An example of the evidence of the status that reinforce his behaviour and that show the relation to other people as follows:

*My status has been changed a lot. When I was working at the computer department, I was a part of the company. I was a subordinate who was assigned the task from the manager. But at the moment, I feel that I am an owner of this place in which everyone closely monitors my movement. (BM1, Club Leader)*

### **9.3.2 The Function of Constitutive Rule: An Example of Status of “the Club Leader” in the Accord Club**

“AC1” counts as “the club leader” in the “Accord Club”; where X = AC1, Y = the club leader, C = the Accord Club.

AC1 is selected as the president of the Accord Club (like the webmaster of the BMW Society). According to the constitutive rule, AC1 is assigned a new status as the club leader of the Accord Club. The existence of this status comes by declaration. Consequently, AC1 receives the deontic powers which carry with rights, duties, authorisations and so forth (Searle, 2010) that empower him to perform the functions based on his status.

After giving a leadership status to AC1, the members will recognise him as the club leader through the web-board and club activities in which AC1 participates. He will then be collectively recognised and accepted by the members. He has now become well-known in the club leader status, which makes him an influential person in the club. As a result, AC1 becomes the club leader of the Accord Club by virtue of the collective intentionality of people in the Accord Club.

The status assigned to AC1 becomes symbolic reinforcement to him when his performance is widely accepted by members in the club. His good performance leads him to receive other rewards such as friends/friendship, and social recognition. When his recognitions are extensively expanded outside the club, he is also recognised by other involved parties (such as the car company and sponsors). Consequently, AC1 has

been recognised as the club leader of the Accord Club by virtue of the collective intentionality of involved parties in the context of Thai car-consumer clubs. Therefore, the status of the club leader of the Accord Club also relies on the collective intentionality of people involved, which is similar to the status of the club leader in the case of the BMW Society. The evidence of the status which involves other people makes him powerful and reinforces his behaviour, as can be seen in the following quote:

*Because I have influence in the club and outside the club so the club logo has power as a consequence. The Honda Car Company Thailand approached me to collaborate with the club. However, I have never had a personal connection with the company before, neither has the Honda Car Company. Because of the club leader status so the company contact me. So we have reciprocal benefits because of the club. (AC1, Club Leader)*

According to the example in section 9.3.1 and section 9.3.2, it can be seen that the status of the club leader is obtained from the collective intentionality of people and involved parties in the Thai car-consumer clubs. The interviews show that the constitutive rule plays an important role in conducting individuals' behaviours by imposing functions into the persons. Accordingly, this formula can also be applied with other club leaders throughout all of the case studies. The club leaders have received a new status in the clubs through collective recognition. This is the reason why social recognition is mentioned by all of the club leader respondents and some of the active member respondents who are the head of sub-groups in the clubs and who are given a nickname by people in the clubs, which is in agreement with Muniz and Schau (2005), and Leigh et al. (2006). Therefore, it is worthwhile to note that the status of the club leader (i.e. the Accord Club, the BMW Society) is the symbolic reinforcement on the condition that the person has been collectively assigned their status in the context of Thai car-consumer clubs.

#### **9.4 The Status of Club Members: Friend/Friendship**

The system of status functions can be applied with the status “friend/friendship” by applying the same constitutive rule formula. The status friend/friendship comes together with deontic powers which contain the obligations, rights, and responsibilities. The

deontic powers regulate and create a new form of behaviour in the status functions to that person.

By applying the same concept as the status club leader, the status friend/friendship can be illustrated by the same formula of “X counts as Y in context C” as the examples of the Yaris Club and the Volvo Club in section 9.4.1 and section 9.4.2.

#### **9.4.1 The Function of Constitutive Rule: An Example of Status “Friend/Friendship” of the Active Member Respondents in the Yaris Club**

“YC5Ga and YC5Gb” count each other as “friends” in the “Yaris Club”, where YC5Ga and YC5Gb = X, friend = Y, the Yaris Club = context C.

YC5Ga and YC5Gb know one another from their activity participation in the club. After knowing each other for a while, they became close friends thanks to the status function which comes from the collective acceptance of two parties (Searle, 2010). When both of them are continually collectively recognised in this status that is assigned to one another, YC5Ga and YC5Gb will be perceived as friends of one another in the club, and this carries the rights and responsibilities of friendship. Consequently, the status friend/friendship leads these two members to other rewards (e.g. assistance). To them, this friendship is meaningful and, therefore, it is symbolic reinforcement that stimulates their frequency of participation in the club activities in order to meet one another. Moreover, they both help each other and listen to one another as if they are close relatives in order to carry on the friend/friendship status. This indicates that the status “friend/friendship” relies on their collective intentionality. This can be seen in the following interview dialog:

*YC5Ga: Friends are put in the first rank.*

*YC5Gb: Brothers and Sisters. For example, I can seek for advice in all matters.*

*YC5Ga: I count her (YC5Gb) as my sister.*

*YC5Ga: Yes, we can talk in all issues.*

*(Group Interview, Active Members)*

### 9.4.2 The Function of Constitutive Rule: An Example of Status “Friend/Friendship” of the Active Member Respondents in the Volvo Club

Furthermore, the status “friend/friendship” is not only limited to two parties, it can be engaged with more than two people. An example of this is to be found in the following example of the active members in the Volvo Club:

“VV1Ga, VV1Gb, VV1Gc and VV1Gd” count each other as “friends” in the “Volvo Club”, where VV1Ga, VV1Gb, VV1Gc and VV1Gd = X, friends = Y, the Volvo Club = context C.

VV1Ga, VV1Gb, VV1Gc and VV1Gd have grown to know one another from the web-board participation (like the earlier examples of YC5Ga and YC5Gb). After knowing each other for a period of time, they became close friends through the club activities participation. They are friends with each other thanks to the status function which comes from the collective acceptance of all parties (Searle, 2010). Their friendship status has been collectively recognised from time to time, until they have now become very close and acknowledges each other as if they are relatives. The status “friends” carries rights, requirements and responsibilities of friendship that impose on their behaviours. Consequently, their status as friends/friendship leads them to other rewards (e.g. assistance and connections). They value their friendship as invaluable and, therefore, it is symbolic reinforcement which stimulates their frequency of participation in the club’s web-board and activities in order to interact with one another. Because their friendship originates from the club, they give an importance to the club and wish to maintain the club in Thai society. Consequently, they cooperate with one another and assist each other in order to continue their friends/friendship status in the club while maintaining the club in society. It is clear that the status function of friends/friendship is a form of symbolic reinforcement that relies on the collective intentionality of all parties involved. The following example from the group interview dialogues demonstrates the close friendships of the respondents and their occurred behaviours that have interconnected to their friendships:

*VVIGa: In my view, the club has given me more than friends and cars. We receive everything, including family. We are able to reach one another. Like us, we are similar to relatives. When there is a need, we can call one another immediately.*

*VVIGb: Yes. Like my case, if my car breakdown in Bangkok, I will have to wait when I call to my house. But here, I have VVIGc and other fellows in the club. If I call them, they will come to help me straightaway. We do not want anything in return; like friend and friendship, like relatives.*

*VVIGc: Let's say that I know everyone here. I used to visit, VVIGa, VVIGb, and VVIGd houses and had dinner in their house. We have known each other until present days.*

*VVIGd: We never expect to get anything in returns from others. We help each other in what we can help. We are givers and receivers. We only give and gain from being the club. None of us lose anything in the Volvo Club.*

In a similar manner, this formula can be applied to explain the comparable conditions that take place with other members in the clubs. Furthermore, these findings also reveal that, although people in the car-consumer clubs may count each other differently (such as friends, relatives or even family members), the implications of the status which is given by collective intentionality of involved people remains unchanged. The main outcome is that they are friends who give friendship to one another. Accordingly, the empirical findings indicate that friends/friendship is an institutional fact which comes with status functions and deontic powers from collective intentionality of people in the same society, as stated by Searle (1995). In line with the statement of Searle (2006), friendship in this study is found to be one of the institution facts because it carries a collectively recognised status function. As stated earlier (in Chapter 6 and Chapter 8), friends that come with friendships are the basis of the other symbolic reinforcement which follow. It can be concluded from this that the status “friends/friendship” reinforces the behaviours of the respondents to carry on their friendships with each other.

## **9.5 The Status of People who are Members of the Car-Consumer Clubs: Membership**

Having offered an idea of how the system of status functions work in the statuses “club leader” and “friend/friendship”, this section will apply the same formula to inform the

process of status “membership” which exists in the car-consumer clubs. The findings are in concurred with Searle (2010) that the status “membership” is very significant because it controls the whole process of reasons for action of members in generating the club function and its existence in Thai society is like the glue that holds members of the club together.

By adopting the same formula as the status “club leader” and friend/friendship”, the system of status function of “membership” can be illustrated by the “X counts as Y in context C” as examples of the Camry Club, the MercedesMania and the Jazz Club in section 9.5.1 and section 9.5.2.

### **9.5.1 The Function of Constitutive Rule: An Example of Status “Membership” of the Active Member Respondents in the Camry Club**

“CR4, CR5” count as “Memberships” in the “Camry Club”; where CR4 and CR5 = X, memberships = Y, the Camry Club = context C.

As owners of Toyota Camry cars, CR4 and CR5 have applied to be members in the Camry Club because they wanted to find and share their mutual consumption of the Toyota Camry with other consumers. After they applied to the club, the club leaders, and perhaps other members, collectively accepted them as members of the Camry Club. They received their login name, representing their membership status, when accessing the club’s web-board for the first time. Consequently, they have a new status as members. The deontic powers (such as entitlement, rights and permissions) are attached to the status “membership”. Hence, they are permitted to view and communicate in the web-board as well as having the right to participate in the club activities. When they take action in the club they will receive other rewards from the club which reinforce their behaviours, and this stimulates their desire to maintain this status. The following quotes (which are drawn from the interviews) show that their good intentions to the club reflect their desire to continue their participation in the club and maintain the club:

*I expect the club's good reputation will be increased more and more. I wish the club to maintain existing members while increasing new members. I wish everyone in the club has unity. (CR4, Active Member)*

*I do not expect anything more than the club has offered already. As far as I concerned the club is already excellent. We are talk in the same language. I just hope there is no conflict between members. That is more than enough. (CR5, Active Member)*

### **9.5.2 The Function of Constitutive Rule: An Example of Status “Membership” of the Non-active Member Respondents in the MercedesMania and the Jazz Club**

The example above shows the membership status of the active member respondents and reveals their shared desires for the club to continue its good reputation. The next example by applying the same formula shows the status “membership” of the non-active member respondents which attracts them to keep their status in the club:

“MM5” counts as “Membership” in the “MercedesMania”, where MM5 = X, membership = Y, the MercedesMania = context C and “JZ4” counts as “Membership” in the “Jazz Club”, where JZ4 = X, membership = Y, the Jazz Club = context C.

MM5 and JZ4 applied to the clubs because they wanted to search for car-knowledge for their own cars. They become entitled as members when the club leaders declare their status by given them a login name in the clubs. Thus, they receive a new status of membership by declaration (Searle, 2010). Their membership status has given them the deontic powers to access the clubs' web-board. Consequently, they are also permitted to participate in the club's activities (which are free-choices for all members). Since they are only interested in car-knowledge, and how to save the costs of their cars, they are not interested to join in the club activities and this is not a compulsory task. However, they still occasionally visit the web-board to keep up-to-date on the car-knowledge. Their behaviour is a result of both functional reinforcement (which makes them occasionally enter the club website in order to retrieve information) and symbolic

reinforcement (which is the status that makes them keep their login name active in order to maintain their membership):

*I want the club to have more members. Also, I want the club to be maintained and carried on. Before I entered to the club, I have no idea about it at all. (MM5, Non-Active Member)*

*I will continually stay in the club even though I may not participate in the meeting. (JZ4, Non-Active Member)*

The empirical evidence clearly shows that all types of membership respondents in the study have received rewards from being in the status “membership”. The “membership” status grants these people access to the club’s web-board and activities. Members have the right to communicate and interact with others in the clubs, while they have to conform to the club rules and norms at the same time as their behaviours are monitored by other people. In other words, the rewards in the clubs derive from members’ reciprocity or mutual rewards (Foxall, 2010b); therefore, the rewards are mediated socially. The reason why their behaviours are governed by rules is because individuals have social needs, as stated in the literature (i.e. Schiffman and Kanuk, 1994; Lazer, 1996; Schutte and Ciarlante, 1998; Bishop, 2007) that make them want to belong to the clubs, and it is this society which will determine their performance.

## **9.6 The Individual’s Shared Beliefs, Desires and Attitudes, and their Cooperative Behaviours**

Empirical results of the seven case studies show that the collective intentionality to act is exposed in the form of collective actions of members of the clubs in the form of cooperative behaviours. In line with the results of Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006), Devasagayam and Buff (2008), Chan and Li (2010), Devasagayam et al. (2010), Mzoughi et al. (2010) that collective actions are found in the BCs. Likewise, when individuals have shared beliefs, desires, and attitudes, they will bring about their cooperative behaviours, representing collective intentionality (Searle, 1995; Foxall, 2010b). The apparent evidence can be observed from their cooperation in the club activities and their attaching of the club logo on their cars. With the cooperative

behaviours of members, the car-consumer clubs achieve a status in society that sustains the club's existence in both the virtual and physical world.

It is imperative to note that the explanation here is only drawn from the results of this study and is not a sequential development. Although one may occur before another, or they may occur together at the same time, this is not the focus of the study. In fact, it is not necessary for individuals to have shared beliefs, desires and attitudes in ordering, or even have all of them together. Nevertheless, at least they should have one of them otherwise their behaviour in the car-consumer clubs will not appear.

### **9.6.1 Shared Beliefs**

Shared beliefs enhance the we-ness feelings among members in the clubs because members in the club believe that they are family and friends representing the consciousness of kind, as indicated by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), Evans et al. (2001) and Nilsen (2005). Moreover, status in the clubs, particularly membership status, relies considerably upon the members' shared beliefs. The status "membership" will be meaningful when members in the clubs believe that there are existences of their clubs. It is essential for individual to have a shared belief that their clubs exist amongst members because the car-consumer clubs are institution facts where members assign status functions to them. Due to the fact that all of the clubs in the case studies are established in the virtual world, their centres of administration are located in the VC. Although these clubs have no office in the physical world, the members still can feel of belonging and act as if the clubs are located in society. This happens because of their shared beliefs in the club's existence. The results are in accordance with McMillan and Chavis (1986) and Preece (2000) and Petroczi et al. (2007) that people shared their beliefs towards their community existence that develops SC.

Accordingly, the constitutive rule, X counts as Y in context C, plays a role as "the virtual communities" counts as the "car-consumer clubs" in the "car-consumer clubs communities", where the virtual communities = X, the car-consumer clubs = Y and the car-consumer clubs communities = C.

Once the clubs are established in the virtual world, the status “car-consumer clubs” requires collective acceptance from members in these communities. When the clubs have been collectively recognised as a place by members or people involved, the status of the clubs exists. The empirical evidence to prove the beliefs of members in the existence of the car-consumer clubs is to be found when they compare their clubs as places such as home, school, library, community and so on (see Appendix VIII) because they believe that their clubs are real and have existence. Accordingly the car-consumer clubs are comparable to an imagined community (Anderson, 1983) that constructs the BC existence by a feeling of belonging through the SC, as found by Cova and Pace (2006) and Davidson et al. (2007) as illustrated in the following examples:

*This club is like a house where I am a father and have children. (AC1, Club Leader)*

*We feel of community because this is our home. (AC1Gb, Active Member)*

### 9.6.2 Shared Desires

When people have shared beliefs and collectively recognise that they clubs really exist, they are likely to share their desires to make their clubs explicit in public through their club symbols, rituals and traditions. Since all of the car-consumer clubs in the case studies have been formed in the virtual world, they have formulated their identity and then expanding out of the VC by creating club logo which is a symbol to represent their identity in the public (See Appendix XII). The club logo is another institution fact that people collectively assigned the functions into it.

The value of the club logo is transmitted by the constitutive rule, X counts as Y in context C. “Symbol A” counts as the “club logo” in “Thai car-consumer clubs”; where “symbol A” = X , “club logo” = Y, “Thai car-consumer clubs” = C.

In order to assign a new status to symbol A, or status function of the club logo, requires collective acceptance from people in the car-consumer clubs communities, which means that it is not only accepted by members in the clubs but also by other people who are in the car-consumer clubs communities who acknowledge the club logo. Once it is

declared and widely accepted by the public, the status function of the club logo comes together with deontic powers (such as requirements and authorisations). To receive the club logo (which may be produced in the form of stickers and car plates, t-shirts, souvenirs and so on) one has to apply as member. In addition, everyone who employs the club logo (either as a sticker on their car or on oneself by wearing the club t-shirt) should behave themselves and respect the club rules because their behaviour will be assessed by people in the club and public. This happens because members' behaviours in public can correspond to the club's image in the society. Consequently, members' behaviours are rule-governed (as discussed earlier in Chapter 7) and their behaviours are mediated by other members and society. Thus, all of the respondents conform to the club rules due to the rewards which they receive. Accordingly, the club logo becomes a very important asset in the car-consumer clubs communities because it shows their identity, belongingness and signals the codes of behaviour for individuals (such as drive politely, assist one another and greet each other):

*The club logo is very important because if we have no symbol, there is nothing to indicate our identity in the public. Moreover, if there is no logo, our club would only be existed in the virtual world. But when we have logo in the forms of stickers and t-shirts, it will transfer the club out of the virtual world to the physical world and public. Then other people in the public can notice us from this identity such as noticing from the front or the back car mirror. They will also know that they are friends. Moreover, there is a case when one of our club members' car broken down on the highway and that car have our club logo sticker, other member who noticed it parked the car straightaway and help that person even though they did not know each other before. (JZ1, Club Leader)*

*Nowadays almost all cars have their own clubs. It is the feeling like at least we want to have something to say that this is our own club where we belong to. (YC2, Club Leader)*

Furthermore, the club logo represents belongingness (McMillan and Chavis, 1986). Other people who are in the car-consumer clubs communities will know each other's identity by noticing the club logo from the sticker attach to their car, t-shirt or any other forms of club logo. The members may greet each other when they notice the club logo even though they do not know each other; this is consistent with the rituals and traditions as stated by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001). When the club's logo exists in the public by collective recognition, the logo of a prominent club can attract people to

participate in the club and it can have the power of negotiation to the car company, car dealers and sponsors. Consequently, the logo becomes symbolic reinforcer thanks to the public positive feedback that they receive from being a member of a prestigious club. The following examples show the importance of the logo in the views of the respondents:

*It is necessary to have club logo because it represents our unity that we are in the same club. (CR1, Club Leader)*

*The logo makes me feel proud. When I drive and see the club logo, I feel that we are in the same club. (BM1, Club Leader)*

*When I drive pass other cars and see the club logo, I feel good because I have friends on the road. (YC3, Active Member)*

### 9.6.3 Shared Attitudes

Once the feeling of community occurs to members in the clubs, they are likely to share their positive attitudes together. When individuals have shared good intentions, the cooperative behaviours will appear. In this study all of the seven clubs have a wide range of activities (see the photographic evidence in Appendix XIII). Joint-activities of car-consumer clubs and social activities are manifest evidence that is found in every single case. These kinds of meetings demonstrate the cooperative behaviours of members in the car-consumer clubs.

Many of the clubs in this study have on some occasions organised joint-activities with other car-consumer clubs (e.g. sport competitions and car meetings). The aim of these activities is to build a good rapport and develop harmony amongst members of each club. More importantly, they present the unity of the car-consumer clubs communities to the public. When the Thai car-consumer clubs are unified then conflicts will tend to not happen. Moreover, it is a distinctive feature of Thai car-consumer clubs that the members do not offend one another or even criticise on other car brands. The reasons for this are given by CR1 and AC1:

*We organise joint-activities with other Thai car-consumer clubs continually because it will make us become closer and assist each other more. Moreover, it creates our synergetic power or consumer power. (CR1, Club Leader)*

*We know other clubs from joint-activities which become our traditions. Nowadays, when we have some issues, we will share to other clubs or even ask for their assistances. Then, they will help us, which is great. (AC1, Club Leader)*

The findings are consistent with Komin (1990), sometimes the clubs organise social activities (or Tamboon) that reflects on the religion-physical orientation and their good attitude in similar to the shared sense of moral responsibility, as stated by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) and McAlexander et al. (2002). These social activities can be organised either by the clubs or by the members themselves. In all cases the objective is the same: to contribute a good deed to society. These meetings include charitable events and social responsibility acts, such as visiting schools and temples (including donations). Even though they have to contribute their personal investment, the findings reveal that they are willing to do so and cooperate with one another at the same time. The members do these acts without expecting anything in return. Rather, they only want to have a good time with other club members and do something good for the clubs and society. These social activities represent members’ good intentions to society and in return they will make the members feel good about themselves. Furthermore, these kinds of activities can build a positive reputation to the clubs in the public. Eventually, they also create the club’s existence in Thai society. Consequently, the shared attitudes will lead to the members’ cooperative behaviours. The following quotes, which are drawn from the interviews, are examples of the intentional language that reflects on the we-intentions which represents the collective intentions to acts of the respondents:

*When we are gathering, we should make something good happen to other people. Therefore, we will see what we can do or help other people. Last year, we had a donation project which was clothes donation to children in the countryside. (JZ1, Club Leader)*

*It is a feeling that we should make something good for other people not just only meeting to modify cars. (JZ3, Active Member)*

*Instead of gathering for fun, we want to do something good for society... Since we will meet anyway to eat together, have a meeting,*

*and talk about a car, we just insert other good activities that make a contribution to the social well-being better than just meet. (CR3, Active Member)*

It can be noticed here that the respondents used the word “we” instead of “I”. Tuomela (1991) suggests that when people think they are members of groups, it is apparent that they use pronoun “we” when referring to the groups. Accordingly, the statements quoted above imply that each respondent have we-intentions. As can be seen, these findings reveal the respondents’ we-intentions that would determine member participation in the clubs (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006) and that direct on their cooperative behaviours in the club activities (Cova and Dalli, 2009). It represents the collective intentions to act of members in the car-consumer clubs.

#### **9.6.4 Cooperative Behaviours**

As discussed in sections 9.6.1, 9.6.2 and 9.6.3, these findings are in line with those of Searle (2010) who states that human beings differ from animals because they can have shared beliefs, desires and attitudes. These results are in agreement with those of Rakoczy (2008): the empirical findings manifest the role of collective intentionality that represent in the form of cooperative behaviours, and this lies at the heart of societal existence. The outcomes from their cooperative behaviours are determined by society in verbal form. In other words, the consequences of their actions are informed by societal feedback. Examination of the seven case studies show that all of the clubs have obtained positive feedback by achieving recognition and reputation from society, this can be considered as symbolic reinforcement to members in the clubs. These findings are in line with Foxall (1997a) who found that symbolic reinforcement is usually mediated socially. When the clubs gain social honour which is public, members in the clubs will have their pride and self-esteem to be in those clubs (which are considered as being private clubs) by the status “membership” (Foxall, 1997a). Consequently, symbolic reinforcement as status has an important effect on members’ cooperative behaviours by virtue of collective intentionality of people in car-consumer clubs communities.

To this end, the emergence of the car-consumer clubs relies much on collective intentionality, which makes value of the symbolic reinforcement and that has an impact on members' cooperative behaviours which represent their collective intentions to act for the club to which they belong. The emergence of the car-consumer clubs are consistent to the emergence of social cooperation in that it relates to the way to facilitate behaviour by mutual rewards or reciprocal benefits, which relies on a system of symbols (Foxall, 2010b). The system of symbols is similar to the system of status functions that create facts (social facts) which exist in society. Once the status functions are assigned to people or objects by peoples collective intentionality, then there will be a value attached that makes agents meaningful and then turn into the symbolic reinforcement (as presented in the BPM) by social assessment. This leads to the individuals' demand to possess that status or object with new status. Therefore, when individuals have shared their beliefs, desires and attitudes or collective intentionality, the result is shown in their cooperative behaviours that are the root of the societal development. As a result, the development of the club existence depends on members' interactions and expectations through the reciprocal rewards, as pointed out by Foxall (2010b) and confirmed by the empirical findings as can be seen from following example:

*The club is stayed by members themselves. The members' cohesiveness and contributions make the club progress and alive in the society. (JZ1, Club Leader)*

*The club is maintained by members. If there are active members with us, we will continually stay. If one day the club had no members, it would have disappeared. (YC2, Club Leader)*

*The club can be stayed in our society today by members. Members take care of the club. The club also takes care of members in return. (AC1, Club Leader)*

*The club is maintained by members' contributions. Members give members with generosity, sympathy and thoughtfulness. Members help one another by given suggestions and problem solutions. The contributions given by members are the most important reward which can maintain the club in the long run. (CR1, Club Leader)*

## 9.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter informs the foundation of the phenomena, grounding on the collective intentionality of humans. According to the seven case studies there is sufficient evidence to specify the collective intentionality of members in Thai car-consumer clubs. The function of constitutive rule accorded by the collective intentionality of people in the car-consumer clubs communities, through which value is added to the new status assigned to people and objects. Consequently, these people and objects have obtained status in society. Since people have a capacity to collectively assign status, they are also able to assess its value. In other words, the value of status is mediated by society. Thus, status is a reward (specifically symbolic reinforcement) which is caused by social feedback and this is the reason why status is meaningful and has an effect on members' behaviours in the car-consumer clubs. Due to members demand to obtain status, the consequence is on their behaviours (which are governed by social instructions such as rules and norms). When members perceive status as a reward from their participation in the clubs, they are likely to sustain their clubs in the Thai society as well because of the reciprocal rewards amongst members in the clubs. If there is no club, there is no member, and vice versa: if there is no member, there is no club.

The shared beliefs, desires and attitudes generate shared consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions and shared sense of moral responsibility in the car-consumer clubs, which are key components of the BC (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001). Furthermore, the shared beliefs, desires and attitudes of members direct to their collective intentions to act in the form of cooperative behaviours and bring about joint activity (Cova and Dalli, 2009). The members' cooperative behaviours will enhance the club development, and this reinforces the existence of the club in Thai society. Therefore, the overall discussion has highlighted the implication of the reward "status" and has supported Proposition IV: The implication of status requires collective intentionality of members in the car-consumer club communities to assign its value and function; therefore, the emergence of Thai car-consumer clubs relies on the collective intentionality of people who are involved in the car-consumer clubs communities.

# **Chapter Ten**

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

### **10.1 Introduction**

This thesis has addressed three research questions regarding Thai car-consumer clubs. This chapter presents a brief summary of the research questions in relation to the nature of car-consumer clubs in Thailand. It will also summarise consumer behaviour in those clubs. This chapter begins with a discussion of the first research question, which relates to the overview of car-consumer clubs in Thailand. This is followed by a discussion of the second and third research questions, which relate to consumer behaviour in these clubs. This will be informed by implementing the BPM as the frame of interpretation and the theory of collective intentionality to enhance understanding of the analysis. This chapter will then review the objectives of the thesis, and will outline how the study has met these objectives. Research implications and contributions are also highlighted. Lastly, limitations of the study are specified and recommendations are made for future research.

### **10.2 Car-Consumer Clubs in Thailand**

This section will provide a summary on the empirical results of the analysis of car-consumer clubs in Thailand. In association with the first part of the research (which is an exploratory stage) the discussion will be conducted in response to the first research question, which is:

***‘What are car-consumer clubs in Thailand?’***

The descriptive data in Chapter 4 has provided details of the seven car-consumer clubs in Thailand. The seven clubs which were included in the case studies have already established their reputation in the automobile business sector in Thailand. These seven

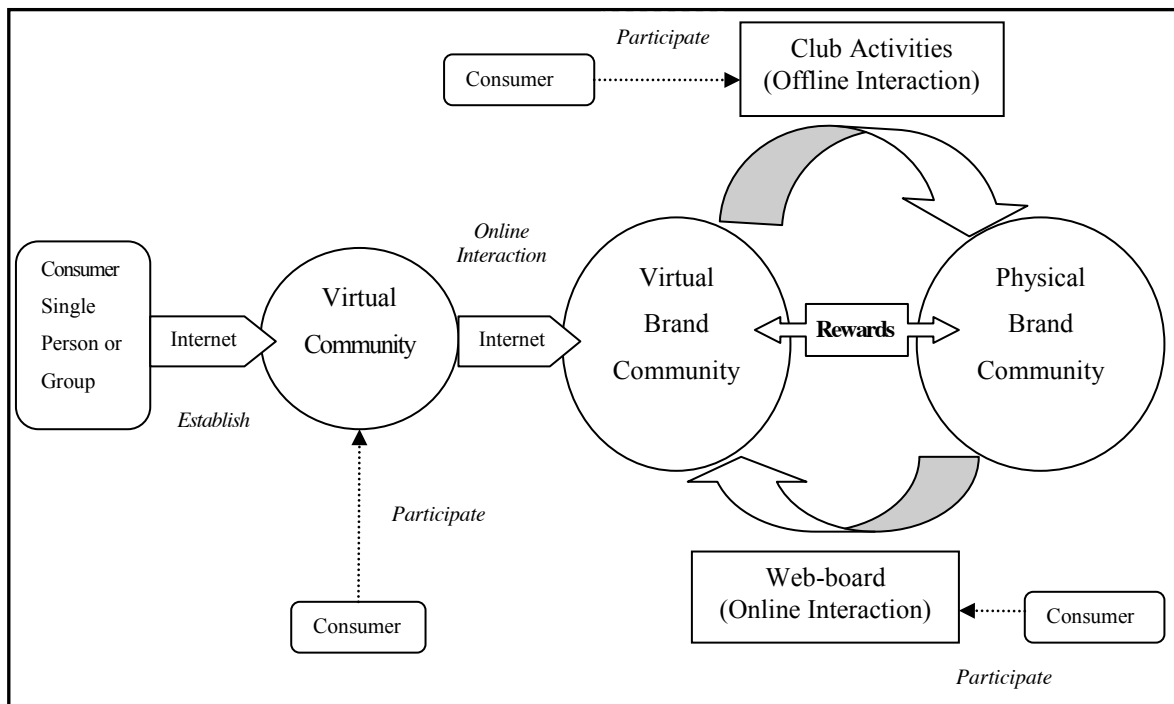
clubs are included in this study because they were found to be representative of the nature and characteristics of these Thai car-consumer clubs. According to the cross-case analysis in Chapter 5, it can be concluded that the car-consumer clubs in Thailand can be defined as: clubs of consumers, established by consumers, for consumers who want to share mutual interests based on the communal consumption of the same car brand and/or models, where the heart of the clubs lies in the reciprocal rewards which are generated by the members themselves.

This study has found that the car-consumer clubs in Thailand (which are an example of an Asian BC) have been typically formed as VCs, but once they have formed they then expanded their boundaries to include physical BCs (e.g. holding club offline activities). The majority of the Thai car-consumer clubs have been initiated by a single person or group, and they can be controlled either by a single person or a group. The formation of each car-consumer club in Thailand generally begins as a VC, which comes together via the Internet. The web-board is a communication centre of the club in the virtual world where consumer can participate in the club's web-board at anytime and from any place at their convenience. However, the participants have to become members before they can interact with other members on the club's web-board.

When the car-consumer clubs have settled down in the virtual world for a period of time, there is a tendency for the members to extend their relationship into the real-life context. They begin to meet in the physical world in the form of club activities, which allow them to have face to face contact with one another. Such club offline activities can strengthen the intimacy of their relationships, this result is consistent with the previous literature (i.e. Kozinets, 1999; Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Langerak et al., 2003; Koh and Kim, 2003; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Shang et al., 2006; Casalo et al., 2007; Schouten et al., 2007). The club activities are a source of a synergetic component that produces the club's dynamic. In most of the case studies the club activities were shown to complement the members' online interaction. It needs to be noted that participating in club activities is optional and it is not compulsory. The members' interactions in both the web-board and club activities can help them to develop a close relationship within the club.

Because the relationship between online and offline interaction is a cycle (as described in section 5.5 and shown in Figure 5.1), the consumers can enter to online interaction by participating in the web-board and offline interaction by participating in the club activities and they can leave at almost any point in the cycle. The benefits received from the clubs or rewards from members' participation are the main reason which motivates members to continue their participation in the clubs. As a result, the rewards from the clubs lie at the heart of this cycle, like a glue connecting people and making their stay in the car-consumer clubs more likely. The formation of Thai car-consumer clubs is illustrated in Figure 10.1.

**Figure 10.1: The Formation of Thai Car-consumer Clubs**



Source: This study

### 10.3 Consumer Behaviour in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs

This section will provide a summary on the empirical results of consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs. In association with the second part of the research (which is the explanatory stage) the discussion here will be conducted in response to the second and third research questions, which are:

***‘How do consumers participate in these car-consumer clubs?’***

And,

***‘Why do consumers participate in these car-consumer clubs?’***

The second and third research questions are interconnected in scope in conjunction with four propositions (which have been described in more detail Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9) which will integrate the analyses to achieve the aim of the study.

To enhance the comprehensive analysis of the study in response to the research questions, the BPM (Foxall, 1990, 1997a, 1998, 2005, 2010a) is implemented as an interpretive device to demonstrate the pattern of behaviour of the Thai consumer in these clubs. Accordingly, the overall analysis of the study is informed in relation to three levels of interpretive analysis (i.e. the operant classification, the contingency matrix and the consumer situation) in relation to the BPM (Foxall, 1994, 1997a, 2010a) to understand how members’ behaviours in the clubs are maintained. Subsequently, the underlying principle of the significance of the rewards produced by members in the clubs will be revealed to understand why the Thai consumers continue their membership in the clubs.

### **10.3.1 BPM Analysis: Car-Consumer Clubs, Thailand**

#### **10.3.1.1 Level 1: Operant Class**

The analysis of the case studies has suggested that the operant class to which members in these clubs belong is accomplishment since the behaviours of consumers are maintained by high levels of both functional and symbolic reinforcement (Foxall, 1997a; Foxall et al., 1998). Functional reinforcement is evident from the utilities and facilities that are provided by the clubs to members, including other fringe benefits which the members may receive from membership (i.e. access to information of car-

knowledge, cost-savings, earnings from the club, business opportunities, and friends<sup>17</sup>). The empirical findings reveal that the car-knowledge is one of the main reasons for consumer to participate in these clubs (as discussed in Chapter 5). Consequently, the discussion in Chapter 6 finds that the car-knowledge provided by the clubs (such as car-related information, car technical knowledge including miscellaneous information) is the most expected rewards that members will obtain from their participation, which is consistent with the previous literature (i.e. Wellman, 1996; Romm et al., 1997; Ridings and Gefen, 2004). Members of the clubs not only obtain access to the car-knowledge but they can also gain an advantage from the car-knowledge (e.g. price information and details on car service garages, and car parts and accessories shops which can economise their car costs). Furthermore, the members are able to take advantages of the club to generate earnings from making transactions in the clubs. In addition, the club leaders are able to earn an income from sponsorship and business partners who wish to invest in the clubs. The clubs also provide opportunities for members to expand their business opportunities from other members, which happens because members tend to support the businesses of other club members. The rewards from membership status also include friends which can be regarded as functional reinforcement if the members only interact with members who they call “friends” within the context of car-related matters (e.g. discussion on the car models, solving their car problems). Nevertheless, if the relationships are expanded to other matters besides cars then they can be regarded as symbolic reinforcement rather than functional reinforcement.

Evidence of symbolic reinforcement is provided in terms of friends/friendship, social recognition, connections and assistance. As illustrated in Chapter 6, when the friendship has been extended further from the club into personal life, the friends/friendship is considered as symbolic reinforcement. The friends/friendships in this sense is likely to be associated with activity participation because club activities or meetings present an opportunity for members to meet each other in person and this can broaden their

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<sup>17</sup> “Friends” in terms of functional reinforcement refers to other members in general. This is because car-consumer clubs people in Thailand often call other members as “friends” like a common word that is often used in this context. However, it is important to note that “friends” in the symbolic reinforcement have different implication from “friends” which have more meaning in terms of friendship than general “friends” in functional term. Therefore, interpretation from the context is required in the analysis of the term “friends”.

personal interaction further from online context into the real-life context. Business and social connections are products of the status of friends and friendship in the club because the members of these clubs consist of people of various backgrounds who have mutual interest as a foundation of their cohesiveness. When the friendships have been developed members can acquire both business and social connections through their friendships. The business connection is related to business opportunities; however, it is categorised as symbolic reinforcement because it related to feedback from behaviours in the clubs. Likewise, assistance is always available in the clubs as a result of friends/friendship. Assistance includes all matters regardless of the car (e.g. personal problems). Furthermore, social recognition is another reward which members can achieve from their positions in the clubs. Consequently, members' behaviours are maintained by high levels of both types of reinforcement. Therefore, the classification of consumer behaviour in car-consumer clubs, Thailand is accomplishment.

#### **10.3.1.2 Level 2: Contingency Category**

In this study, the contingency category (which is the second level of analysis) shows that it is apparent that the behaviours of members in Thai car-consumer clubs take place in a relatively closed setting. Although in supposition the clubs are publicly open for everyone who is interested join (which may sound open to the consumer), in reality it is imperative to apply for membership in order to receive the subsequent rewards which are offered by the clubs. As a member one has to conform to the rules and norms of the clubs in order to continue membership status. It is not only the active and non-active members' behaviours which are controlled by the club system, but also the club leaders' behaviours that are controlled by the members. Thus, consumer behaviour in these clubs is controlled by the rules and social norms which are monitored by members of the clubs. The evidence of pliance in all types of membership in Chapter 7 shows that consumer behaviour in the clubs are dominated by people in the clubs, which confirms that their behaviours take place in a relatively closed setting.

Furthermore, as a member, even though one is entitled to be granted the rewards from the clubs, one may not receive all of the aforementioned rewards. Receipt of the

rewards also depends on an individual's participation in those clubs. This happens due to the fact that the progress of the clubs relies on members' activities and web-board interaction, and more importantly on the members' patronage (which is entirely voluntary) and contributions. Consequently, most of the rewards in the clubs are predominantly supplied by members to members, and for members themselves. Each member may receive similar or different kinds of rewards as a result of their behaviour in the clubs. As appeared in the case studies, the differences between the club leaders, the active members, and non-active members are their level of participation in both the web-board and the club activities. Consequently, the non-active members who take a small level of participation in the clubs are mainly motivated by functional reinforcement, whereas the club leaders and the active members who take a high level of participation are mostly motivated by both symbolic and functional reinforcement. The empirical evidence shows that the rewards in the clubs are mediated by members, which has an effect on members' behaviours or their participation in the clubs in this study. This also confirms that the members' behaviours take place in a relatively closed setting. The results of this study of car-consumer clubs in Thailand are consistent with those of Foxall (1997a) who found that consumers who consume products and service for their pleasure and convenience (such as taking part in a socially exclusive group) represent fulfilment in the contingency matrix. Therefore, the justification of consumer behaviour in Thai car-consumer clubs is located in the fulfilment category.

#### **10.3.1.3 Level 3: The Consumer Situation**

At the third level of analysis, the responses in this case are evoked by physical, social, temporal, and regulatory discriminative stimuli. The physical contexts that appeared in the case studies are related to the website atmosphere (Nicholson et al., 2002) and the meetings atmosphere, which are tangible and intangible aspects of the environment (Mowen and Minor, 1998). The front pages of Thai car-consumer clubs websites generally contain colourful pictures and photos of the cars of each brand or model, and they include a welcoming statement to attract people to visit the website. Moreover, the clubs' websites also contain a header which is descriptive of the site's contents and, more importantly, the web-board rooms for members to communicate in the clubs.

Some web-board rooms are restricted to members who can view the entire site contents, and these members are able to interact with other members while the visitors can only view some of the clubs' contents and are unable to interact within the club unless they become members. The more members take a greater part in the web-board the more they are recognised by other members, they have more stimulation to participate in the web-board.

As important as the web-board environment is, the club meeting's atmosphere can also stimulate the members' behaviours because of the friendliness and fun environment of people in the clubs. Furthermore, the meetings provide an opportunity for members to meet in person and present their cars to each other. Because most of members in the clubs who participate in the meetings are car owners, it is a chance for them to talk about their cars and see other cars. However, in the meetings the members do not only talk about their cars but their conversations can also include other miscellaneous stories that enhance their close friendship further from the car issues. Consequently, the meeting's atmosphere can stimulate members' activities participation. Therefore, the physical context has an effect on members' behaviours in the clubs, as pointed out by Foxall et al. (1998).

The temporal context, or time available for the clubs, also has an impact on members' behaviour in the clubs (Belk, 1975; Foxall et al., 1998; Nicholson et al., 2002; Solomon et al., 2002). Because participating in the club is optional for all types of membership, this setting has different effect on members' behaviours because it depends on their obligations and schedules in the clubs which will determine their action for the clubs (Solomon et al., 2002). This is due to the fact that even though all of the members spend time in the clubs as hobbies or leisure time (Prykop and Heitmann, 2006); some of them may spend time in the clubs as a job or duty. Moreover, some of them may have time constraints from their own business which can stipulate their responses as well (Belk, 1975). Therefore, the availability of time for the clubs is another setting which has an effect on members' participation in the clubs.

This study has found that the regulatory context appeared in the form of rules that controlled members' behaviours in the clubs (especially in the web-board

communication). The rules in the clubs are mainly adopted from the Thai social norms and the Thai universal web-board codes of practice and etiquette. Thus, the rules in the present study are apparent in terms of plys and tracks for members to pliance and tracking (Zettle and Hayes, 1982). Rules such as the web-board etiquettes are tracks which govern members' behaviours in the clubs. Rules such as social norms are plys which signal members' code of conducts in the clubs. These rules determine who can maintain their membership status in the clubs based on their behaviour in the clubs, which is monitored by the club leaders and members of the clubs. Consequently, people who wish to maintain their status in the clubs are likely to conform to the rules by formulating their self-instruction to conduct their own behaviour (Poppen, 1989; Kunkel, 1997; Greer and Speckman, 2009; Foxall, 2010a). As a result, members' behaviours in the clubs are considered as RGB (as illustrated in Chapter 7).

The social context is deemed by this study to be the most influential setting in the case studies, particularly in terms of friends and friendship. As stated earlier in level 2, club advancement is dependent on the members of the clubs. Consequently, the rewards from the clubs are originated by members. The supporting evidence in Chapter 6 is sufficient to suggest that the social factor is essential to advancing in the clubs. People in the car-consumer clubs who often call each other as "friends" have an influence on one another. For instance, advice and comments from members are more likely to be trusted by other members than the car company, and this can have an influence on consumer purchasing decisions (Solomon et al., 2002). This happens because consumers tend to believe in the information from the consumer-side, so the consumers have more information about the product than the company will have about the consumers (Akehurst, 2009). The members' relationships have an impact on their participation in the clubs because most of members participate in the clubs due to functional reinforcement; however, they are likely to stay longer in the clubs and increase their contribution and participation in the web-board and club activities due to symbolic reinforcement. The feeling of friendship also encourages members to help each other when they need assistance or support from one another. This is related to an intentional behaviourism (Foxall, 2007a, 2008a) in terms of intentional social action (Dholakia et al., 2004) or we-intentions (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Cova and Dalli, 2009) which is shown in their contributions to the clubs.

This study has found that members' behaviours are not just an outcome of discriminative stimuli but they are also a product of an individual's learning histories of reinforcement and punishment in these clubs (Foxall, 1997a). Because consumer behaviour in the clubs is governed by the rules which are generated through a history of social reinforcement (Kanter et al., 2005) the case studies found that members of the clubs have positive experiences from membership status. This can be observed from their verbal behaviour. Consistent with the existing literature, the present study has shown that members' behaviour in following instructions or the rules in the clubs is a result of the histories of conditioning that are related to favourable outcomes or rewards as represented in the cases (Galizio, 1979; Hayes et al., 1989; Peláez and Moreno, 1999). Accordingly, this study has shown that rules connect the consumer behaviour settings and the pattern of reinforcement most likely to reinforce the consumer behaviour, which is consistent with the BPM (Foxall, 2010a).

### **10.3.2 Underpinning Reasons of Rewards Significance**

To summarise, this study has found that the car-consumer clubs in Thailand are relatively exclusive spaces whose members are able to participate in the clubs. Although on the face of it the clubs appear to be always welcoming visitors to visit their websites, in reality much of the contents of their web-board are preserved for use by their members only. Consequently, the clubs' web-board contents are basically generated by members; they are user generated content which the members can use to share their related information and experience of the cars and other non-related car subject matters with one another. Moreover, the members can provide support and assistance to one another via the web-board. Therefore, most of the rewards in the club will be received through membership. This happens because the rewards primarily appear in the form of reciprocal benefits among members, which is rooted in their altruism, and this reflects on their various contributions to the clubs. As described in Chapter 6, different types of membership may obtain different kinds of rewards depending on the member's participation in the club. Consequently, the empirical findings indicate that status in the clubs plays an important role in consumer behaviour in the clubs. As discussed in Chapter 8, status acts like the gateway to the receipt of

other following rewards from the clubs. Furthermore, status has been shown to have an influence on the members' behaviours in the clubs because it is the symbolic reinforcement that acts as positive reinforcement in the study.

The empirical results in this study reveal that the significance of the rewards, particularly "the status" or the key symbolic reinforcement in this study, relies on the collective intentionality of people in the context of Thai car-consumer clubs. In other words, people who have no experience of this kind of club may not fully understand or even appreciate the importance of the rewards received from the club. As described in Chapter 8, in these clubs the status of the club leader or the club leader's position, friend and membership is symbolic reinforcement that can generate other rewards. Above of all, it is necessary to have a "membership" status because it is the initial status which everyone who applies to join the clubs will obtain through the application process. In general, the "membership" status enables members to receive functional rewards from the club (such as access to the car-knowledge and cost-savings). Nevertheless, the members are able to receive additional rewards from their participation in the clubs, especially when they are assigned to another status as "friend". The development of these clubs can be further promoted and sustained in Thai society because of the status "friend". It was apparent in this study that the majority of the respondents revealed that they maintain their status in the clubs because of friendship with club friends owing to the fact that friends/friendship is an important symbolic reinforcement of the forthcoming rewards (such as connections and assistances). The members are willing to support and voluntarily help each other when close relationships have developed. This agrees with the BC literature which says that members' friendship allows them to share sense of moral responsibility (e.g. Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; O'Guinn and Muniz, 2005). The results from the seven case studies confirms that friends/friendship is a very significant reinforcement in these car-consumer clubs because it lies at the centre of the car-consumer clubs and reinforces members' behaviours in the clubs, produces the club activities, and brings the clubs into a real-life context and so sustains the clubs.

Members who are club leaders and/or members who take charge of the clubs will be assigned positions in the club, and this is another status for them. In addition to the

other rewards from the clubs, the positions of club leaders will generate social recognition (in both the clubs and in wider society). The leadership status in the club counts as symbolic reinforcement because it is related to performance feedback from society (Foxall, 1997a). Thus, whether or not the rewards from the clubs will be granted depends on those members of the clubs who are judges of one's performance.

The reason why the reward "status" is meaningful to people in these car-consumer clubs is because they have shared beliefs, desires, and attitudes which are the foundation of the club's existence in the physical world. Through their use of language the people in these clubs can assign meaning and functions to persons and substances that enable new status to such entities (Searle, 1995); however, one cannot obtain this status if it is not given by others. Furthermore, this status requires collective acceptance and recognition from other persons, which are embedded in the collective intentionality of individuals to add meanings and value in this status (Searle, 2010). This is the reason why status is socially mediated and is achieved through one's performance. Furthermore, status generally comes with a role, right, and responsibility to act in the clubs, as indicated in the status like prescription (Searle, 1995, 2010). Hence, the members' behaviours in the clubs are rule-governed by the instruction or prescription from the given status, which increases the value of their status by assigning the meaning attach to it. They are controlled by both the formal rules in the club and the informal rules from society which are mediated by people in the clubs. These results are in agreement with Foxall (2010b) who stated that symbolic reinforcement controls behaviour more firmly within the influence of social interactions and expectations, as well as increasing the prospect of societal developments based on collective intentionality.

Chapter 9 has illustrated some examples of the power of collective intentionality of people to status in the clubs. In summary, the meanings and value of status relies on the collective intentionality of the people involved. When their status is meaningful to the members in the clubs, then there will be an effect on their behaviours to sustain this status in the club and for the club that lead to cooperative behaviours which represent collective intentions to act. The cooperative behaviour from members will result in the club's advancement because it will generate the reciprocal rewards amongst members.

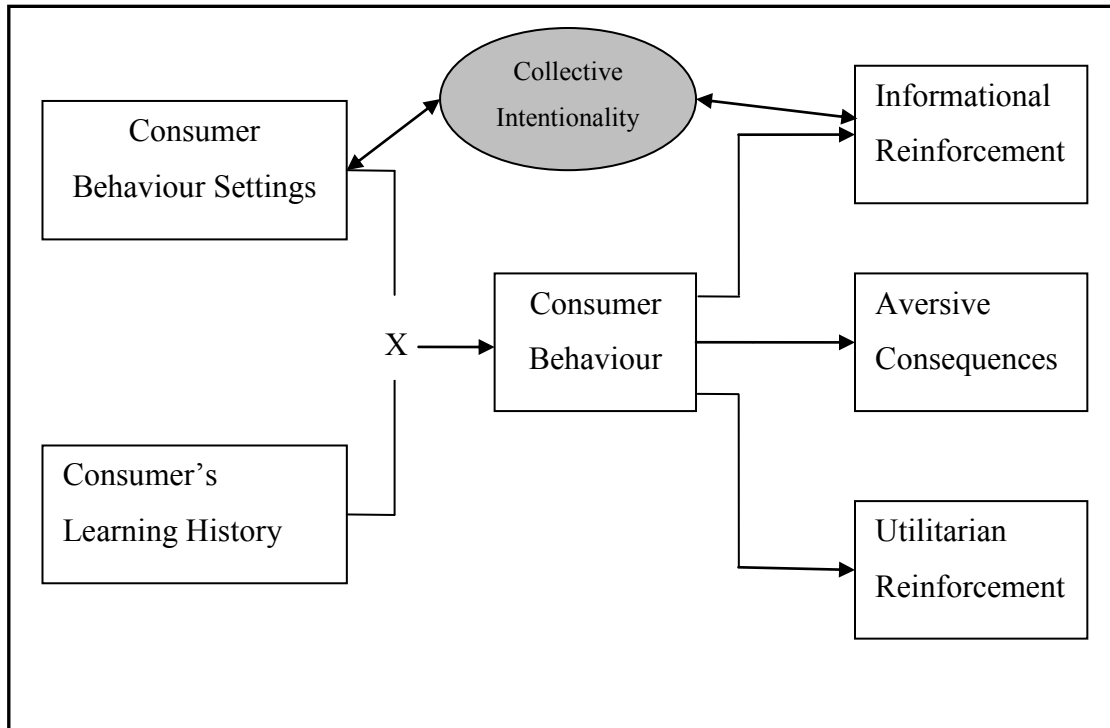
Therefore, collective intentionality plays a significant role in the car-consumer clubs, from the club's existence to rewards, because it has an effect on members' behaviours and their intention to act for their clubs, as can be observed from their statements which is akin to the intentional behaviourism, as proposed by Foxall (2007a). As a result, the emergence of car-consumer clubs appears in Thai society by virtue of the collective intentionality of people and parties who are involved in the car-consumer clubs.

As stated earlier, the meaning and value of status relies on the collective intentionality of the people within the context who have the power to emerge as a consumer community (such as the car-consumer clubs in Thailand). The findings from this study have implications to the understanding of BPM in terms of adding the personal level of experience and explanation, which will comprehend the understanding of consumer behaviour and add this into the body of knowledge of the literature. While the previous research on the BPM predominantly explains and predicts consumer behaviour by emphasising the quantitative measure which shows causal influences, the intentional stance or reasoning to explain its dependent variables remains unincorporated in the model.

This study has demonstrated the integration of an intentional dimension in the analysis of consumer behaviour in relation to the model by implementing the theory of collective intentionality to portray the case studies of the brand communities in Thailand, which is incorporated into the model specifically through the symbolic reinforcement. The empirical findings show that the meanings and the value of symbolic reinforcement relies considerably on the collective intentionality of the people involved, who collectively assign and recognise a new status function to tangible and intangible objects and/or people through the language that creates their existence and which eventually turns them into the symbolic reinforcers to motivate their behaviour. Consequently, societal development is dependent on the system of symbols which takes control of consumer behaviour based on the collective intentionality (Foxall, 2010b). Therefore, it is likely that the value of symbolic reinforcement relies on collective intentionality in assigning meaning to symbols by verbal communication in order to increase the value of reinforcement as a motivating operation in the consumer behaviour setting, which has an effect on behaviour as a result of individual learning

history. The behaviour controlled by this verbal antecedent is rule-governed. The conceptual framework of the relationship between collective intentionality and the BPM based on the empirical findings is proposed in Figure 10.2.

**Figure 10.2: The Relationship of Collective Intentionality and the BPM**



Source: This Study with adaptation from the BPM (Foxall, 1997a)

## 10.4 Review of the Objectives of this Thesis

This thesis has focused on the rationale behind members' behaviours in Thai car-consumer clubs. The car-consumer clubs in Thailand which were analysed in this study are examples of BCs which are currently active in Asia. The significance of this study lies in the way in which the study is interpreted by using behaviourism, the BPM and the philosophy of collective intentionality as a major frame to enlighten the phenomena. The main aim of this thesis is to investigate Thai car-consumer clubs and explain the rationale for rewards which maintain consumer participation in these clubs. This thesis also aims to fulfil three research objectives in response to the research questions, which are detailed below.

The first objective of this study was to understand the nature of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand, which are social groups formed by voluntary members, and to explore the reasons why car consumers are interested in these clubs. Chapter One establishes the background to the research and addresses problems why the cases of car-consumer clubs in Thailand are necessary to investigate. The extant literature concerning on the BC and SC, BPM and collective intentionality is reviewed in Chapter Two in order to provide prior knowledge in relation to the case studies. Chapter Three describes the data collection procedure which was used in this stage, which is an exploratory stage. The structure and characteristics of the seven case studies are described in Chapter Four (which are the web-board and club activities). This is followed by cross-case analysis of the overview of the clubs in Chapter Five. This study argues that the car-consumer clubs in Thailand do not oppose competitor brands (i.e. the other car-consumer clubs) but they oppose instead the car brand companies (i.e. the large car manufacturers).

The second objective sought to explain the effects of the rewards on Thai consumer behaviour towards the clubs which can lead members continuing their membership in the clubs. Having established that the nature of the clubs is a fundamental idea to understand the case studies, this second objective is complementary to the study because it explains how the rewards from the clubs have an effect on members' behaviours in the clubs. Chapter Three portrays the data collection process which was used in this stage, which is an explanatory stage. Chapter Six considers the rewards which members receive from their participation in the clubs. These rewards are found in the forms of functional and symbolic reinforcement, or patterns of reinforcement, as indicated in the BPM which have an influence on the frequency of behaviour. The study reveals that functional reinforcement brings people firstly to the clubs, whereas symbolic reinforcement strengthens the functional reinforcement in ways of encouraging members to continue their membership in the clubs and participate in the clubs more often. Furthermore, this study suggests that symbolic reinforcement has more effect on members' participation in the clubs (this is particularly true for the club leaders and the active members). The characteristics of members based on their participation in relation to both types of reinforcement are also proposed in this study. Chapter Seven examines how the rewards affect members' behaviours in the clubs. In particular, the RGB (such as pliance, self-pliance, tracking and self-tracking) is

identified as evidence of their behaviours in the clubs. Based on the empirical evidence, therefore, it can be concluded that members' behaviours in the clubs are rule-governed as a result of both types of reinforcement which are determined by their learning histories.

The third objective was to explain the rationale behind the significance of the rewards which have an effect on consumer behaviour in the car-consumer clubs. Chapters Eight and Nine describe how this objective attempts to seek for the underlying principle of the phenomena to explain why the rewards are important to members. Chapter Eight illustrates that the foremost reward which has most influence on the continuance of membership is "status". The role of status is defined as symbolic reinforcement to all members in the clubs. Status plays a significant role for all types of membership because it functions as the gateway to other rewards and indicates the role and responsibilities of members. This study also indicates that status is socially mediated by the public, and so it is a publicly given reward as a result of individual performance. The implication of the status is described in Chapter Nine. The value and meaning of the status is assigned and mediated by people through the collective intentionality of individuals. This study demonstrates that collective intentionality includes the shared beliefs, desires and attitudes, which direct to the collective intentionality in the form of cooperative behaviours. This is a foundation of the clubs that relies on members in the club, and their altruism and reciprocity. Furthermore, this study points out, in some detail, how the consumer intentional behaviourism (which is considered as a personal level) is crucial to examine and explain consumer behaviour as shown in the case studies. Finally, the overall characteristics of car-consumer clubs in Thailand is summarised in Chapter Ten.

As a whole, the empirical findings of the present study are complementary to the BPM literature through the usage of the model in the interpretation of consumer behaviour in the BC, Thailand. They empirically demonstrate the role of intentional dimension in the analysis at a personal level in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena. The overall pattern of Thai consumer behaviour in car-consumer clubs is summarised by implementing the three levels of interpretive analysis of the BPM to portray their behaviour. This shows that the BPM is a useful device to be applied in

consumer behaviour analysis. The study also demonstrates that the theory of collective intentionality can be integrated into the analysis to comprehend the BPM in terms of symbolic reinforcement.

### **10.5 Limitations of this Research and Recommendations for Future Research**

Similar to other studies, this study is not complete without a statement of its limitations. There are several limitations that should be acknowledged in this study. The first limitation regards the data collection and the snowballing technique that was implemented. Although the snowball sampling enables the researcher to reach those respondents who are hard to find since the car-consumer clubs are located in the virtual world, they may not be representative of the entire population in the Thai car-consumer clubs due to the fact that the majority of the club members are non-active members. The interviews were granted by the club leaders who also nominated other members that often participated in the clubs based on their familiarity. Consequently, most of the respondents who were introduced to the interview appeared to be active members who often participate in the club, they had similar traits and characteristics and this could have caused a sampling bias. Moreover, the respondents are more likely to give positive information towards their clubs rather than negative views, which could lead to an unknown bias. Thus, in this study, the numbers of non-active member respondents (i.e. three) who were included in the study were considerably lower than the active member respondents (i.e. thirty-two). It is recommended that future studies should find other sampling techniques and investigate this topic with a wider group of respondents, especially with larger numbers of non-active members. Moreover, the majority of the respondents are males, which was a result of the snowballing sampling technique. Future studies can extend this work by comparing the rewards received and the satisfaction gained between males and females. They can also attempt to find if gender is a reason for members to remain in these communities.

Secondly, this study has implemented merely simple calculation of the SCI in categorising the types of membership between active members and non-active

members. Further studies may implement factor analysis or other quantitative measures to investigate each factor and its degree of influence. The SC of members in the BC might change over time and, therefore, longitudinal research is desirable to assess consumers' SC and influential factors in different time frames.

Thirdly, the study has suffered from a limitation in identifying the augmenting which is one types of RGB (Zettle and Hayes, 1982). Because this study focuses on the consequences of members' participation in the clubs and the evidence of their behaviour based on the interview, this study basically demonstrates the empirical evidence of their rule-following behaviour as a result of the rewards and the contingencies which can be contacted or experienced at the present time. Consequently, this study has only identified two types of RGB that can be observed directly from the interview, which are pliance and tracking, and it does not include augmenting. Augmenting specifies the contingencies that the listener has not yet experienced or even contacted at the present, and the consequences can still be abstract and not necessarily able to be directly contacted to put forth control over behaviour (Törneke et al., 2008); therefore, augmenting, is embedded in the rules as a motivating operation and antecedent verbal stimulus (Malott, 1989; Fagerstorm et al., 2010); however, it is not examined in this study because of the constraints of time and scope of analysis. Further research may follow up on identifying the augmental, another types of rules, which can increase the reward value of stimuli that can stimulate members' compliance with the rule, as suggested by Foxall (2007b). The analysis of the augmental as a motivating operation in consumer situations in the clubs is a fascinating topic for further investigation.

There are many additional issues which arise from this study which would merit further research. One of the obvious extensions of this study is the degree of each reward that has influence on different types of membership. Although symbolic reinforcement and functional reinforcement were examined in this study, they were not confirmed in the degree of influence on members' behaviours. Further research could investigate this by changing the methodological approach from qualitative to quantitative analysis. It could also employ a quantitative approach to test the initial findings of each reward and degree of influence of different kinds of rewards on different types of membership from

this study. Although the previous literature mentions that community members receive financial benefits from the brand communities (Algesheimer et al., 2005), the management profit gained from the club has yet to be noted in the extant literature. The findings from the present study reveal that the club leaders have earned some income from the club administration. It is worth emphasising that the earnings from the club administration (specifically for the club leaders) is a topic which is worth investigating in further research. Another worthy issue to examine is the role of collective intentionality which is incorporated into the BPM. The proof of the proposed relationship in the BPM awaits further empirical research.

The present study should be replicated across other samples, products, and countries in order to determine if the findings are consistent in other settings. The study of consumer behaviour and the BC in Asia is still in its infancy. The cultural differences between countries may have an impact on the characteristics of BCs. Further investigation is encouraged into this cultural translation issue in order to further develop the concept of the BC in Asia.

## **10.6 Implications of this Research**

### **10.6.1 Theoretical Implications**

The central findings of this study have significance for marketing philosophy. The emergence of the BCs is found to be a result of the collective intentionality of consumer within those contexts. The findings also reveal the significance of the rewards that maintain consumer behaviour in the BCs. These findings have implications for the brand communities and marketing literature, which emphasise the role of the rewards as the key to maintaining consumer participation and the role of collective intentionality as the foundation of these BCs. In the case of the car-consumer clubs in Thailand, it is the philosophical underpinning of collective intentionality that has the greatest impact on the emergence of these clubs. The theory of collective intentionality is introduced to the marketing literature, especially in the analysis of the consumer behaviour in the brand

communities, in order to achieve comprehensive understanding of the rationale for the BC phenomena and their existence in society.

The findings also contribute to the behavioural perspective of the BC through the use of the BPM to inform the case studies of BCs in South East Asia. This study illustrates the impact of the rewards that have an influence on consumer participation in the BCs, as shown in their various contributions to the communities. This study was also able to support the work of the BPM which was introduced by Foxall (1990) by using the model to interpret consumer behaviours in Thai car-consumer clubs. With respect to BPM, this study incorporates an aspect of the intentional dimension of individuals (or their personal level) and proposes that there is a potential relationship of the collective intentionality and symbolic reinforcement to the model in order to strengthen the analysis in the explanation of consumer behaviour. This study, therefore, extends the theoretical knowledge of the BC and consumer behaviour in the BC by integrating the philosophy and the behavioural theories to inform the case studies of the BCs in South East Asia. Future research should consider these philosophical and behavioural theories.

Another noteworthy issue for consideration is related to the scope of the findings. Since this study is qualitative research, which means that it focuses on small scale studies, this could limit the scope of the generalizability of the findings. Generalizability describes the applicability of the findings to other areas of social research and it is commonly associated with large scale quantitative approaches. Nevertheless, in this study, which used multiple case studies, it can be argued that the findings (such as the implications of the rewards and collective intentionality of people) have a broader relevance in areas such as the online communities of other brands and products, either in Thailand or in other countries. This is because collective intentionality comes from the intentionality of individuals. In addition, reward learning is also related to the behavioural learning of individuals that are embedded in human nature. This could have a similar impact on the pattern of the brand community phenomena. Therefore, the theoretical and practical concepts from this study could be generalised to other brand communities, and this also merits future study. However, in a strict methodological sense, these propositions would have to be tested through further research in these areas.

This study highlights three main types of membership in the BC. Most of the extant literature is principally focused on the active members, but it is less focused on the management persons of those communities or the club leaders (who are the key powerful person of these communities) and the non-active members. This study fills a research gap because there are few studies which have employed a behavioural approach to study BCs in Asia. In addition, no previous study has examined the kinds of rewards that have attracted different types of membership to participate and maintain their status in the communities, including the club leaders and the non-active members. This study reveals the potential rewards that persuade consumers to sustain their membership status in consumer BCs. Furthermore, this research is the first effort to integrate the SCI to distinguish the active members and non-active members in the BC. Thus, the SCI from the literature of sociology is integrated into this study as a practical device to indicate the types of membership of the BC. The verbal evidence from this study is in harmony with the results of the SCI score. Therefore, this study also supports the work of Carlson et al. (2008), which recommends that a psychological sense of community can be used to indicate the true members of the community.

The findings from this study also make an important contribution to the BC literature, specifically in the understanding of the nature and characteristics of the BC in a South East Asian country. This is one of the few studies which have focused on consumer BCs in a developing country such as Thailand. Accordingly, a description of the formation of BCs in Thailand has been offered in this study. By selecting car-consumer clubs in Thailand, this study has replicated some of the previous research from a Western context (which has similar products but different cultural contexts) with the aim of providing additional evidence of the nature of BCs in a South East Asian environment. The findings reveal that car BCs in Thailand have somewhat different characteristics from the extant literature owing to different cultures and values. Oppositional brand loyalty is not applicable in Thai BCs due to the cultural values of Thai people, who tend to prefer smooth interpersonal relationship and ego orientation (Komin, 1990). These results contradict the work of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), Muniz and Hamer (2001) and Muniz and O'Guinn (2005) but support Schutte and Ciarlante (1998) in terms of the high value that Asian culture places on group norms and behaviour. The findings suggest that culture is another factor which needs to be taken

into consideration in the BC. Additionally, the reasons why members stay in car BCs which were found in this study extends the work of Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), McAlexander et al. (2002), Algesheimer et al. (2005), Ouwersloot and Odekerken-Schröder (2008). As a result, the practical concept from the study is anticipated to be able to be applied with other products and local brands in Thailand for long-term market success.

### **10.6.2 Managerial Implications**

The findings of this study have implications for marketers, practitioners, and companies, who will all benefit from some of the guidelines that this study offers. The results show that the consumers' alliance in organising their own clubs is based on their interest in car brands and/or models, and this in turn can affect the car companies. Unlike previous research on BCs, this study has examined three main different types of membership in the BCs in relation to the rewards that they receive from participation. It also points out how the company should nurture these differing groups of customers. Having indicated the rewards that persuading members sustain in the communities, the company and marketers will be able to know what the consumers want and then customise their marketing strategy to the desires of this group of consumers.

The company should not overlook consumer communities because the car-consumer clubs define themselves as being on the buyer's side. This separates them from the companies, whom they call the seller side. The effects of consumer communities on the company are seemingly a double-edged sword. On the one side, they are valuable for the marketer because they are a cost effective and powerful device to create value added to the product and brand for the company (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Lawer, 2005). On the other hand, consumers in these communities are free to spread either positive or negative word-of-mouth information and recommendations, which can have an influence on other consumers' decisions and, eventually, on the image of the products, brand and company (Pickton and Borderick, 2005; Brown et al., 2007; Cova and Pace, 2006; Hollenbeck and Zinkhan, 2006). This can possibly be difficult for the company to control since these groups of consumers have control over the information flows (Akehurst, 2009). Consequently, they have the power of negotiation with the company.

The lesson from the car-consumer clubs in this study encourages the brand companies and marketers to closely monitor those clubs, especially in terms of the power of the consumer.

The key to the success of these car-consumer clubs appears to be the long-term relationships which enhance loyalty and trust between members in the clubs. This study shows that the continuance of the clubs depends on the members' cohesiveness. The mutual trust fostered from the member's close relationships enables them to willingly support one another. The evidence of this study shows that friends/friendship is a very important symbolic reinforcement for both the club leaders and the active members. It is friendship which sustains the clubs and, therefore, establishing relationship marketing would be an appropriate marketing strategy to be implemented to make offers to these consumer groups.

It is crucial to note that marketers should be more cautious in building relationships with these clubs. According to the findings, consumers in these consumer communities are likely to position themselves as independent from the car company: they have consciously drawn a line between seller and buyer. The company should be aware of this barrier. Thus, it is advised that the company should not cross their line and make them feel that the company is trying to take over their communities, or even try to play a dominant role in their clubs, because this is undesirable from the point of view of the members of these clubs. In other words, the company should not make them feel that they are being exploited by the company because these consumer communities have their own sense of pride.

Rather, the brand company might be able to build long-term relationships with these communities by forming a good alliance with them and providing assistance to them in nurturing their clubs. For example, many brand companies today have created their own websites and loyalty clubs, and as such it would not be wise for a company to try to compete with the consumer communities that have already established their reputation in Thai society. More importantly, most members in these communities are loyal customers of the products and the brands and, therefore, the members in the BC can benefit the company as a customer retention tool (Algesheimer et al., 2005). This study

has found that the members want to obtain some benefits from their participation and, accordingly, the company should offer reciprocal benefits to the consumers' clubs. Therefore, establishing an alliance with these consumer communities is highly recommended.

To form an alliance with the consumer communities, the company must find methods which are beneficial to both parties (i.e. the company and the consumer communities), such as promoting both parties. For example, the findings indicate that the club leaders are key persons in running the clubs. Having learned that these persons are highly motivated by both symbolic and functional benefits, the company should contact them straightaway and offer their assistance. If the clubs are run as a business venture then the company should offer financial assistance (such as placing an advertisement on their website). If the clubs are not run as a business then the company may offer other assistance (such as sponsoring their events or initiating a meeting with the club leaders to establish a favourable relationship). The company may invite the club management teams to meet the management of the company to make them feel that the company considers them to be important, and respects and values them. This study has shown that the club leaders are opinion leaders of the club and can transfer a message directly to the club members. Most of the club leaders are influencers in the club who are respected by members. Fournier and Lee (2009) state that opinion leaders are able to transmit information, have an influence on consumers' decisions, and endorse new ideas in the communities. If they have a good impression of the company then they will broadcast a positive message to the clubs. As a result, the company will be able to protect its product and brand image.

The company should organise events for these clubs in order to be able to meet their customers and so preserve loyal consumers. As suggested by the literature, building relationships with the community at an event can enhance consumer connections to the BC (Kozinets, 1999; Rothaermel and Sugiyama, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002; Kozinets, 2002; Langerak et al., 2003; Koh and Kim, 2003; Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006; Shang et al., 2006; Casalo et al., 2007; Schouten et al., 2007). Events (such as car meetings) will gather consumers, like social networkers and car-lovers (as classified in Section 6.7, Chapter 6), to meet in the physical world. The company may even invite

the clubs to participate in an motor show event to present their cars because car-lovers are likely to enjoy showing their modified cars to the public. Moreover, the company can offer to act as a sponsor when the clubs occasionally have joint-activities (such as a sporting competition) among the car-consumer clubs.

The company can also promote their website by sharing a website link with the consumer BCs. By the same token, the company can also promote the car-consumer clubs' websites on their own company website. This may well be the best way to promote both the company's website and the consumers' websites. The company can use this technique to acquire new members from the consumer communities. It can also be especially attractive to the non-active members because these people principally remain in the club for the car-knowledge, and they may find that the company's website is useful in terms of company news, promotions and other car technical information. Marketers should bear in mind that the non-active members of the consumer communities are also the customers of the company and they should not be mistreated.

Finally, marketers and practitioners might apply to become a club member in order to build internal relationships with the club members and the club leaders. Being a member in the club will enhance their understanding of the club from the inside out and foster the corporate relationship with members in the clubs. Moreover, the marketers will be able to monitor the direction and progress of the consumer communities as well as collecting useful data from target consumers for further development of the products and brand. In summary, marketers and practitioners should establish a good relationship with these communities by employing appropriate functional and symbolic reinforcement. The practical implications of this study are speculated to apply with other brand communities in Thailand, as well as in other countries. In other words, the findings of this study are not only limited to car-consumer clubs in Thailand, but they are also expected to be able to be applied to other car clubs in other countries which have a similar culture to Thailand. They are also considered to be applicable to the consumer communities of other brands and/or products which have comparable characteristics to these car-consumer clubs brand communities.

## 10.7 Concluding Remarks

This chapter has illustrated the application of the BPM in three levels of interpretive analysis, which concludes the overall findings of the case studies. This chapter has also summarised how the research has met the objectives of the study in response to the main research questions. In addition, research implications, limitations and recommendations for future study and contributions of this research were also offered. The theoretical implications of this study are anticipated to be added into the body of knowledge of the marketing literature and to be of benefit to further research on brand community and consumer behaviour research. The practical implications of this study will also be of benefit to marketers, practitioners, and companies who wish to use them in their marketing application in order to deal with consumer communities and retain their consumers for long-term success in a competitive market. The implications of this study are speculated to be applicable to other products and brand communities in Thailand, or even in other countries. Lastly, the cases of car-consumer clubs are examples of brand communities in Thailand. The heart of these clubs lies in the reciprocal rewards which are socially mediated by members of the clubs; hence, they are social mediation of rewards in Thai car-consumer clubs.

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## Appendix I: Cardiff Business School Ethical Approval Form

### CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL ETHICAL APPROVAL FORM: PHD THESIS RESEARCH

(For guidance on how to complete this form, please see <http://www.cf.ac.uk/carbs/research/ethics.html>)

For Office Use:	Ref	Meeting
<p><b>Does your research involve human participants?</b> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If you have answered 'No' to this question you do not need to complete the rest of this form, otherwise please proceed to the next question</p> <p><b>Does your research have any involvement with the NHS?</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If you have answered 'Yes' to this question, then your project should firstly be submitted to the NHS National Research Ethics Service. Online applications are available on <a href="http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/applicants/">http://www.nres.npsa.nhs.uk/applicants/</a>. It could be that you may have to deal directly with the NHS Ethics Service and bypass the Business School's Research Ethics Committee.</p> <p><b>Name of Student:</b> Sumana Laparokit</p> <p><b>Student Number:</b> 0912763</p> <p><b>Section:</b> Marketing and Strategy</p> <p><b>Email:</b> LaparokitS@cardiff.ac.uk</p> <p><b>Names of Supervisors:</b> 1. Prof. Gordon Foxall 2. Dr. Victoria James</p> <p><b>Supervisors' Email Addresses:</b> 1. <a href="mailto:FoxallG@cardiff.ac.uk">FoxallG@cardiff.ac.uk</a> 2. <a href="mailto:JamesVK@cardiff.ac.uk">JamesVK@cardiff.ac.uk</a></p> <p><b>Title of Thesis:</b> Sense of Brand Community: A case study of car clubs in Thailand</p> <p><b>Start and Estimated End Date of Research:</b> December, 2009 – May, 2010</p> <p><b>Aim of the research</b> To explore the sense of brand community by exploring the sense of community in customer-initiated brand communities.</p>		

#### 1. Describe the Methodology to be applied in the research

The study aims to explore the collective sense of community of customers who join in the clubs which are formed by customers themselves. The qualitative case study approach is selected to explain the phenomena. Accordingly, semi-structured interviews will be employed. The set of questions are drawn from the literature to frame the interview in order to investigate customers' collective behaviours. The respondents will be contacted in advance and be informed of the purpose of the study in order to ask for their consent. The respondents will remain anonymous throughout the research process.

In addition, other sources of data such as webboard posts and photos will also be used to triangulate the interview data. Using the same protocol, consent from the respondents; webmaster and authorised persons in the clubs will be requested. All data will remain confidential.

**2. Describe the participant sample who will be contacted for this Research Project. You need to consider the number of participants, their age, gender, recruitment methods and exclusion/inclusion criteria**

The participants of this study are car club members in Thailand. There will be no age and gender restriction except that all participants must be over 18 years of age. The selection criteria will be based on their involvement with the clubs and their agreement to participate in the interview. The snowball sampling will be used and is a technique to access to the respondents by which the respondents suggest their clubs friends and contact to the researcher with their personal connections.

**3. Describe the consent and participant information arrangements you will make, as well as the methods of debriefing. If you are conducting interviews, you must attach a copy of the consent form you will be using.**

The name of the respondents will be kept anonymous. Other additional data such as web-board postings, events photos etc will be strictly controlled and kept confidential. A pre-notification letter (Appendix 1) will be sent which provides a brief outline of the research details including the research proposals and data collection methods. The introduction letter and consent form (Appendix 2) will be given to the respondents when conducting the interview. The consent form states that all respondents have right to withdraw from the interview at any time and their name and other personal information will be kept anonymous. Debriefing will be provided upon their request.

**4. Please make a clear and concise statement of the ethical considerations raised by the research and how you intend to deal with them throughout the duration of the project**

The main ethical issues that bring into account are informed consent and data confidentiality. The main issue is related to the feeling and opinions of the respondents which may lead to the conflict or misunderstanding. Therefore, as a researcher, I will carefully protect the given information by respondents such as their name and treated them as anonymous name instead. Audio recordings will be used for research. The respondents will be informed and asked for the consent to record the conversation. They have right to refuse the record as request. In addition, other sources of data such as photos, web-board posts, will not be used without consent.

Participation in this study is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty. The respondents are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. They are also free to refuse to answer any question the researcher might ask.

**PLEASE NOTE** that you should include a copy of your questionnaire

**NB:** Copies of your signed and approved Research Ethics Application Form together with accompanying documentation must be bound into your Dissertation or Thesis.

5. Please complete the following in relation to your research:

		Yes	No	n/a
(a)	Will you describe the main details of the research process to participants in advance, so that they are informed about what to expect?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(b)	Will you tell participants that their participation is voluntary?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(c)	Will you obtain written consent for participation?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(d)	Will you tell participants that they may withdraw from the research at any time and for any reason?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(e)	If you are using a questionnaire, will you give participants the option of omitting questions they do not want to answer?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
(f)	Will you tell participants that their data will be treated with full confidentiality and that, if published, it will not be identifiable as theirs?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
(g)	Will you offer to send participants findings from the research (e.g. copies of publications arising from the research)?	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

PLEASE NOTE:

If you have ticked No to any of 5(a) to 5(g), please give an explanation on a separate sheet.

(Note: N/A = not applicable)

There is an obligation on the lead researcher to bring to the attention of Cardiff Business School Ethics Committee any issues with ethical implications not clearly covered by the above checklist.

Two copies of this form (and attachments) should be submitted to Ms Lainey Clayton, Room F09, Cardiff Business School.

Signed

Sumana Laparojkit

Print Name

Miss Sumana Laparojkit

Date

26/10/09

SUPERVISOR'S DECLARATION

As the supervisor for this research I confirm that I believe that all research ethical issues have been dealt with in accordance with University policy and the research ethics guidelines of the relevant professional organisation.

Signed

GR Fercall

(Primary supervisor)

Print Name

Gordon Fercall

Date

26.10.09

STATEMENT OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

This project has been considered using agreed School procedures and is now approved.

Signed

Tom Entwistle (Chair)

(Chair, School Research Ethics Committee)

Print Name

Tom Entwistle

Date

4/11/2009

## Appendix II: Pre-notification Letter

Date

To whom it may concern,

I am writing this letter to introduce you to my thesis and would, therefore, like to ask for your kind participation in a research interview. My name is Sumana Laparojkit, a PhD candidate at Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, United Kingdom. I am conducting research entitled “Social Mediation of Rewards in Thai Car-Consumer Clubs”.

I am very interested in the club in which you are involved and I have evaluated and found that your club is stable and popular for over three years. Moreover, the number of your club members has been increasing. Therefore, your club is an excellent sample for this research.

It would be highly appreciated if you could provide me with the opportunity for an interview as part of my research data collection. The interview date and time will be agreed at your earliest convenience. An audio recorder will be used for research purposes only. Please be ensured that the research interview will be confidential and will not be harmful or have negative impact to you and your club in this interview. Thank you very much in advance for your kind assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Sumana Laparojkit

PhD candidate,

Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, United Kingdom

## Pre-notification letter (Thai Version)

วันที่

เรื่อง การขออนุญาตสัมภาษณ์เพื่องานวิจัย

เรียน

เนื่องด้วย ดิฉัน นางสาวสุมนา ลาภาโรจน์กิจ ปัจจุบันกำลังศึกษาระดับปริญญาเอก สาขาบริหารมหาวิทยาลัยคาร์ดิฟ ประเทศสหราชอาณาจักร และกำลังทำวิทยานิพนธ์ เรื่อง พฤติกรรมผู้บริโภคของการเป็นชุมชนแบรนด์ โดยใช้กรณีศึกษาคือ ลูกค้านักช้อปปิ้งออนไลน์ในประเทศไทย

ดิฉันมีความสนใจในชมรมผู้ช้รถยนต์ของท่าน เนื่องจากพิจารณาเห็นว่า เป็นชมรมที่ได้รับความนิยมสูงและได้จัดตั้งเป็นเวลามากกว่าสามปี ตลอดจนมีผู้ช้รถยนต์สมัครเข้าร่วมเป็นสมาชิกในชมรมของท่านเป็นจำนวนมาก จึงเป็นกลุ่มเป้าหมายของการวิจัยในครั้งนี้

อนึ่ง การวิจัยในครั้งนี้จะไม่สามารถบรรลุวัตถุประสงค์ที่วางไว้ หากไม่ได้รับความร่วมมือจากท่านในการสัมภาษณ์ที่จะทำการนัดอีกครั้งตามเวลาที่ท่านสะดวก คำตอบของท่านจะได้รับการวิเคราะห์เป็นภาพรวมในแนวสังคมศาสตร์,จิตวิทยา,ปรัชญา และทางการตลาด จึงขอให้อย่างมั่นใจได้ว่า จะไม่ส่งผลกระทบต่อตัวท่านหรือชมรมของท่านในการสัมภาษณ์นี้ และขอขอบคุณในความร่วมมือของท่าน ณ โอกาสนี้

ขอแสดงความนับถือ

นางสาวสุมนา ลาภาโรจน์กิจ

## Appendix III: Letter of Introduction

Date

Dear Participant,

RE: Study Title: Social Mediation of Rewards in Thai Car-consumer Clubs

Supervisor: 1. Prof. Gordon R. Foxall  
2. Dr. Victoria James

This study is designed to explore the communities which focused on the brand and that formed by customers themselves. We are conducting this study to learn more about this topic since it has not been studied much specifically in Thailand. Participation in the study involves a face-to-face interview, which will last for approximately one to two hours. The interviews will be conducted by one of the researchers, audio-taped and later transcribed for the purpose of data analysis.

Before agreeing to participate in this research, we strongly encourage you to read the following information about this study. This statement describes the purpose and procedures of the study.

### Risks and Discomforts

There are no risks or discomforts that are anticipated from your participation in the study. Potential risks or discomforts include possible emotional feelings of sadness when asked questions during the interview.

### Benefits

The anticipated benefit of participation is the opportunity to discuss feelings, perceptions, and concerns related to the experience of being in the car communities.

### Confidentiality

The information gathered during this study will remain confidential in secure premises during this project. Only the researchers will have access to the study data and information. The interview transcripts will be coded and the key to the code will be kept locked away. The results of the research will be published in the form of research and conference paper(s) and may be published in a professional journal or presented at professional meetings. It may also be published in book form. The knowledge obtained from this study will be of great value in guiding professionals to be more effective in marketing strategy and managing relationship with the customers.

### Withdrawal without Prejudice

Participation in this study is voluntary and refusal to participate will involve no penalty. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in this project at any time without prejudice or penalty. You are also free to refuse to answer any question we might ask you.

#### Further Questions and Follow-Up

You are welcome to ask the researchers any questions that occur to you during the survey or interview. If you have further questions once the interview is completed, you are encouraged to contact the researchers using the contact information given below. If, as a result of participating in this study you feel the need for further, longer-term support, you are welcome to contact Miss Sumana Laparojkit or email at LaparojkitS@cardiff.ac.uk

If you have other questions or concerns about the study please contact Professor Gordon Foxall, Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University or via e-mail at FoxallG@cardiff.ac.uk.

Yours faithfully,

Miss Sumana Laparojkit

#### Researcher contact information:

Miss Sumana Laparojkit  
Cardiff Business School  
Cardiff University  
Aberconway Building, Colum Drive  
Cardiff, CF10 3EU  
United Kingdom

This letter draws in part from the informed consent form which is used by Concordia University College of Alberta. Available at:

[https://onlineservices.concordia.ab.ca/documents/common/reb/generic\\_letter\\_consent\\_form.pdf](https://onlineservices.concordia.ab.ca/documents/common/reb/generic_letter_consent_form.pdf) [ Accessed 10<sup>th</sup> October, 2009]

## **Appendix IV: Consent Form –Anonymous data and Consent Form-Confidential data**

**CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL**  
**RESEARCH ETHICS**

**Consent Form - Anonymous data**

I understand that my participation in this project will involve interview about the opinions and feeling toward the car-consumer communities where I am a membership which will require approximately one to one and half hours of their time

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I experience discomfort during participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with Professor Gordon R. Foxall, FoxallG@cardiff.ac.uk

I understand that the information provided by me will be held totally anonymously, so that it is impossible to trace this information back to me individually. I understand that, in accordance with the Data Protection Act, this information may be retained indefinitely.

I also understand that at the end of the study I may request some additional information and feedback about the purpose and results of the study by applying to the student researcher.

Name of student conducting the research: Miss Sumana Laparojkit, PhD Candidate in Cardiff Business School

Name of student's supervisor: Professor Gordon R. Foxall

## CARDIFF BUSINESS SCHOOL RESEARCH ETHICS

### Consent Form - Confidential data

I understand that my participation in this project will involve face-to-face interview about the opinions and feelings toward car communities which will require approximately one to two hours of my time.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time. If for any reason I experience discomfort during participation in this project, I am free to withdraw or discuss my concerns with *Professor Gordon R. Foxall, FoxallG@cardiff.ac.uk*.

I understand that the information provided by me will be held confidentially, such that only the researcher and supervisor can trace this information back to me individually. The information will be retained for up to 3 years and will then be deleted/destroyed. I understand that I can ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed at any time and, in accordance with the Data Protection Act, I can have access to the information at any time.

I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study, if I contact the student researcher.

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (NAME) consent to participate in the study conducted by *Miss Sumana Laparojkit, LaparojkitS@cardiff.ac.uk, PhD candidate of Cardiff Business School, Cardiff University, under the supervision of Professor Gordon R. Foxall, FoxallG@cardiff.ac.uk*

Signed:

Date:

## Appendix V: Interview Questions

### Interview Questions: Club Leader

#### 1. Club Background and Structure

- 1.1 Could you please share the club history or background?
- 1.2 What is the club structure or functions?

#### 2. Consumer Setting

- 2.1 How long have you been in this club?
- 2.2 What is your current status in the club?
- 2.3 Could you please tell your roles and responsibilities in the club?
- 2.4 What are the club events and activities?
- 2.5 To what extent do club activities important? why?
- 2.6 What is the web-board for?

#### 3. Learning History

- 3.1 Why do you create this club? What is your motivation to create this club?
- 3.2 Is there any club requirement for membership application?
- 3.3 Are there any car clubs that you are member before you join in this club?
- 3.4 Do you have any experience in the car club?

#### 4. Behaviour

- 4.1 Who assign the roles in the club to you? Why?
- 4.2 Do you do these roles because you were assigned or because you are voluntary to do it?
- 4.3 Do the group force you to do?
- 4.4 How often do you participate in the web-board? In which way (posting topic or make a comment or reply or any other?)
- 4.5 How often do you participate in the club activities?

#### 5. Functional Reinforcement and Symbolic Reinforcement

- 5.1 What do you receive from this club?

5.2 Do you receive any additional benefits from the club?

5.3 Is there any status assigned in the club?

5.4 Is there any formal position assigned in the club?

5.5 How do you feel towards those positions and status?

5.6 Do you think it is important to have? Why?

## **6. Motivation to create and participate in the clubs**

7.1 What do you expected from car club? -- Before/ Current/ Future (Meet expectation or not)

7.2 Does the car club fulfil your need?

7.3 What make you feel fulfil your need?

7.4 Do people in the club have influence on you?

7.5 Do you have any influence on other members?

7.6 How do you feel towards this car club?

## **7. Rule-Governed Behaviour**

7.1 Who generate the rules in the club?

7.2 Where do the rules come from?

7.3 What is your role in controlling the club? And how do you control them?

7.4 Do members follow the rules in the club?

## **8. Others (to add on)**

8.1 Is there any specific symbol or wording that people in the club use?

8.2 Do you have any expectation on the company by participating in the car-consumer club?

8.3 How do you want the company involve with your club?

8.4 Do you feel the same between being a member of car-consumer club and a member of car club organised by company? How?

8.5 What do you think about this car club in overall picture?

8.6 Could you please give a statement of your feeling that you have towards the club?

8.7 Do you plan to continue your membership in the club? For how long?

## **Interview Questions: Club Members**

### **1. Consumer Setting**

- 1.1 How long have you been in this club?
- 1.2 What is your current status in the club?
- 1.3 Could you please tell your roles and responsibilities in the club?
- 1.4 What are the club events and activities?
- 1.5 To what extent do activities important? why?
- 1.6 What is the web-board for?

### **2. Learning History**

- 2.1 Why do you join in this club? What is your motivation to join in the club?
- 2.2 Does anyone suggest you or ask you to join in the club?
- 2.3 Is there any club requirement for membership application?
- 2.4 Are there any car clubs that you are member before you join in this club?
- 2.5 Have you heard about this club before you join in? From what source of information?

### **3. Behaviour**

- 3.1 How do you apply in this club?
- 3.2 Who assign these roles to you? Why?
- 3.3 Do you do these roles because you were assigned or because you are voluntary to do it?
- 3.4 Do the group force you to do?
- 3.5 How often do you participate in the web-board? In which way (posting topic or make a comment or reply or any other?)
- 3.6 How often do you participate in the club activities?

### **4. Functional Reinforcement and Symbolic Reinforcement**

- 4.1 What do you receive from car club?
- 4.2 Do you receive any other benefits from the club?

- 4.3 Is there any status assigned in the club?
- 4.4 Is there any formal position assigned in the club?
- 4.5 Do you think it is important to have? Why?

## **5. Motivation to participate in the clubs**

- 5.1 What do you expected from car club? -- Before/ Current/ Future (Meet expectation or not)
- 5.2 Does the car club fulfil your need?
- 5.3 What make you feel fulfil your need?
- 5.4 Do people in the car club have influence on you?
- 5.5 Do you have any influence on other club members?
- 5.6 How do you feel towards this car club?

## **6. Rule-Governed Behaviour**

- 6.1 Have you concerned and read the club rules that stated in the webpage?
- 6.2 Do you follow the rules?
- 6.3 How do you know that this is what you have to do in the club?

## **7. Others (to add on)**

- 7.1 Is there any specific symbol or wording that people in the club use?
- 7.2 Do you have any expectation on the company by joining the club?
- 7.3 How do you want the company involve with your club?
- 7.4 Do you feel the same between being a member of car user club and a member of car club organised by company? How?
- 7.5 What do you think about this car club in overall picture?
- 7.6 Could you please give a statement of your feeling that you have towards the club?
- 7.7 Do you plan to continue your membership in the club?

## Appendix V: Sense of Community Index (SCI)

### SCI (English Version)

#### SCI (True/False)

1. I think my car club is a good place for me to stay.
2. People in this car club do not share the same values.
3. My mates and I want the same thing from this car club.
4. I can recognise most of the people in my car club.
5. I feel at home in this car club.
6. Very few of my mates know me.
7. I care about what my mates think of my actions.
8. I have no influence over what this club is like.
9. If there is a problem in this car club, people who join here can get it solved.
10. It is very important to me to work in this car club.
11. People in this car club generally do not get along with one another.
12. I expect to stay in this car club for a long time.

### SCI (Thai Version)

1. ฉันคิดว่าคลับรถยนต์นี้เป็นสถานที่ที่ดีสำหรับฉันที่จะอยู่
2. คนในคลับรถยนต์นี้ ไม่ได้มีค่านิยมที่เหมือนกัน
3. เพื่อนๆ ในคลับรถยนต์และตัวฉันมีความต้องการสิ่งเดียวกันจากคลับนี้
4. ฉันสามารถจำเพื่อนสมาชิกส่วนใหญ่ในคลับรถยนต์ที่ฉันอยู่ได้
5. ฉันรู้สึกเหมือนอยู่บ้านเมื่ออยู่ในคลับ
6. เพื่อนสมาชิกในคลับจำนวนน้อยที่รู้จักฉัน
7. ฉันเชื่อว่าเพื่อนสมาชิกท่านอื่นคิดอย่างไรต่อการกระทำของฉันในคลับ
8. ฉันไม่มีอิทธิพลเหนือคนอื่นในคลับรถยนต์นี้ (อิทธิพลในด้านต่างๆ เช่น ไอเดีย, ความคิด, การแต่งรถ ฯลฯ)
9. ถ้ามีปัญหาอะไรเกิดขึ้นในคลับรถยนต์นี้ สมาชิกในคลับคนอื่นๆ สามารถช่วยแก้ปัญหาได้
10. การเข้าร่วมกิจกรรมในคลับเป็นสิ่งที่สำคัญสำหรับฉัน
11. สมาชิกในคลับนี้โดยทั่วไป เข้ากันไม่ค่อยได้
12. ฉันคาดหวังว่าจะอยู่ในคลับรถยนต์นี้เป็นเวลานาน

## Appendix VII: The Respondents' Profiles

### Volvo Club Thailand Respondents

Respondents	Age	Sex	Occupation	SCI Score	Types of Membership
VV1	51	Male	Privatisation Employee	11	Club Leader
VV2	37	Male	University Lecturer	9	Club Leader
VV1Ga	60	Male	Business Owner	11	Active Member
VV1Gb	39	Male	Business Owner	12	Active Member
VV1Gc	30	Male	Business Owner	10	Active Member
VV1Gd	34	Male	Engineer	9	Active Member

### BMWSociety Thailand Respondents

Respondents	Age	Sex	Occupation	SCI Score	Types of Membership
BM1	36	Male	Business Owner	12	Club Leader
BM1b	34	Female	Researcher/Lecturer	11	Active Member
BM2Ga	30	Male	Employee	9	Active Member
BM2Gb	29	Male	Business Owner	10	Active Member
BM3	29	Male	Business Owner	11	Active Member
BM4	35	Male	Employee	10	Active Member
BM5	31	Male	Business Owner	8	Active Member

### MercedesMania Thailand Respondents

Respondents	Age	Sex	Occupation	SCI Score	Types of Membership
MM1	31	Male	Business Owner	10	Club Leader
MM1Ga	31	Male	Business Owner	11	Active Member
MM1Gb	34	Male	Business Owner	11	Active Member
MM2	48	Male	Business Owner	9	Active Member
MM3	28	Male	Business Owner	9	Active Member
MM4	34	Female	Business Owner	11	Active Member
MM5	32	Male	Employee	5	Non-active Member

### Accord Club Thailand Respondents

Respondents	Age	Sex	Occupation	SCI Score	Types of Membership
AC1	44	Male	Business Owner	10	Club Leader
AC2Ga	39	Female	Employee	11	Active Member
AC2Gb	33	Female	Employee	10	Active Member
AC2Gc	34	Male	Business Owner	10	Active Member
AC2Gd	31	Male	Business Owner	10	Active Member
AC2Ge	23	Male	Business Owner	10	Active Member
AC3	34	Male	Merchant	8	Active Member
AC4	26	Male	Employee	5	Non-active Member

**Camry Club Thailand Respondents**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>SCI Score</b>	<b>Types of Membership</b>
CR1	38	Male	Business Owner	8	Club Leader
CR2	40	Male	Employee	10	Club Leader
CR3	32	Male	Employee	10	Active Member
CR4	31	Male	Sales Manager	10	Active Member
CR5	24	Female	Business Owner	11	Active Member
CR6	30	Male	Employee	9	Active Member

**Jazz Club Thailand Respondents**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>SCI Score</b>	<b>Types of Membership</b>
JZ1	33	Female	Employee	9	Club Leader
JZ2	27	Male	Architect	7	Active Member
JZ3	28	Male	Employee	10	Active Member
JZ4	29	Male	Employee	5	Non-active Member

**Yaris Club Thailand Respondents**

<b>Respondents</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Sex</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>SCI Score</b>	<b>Types of Membership</b>
YC1	38	Male	Business Owner	11	Club Leader
YC2	34	Male	Employee	11	Club Leader
YC3	34	Male	Business Owner	10	Active Member
YC4	29	Female	Housewife	8	Active Member
YC5Ga	32	Female	Employee	11	Active Member
YC5Gb	22	Female	Student	9	Active Member
YC5Gc	23	Male	Student	10	Active Member

## Appendix VIII: The Respondents' stories

### Case: Volvo Club Thailand Respondents (VV)

Six respondents were interviewed during the fieldwork about the Volvo Club. Two of them are the club leaders, and the rest are active members. A group interview was conducted with four respondents (VV1Ga-VV1Gd). The individual face-to-face interview was conducted with VV1 and VV2. The profiles of the respondents are as follow:

VV1 (male, age 51) works in a state enterprise. He is a webmaster who is the club leader (SCI score 11). He is in love with Volvo cars and he thought that the original members should have a place for people who like similar cars to meet. He loves, and is devoted to, the club. His duties include monitoring the club's web-board. He has never wanted to seek profit from the club. As with the other members, he sometimes has to pay for activities from his own pocket. When there are DIY activities, he helps other members by teaching them technical knowledge. He explained that if there was no Volvo Club, the members would not have had a chance to know each other. He metaphorically compared the club to a newborn baby because a newborn baby is full of innocence, which implied that the club is still in its infancy stage. As a senior member, he wishes to teach the younger generation to contribute through posting positive topics on the club web-board.

VV2 (male, age 37) is the club leader who works together with VV1 (SCI score 9). He works in a university as a lecturer. His position was requested by VV1. He applied to the club because he wanted to search for car-knowledge about Volvo cars. He had applied to other car clubs before, but he had never joined in their activities. Since joining the club, he has met many people and helps other members by answering questions on the web-board. He tries to participate in activities when time allows. He has a sense of attachment to the club, loving and guarding it with a passion. He said that he would feel sad if the club no longer continued. He defined the club as *"A group of people who love the same car brand."*

VV1Ga (male, age 60) is an active member (SCI score 11) who has held another position in the club, he has also acted as a consultant. He is the most senior club member to be interviewed. Everyone calls him 'Dad'. He mentioned that if there were no club, they would not have a chance to gather and socialise with one another. He defined the club as "*a nursery home*" where members are welcomed to consult on a range of topics, from car-related issues to personal issues.

VV1Gb (male, age 39) is an active member (SCI score 12) who held another position as a consultant member. He loves Volvo and discovered the Volvo Club through Volvo-related articles posted on the Pantip website. At that time his car had some problems so he decided to explore and solve the problem by himself. When he found the club and had a chance to exchange car-knowledge, he received good will and friendship from the club members. The relationship between VV1Gb and club members' friends had extended to family level. He said that he feels that he and his club friends have similar loyalties, so it is easy for them to meet together. He defined the club as a home that has a variety of rooms in which to talk. All club activities that he has participated in and helped with were because of his willingness to do this with friends.

VV1Gc (male, age 30) is an active member (SCI score 10) who held another position as a consultant member. His reason for joining the club was because his father bought a Volvo car for him, so he wanted to find people who drove the same car. After he had chatted on the web-board, he had the chance to meet other members in person. They exchanged car-knowledge and interacted with each other, which made him feel happy and relaxed, and this prompted him to interact with them more often. He is impressed by the Volvo brand. He views the club as more than just friends, and even views Volvo as more than just a car. He describes it as receiving a new family. To him, other members are counted as his kin-folk, who can ask for advice and who are willing to help each other all the time. He defined the club as a home. As for members, he said he does not view them as members but rather respects them as brothers. He wishes to have this home remain forever. What he does for the club he does because he is pleased to do it.

VV1Gd (male, age 34) is an active member (SCI score 9) who held another position as a VIP member. He had a car problem so he searched for car-knowledge about the club

to help solve his car problem. At first he took his car to a car service centre, but they could not solve his problem. Thus, he had to search on the internet to find people who drove Volvo cars, and he found the club on the Pantip web-board. He felt a sense of affinity with other club members. He said that in the past they only chatted via the web-board and talked on the phone. After the meeting, their friendships have become closer. He said that he was one of the family members in the club.

## Case: BMWSociety Thailand Respondents (BM)

Interviews were conducted with seven respondents: one is the club leader, six are active members. BM1 and BM1b are married. BM3 is an active member and he knew BM1 from the club and they have become intimate friends. BM2Ga, BM2Gb, BM3, BM4, BM5 are active members, they know each other from the BMWSociety club.

BM1 (male, age 36) is the club leader who is a webmaster of the BMWSociety (SCI score 12). He used to work in a computer company before he quitted the job to work as a webmaster. He is currently self-employ as the webmaster and the owner of the BMW club. He had resigned from his job after he found that website design could be another source of income. He has been in love with the BMW cars since he was young. He has spent time to learn about the BMW cars. As he had prior experience in website creation, he generated the BMW website by himself. He said that members in his club were nice. He defined the club as *“a society of BMW admirers”*. It is not only focused on BMW car owners, but also everyone who admires the BMW car brand.

BM1b (female, age 34) is an active member (SCI score 11) and also the wife of BM1. She met BM1 in one of the club's web-board, and met him in person afterwards in the BMWSociety club meeting. She usually checks the web-board daily, and often participates in the main events of the club. She said that everything can be found in the club. The club is not only a place for car issues but also for all other subjects (such as travelling, eating, and feelings). It is a place where members can find all car-knowledge. In her opinion, the activities are very important because they are associated to the movement and interaction in the website. The meetings make the BMWSociety happen in real-life context and create an existence in Thai society. She defined the club as *“a home of like-minded people”*.

BM2Ga (male, age 30) is an active member (SCI score 9). He has participated in the club for eight years. He likes to do activities. Previously, he used to often join the meetings but due to time constraints, he now joins in less often. He said that he participated in the club since he was a college student. He has known the webmaster for a long time, since they were on a former web-board so he decided to participate in the club with no hesitation. He logs in to the web-board every day, and it is his routine

to check the website forum and classified pages to keep up to date on club car-knowledge. He is close to many club friends. In his view, this club is relatively well-established and according to him it is the most popular website for BMW car users in Thailand.

BM2Gb (male, age 29) is an active member (SCI score 10). He first participated in the club by following a recommendation from his college friend. At that time, he visited the web-board and was impressed by the club website so he decided to apply as a member. He used to participate in club meetings and met club friends. He also recommended that his brother joined the club. He runs a car spare parts business so he can make a profit from the BMW Society because most members in the club are his target customers. He has a fondness for the BMW Society because he feels a connection with club friends. He defined the club as *“another society where I can make money.”*

BM3 (male, age 29) is an active member (SCI score 11). He has participated in the club for eight years. He found the BMW Society from Google search engine. After he owned a BMW car, he wanted to receive BMW car-knowledge from the club and this made him decide to participate in the club. He logs in to the club website every day for the car-knowledge update. He sometimes assists with the club activities. He is close to club friends and the webmaster (BM1). He used to persuade other people to participate in the club, such as BM6. He defined the club as *“a society of friendship for people who fond of something in common.”*

BM4 (male, age 35) is an active member (SCI score 10). He is one of the club founders and has known BM1 for a number of years. He has a passion for cars, and is keen on car issues. He said that the reason he participated in the BMW Society was because he wanted to search for car modifications. He contributes to the club by writing articles on cars to share on the web-board, and by providing assistance to other members. Moreover, he demonstrates car modification techniques by taking step by step pictures and posting them onto the web-board so that other members can follow his technique. He often used to participate in the club's activities when the BMW Society was first established, but due to time constraints his attendance has since fallen. In the interview he said that this club made him feel like he had turned back time to when he was a

college student; he compared the BMW Society to a college club where he can relax his mind and soul.

BM5 (male, age 31) is an active member (SCI score 8). He participated in the club following a recommendation from his brother, who is an existing member. Before he joined he also found car-knowledge about the club website from Google and car magazines. At the time when he joined his car had a problem and he wanted to find other people who might have had a similar problem. Although he regularly participated in the meetings when he first joined the club, his attendance has since dropped off due to time constraints. Similarly, his use of the web-board has also tailed off. He defined the club as *“a small gathering society of people who have similar fondness.”*

## Case: MercedesMania Thailand Respondents (MM)

The face-to-face interviews were conducted with both group and individuals. There were seven respondents: one is the club leader, five are active members, and one is a non-active member. MM1 is the administrator. MM1Gb is a member who is close to MM1, he also takes charge as a coordinator when organising activities. MM1, MM1Gb, MM1Ga, MM2, MM4 are close to one another. MM3 is a moderator responsible in the C Class car model room. He knows MM1 (the administrator) but he does not know the other respondents in this case study. MM5 personally knows MM3, but does not know the other respondents. The profiles of the respondents are as follow:

MM1 (male, age 31) is the club leader who held the position as an administrator (SCI score 10) and one of the club's founders. He usually monitors and checks the club's movement. He is a business owner. Although he used to be a member of another car-consumer club prior to operating MercedesMania, his negative experiences in the other club made him decided to operate a new club of his own. He is personally keen on car modification. He usually participates in meetings because of friends. Because he is an influential person in the club, most of the club's operation depends on his decisions. He defined the club as "*home*" because he feels that some of the other members are a 'brotherhood' and 'intimate friends.'

MM1Ga (male, age 31) is an active member (SCI score 11). He participated in the club on the recommendation of MM1. He often participates in the web-board and the activities whenever he has free time because he wants to meet club friends. So far, he feels good about the club and the members, so he defined the club as "*home*".

MM1Gb (male, age 34) is an active member (SCI score 11). He participated in the club on the recommendation of MM1. He regularly reads the club web-boards and participates in meetings. He runs a hotel for a living. He frequently helps the club by acting as a coordinator when the club is organising a meeting. He assists the club by volunteering because he also wants to meet other club friends. He has positive impression of the MercedesMania and defined the club as "*home*".

MM2 (male, age 48) is an active member (SCI score 9). He sometimes participates in the meetings instead of taking part in the web-board. He used to be a leader of one subgroup division. He participated in the club on the recommendation of MM1Gb. He feels good about the club and the club members because he is close to other club friends (such as MM1 and MM1Gb). He defined the club as a nice club with very lovely and nice members

MM3 (male, age 28) is an active member (SCI score 9) and a moderator who is responsible for the C-Class section. He applied to participate in the club to find car parts at a discount rate. He runs a car insurance business. He also participates in the BMW Society. After he sold his BMW car, he engages in the MercedesMania more than the BMW Society. He usually checks the web-board every day because of his position and responsibilities. He often participates in the club's activities because he is one of the coordinator team and a C-Class representative. He feels that members in the club are unified, harmonious and cooperate well. Members of the club, he feels, always help each other so he defined the club as the "*friendship*" that ties them altogether.

MM4 (female, age 34) is an active member (SCI score 11). She participated in the club on the recommendation of MM2. The MercedesMania is her first car-consumer club. She applied to the club in person with the administrator. She participates in activities as often as she can. She owns a coffee shop where members often gather for meetings. Therefore, she before she participated in the club she heard about the MercedesMania from customers who came to her coffee shop. She is close to the other club friends and that makes feel a sense of belonging.

MM5 (male, age 32) is a non-active member (SCI score 5). He found the club from the Google search engine. He participates in the club purposively to find Mercedes-Benz car-knowledge. He neither participates in any activities in the club. He uses the web-board as a source of car-knowledge and, therefore, he is not close to the other club members. Even though he never communicates with other club members privately, he has a positive feeling to the club because the membership status helps him to save costs in car parts as well as providing him with car-knowledge. Accordingly, he defined the club as a "*small library*".

## Case: Accord Club Thailand Respondents (AC)

The interviews with the AccordClubThailand respondents included group and individual interviews. There are eight respondents presented in this case: one is the club leader, six respondents are active members, and the other one is a non-active member. AC1 and AC2Ga are spouses. AC2Ga, AC2Gb, AC2Gc, AC2Gd, AC2Ge are friends from the club. Everyone knows AC1 and respects him as a senior member and club president. AC3 is a member but he is located in the South of Thailand. He knows the club's movement from its website but he has no relation with AC1 and AC2. AC4 is a member who used to occasionally participate in the club's activities but who at the moment is not involved in any of the club's activities, but who follows the club's news from the website. He does not know any of the other respondents in this case study, except the president. Nonetheless, he does not know AC1 in person. The respondents' profiles are summarised as follow:

AC1 (male, age 44) is the club leader who is the president of the club and he is one of the club founders (SCI score 10). He learned how to manage a car-consumer club from chatting with friends through the MIRC chatroom which at that time was one of the most famous chatrooms in Thailand's virtual community. He is personally not keen on activities but due to the responsibilities of his position in the club he participates and this leads him to have more hobbies. He mentioned that he had an influence on club members; for example, if he initiated to play and use something, some members would follow him. Most of the people in the club know him and acknowledge him as the president and a senior member. In addition, although he has applied to join another car-consumer club, he is more close to people in the Accord Club than another club. He compared the club to a house where he acts as the father of the family. He defined the club as "*More than words*" because the club's success was far beyond what he thought possible.

AC2Ga (female, age 39) is AC1's wife and an active member (SCI score 11). She participates in the club because of her husband. Consequently, she often participates in all of the club's activities in the company of her husband. Sometimes she brings her daughter along with her to the meetings. They both like people in the club and are close to them. She respects others as family members. AC2Ga always puts her best effort into

providing assistance and cooperating with other members during the meetings. Moreover, she also participates in another car-consumer club with her husband. However, the other car-consumer club has not impressed her and it makes her feel the difference between the Accord Club and the other car-consumer clubs. In the meantime, she also participates in the web-board to keep up-to-date on club news and car-knowledge. She defines the club as “*home*” because she has a close-knit relationship with other members and the club.

AC2Gb (female, age 33) is an active member (SCI score 10). Her reason to participate in the club is similar to that of AC2Ga in that she participates in the club with her husband. She knew about the club from the Google search engine. Her husband was a member of the Accord Club before she decided to join. During her first club meeting she was impressed by the warm hospitality of members in the club. Since then, she has often joined in club meetings. If the main meetings take place, she will join every occasion. She personally likes activities. She always provides assistance to club friends as much as she can do when they organise the meetings. The meetings make her feel closer to her friends in the club. In addition, she also participates on the web-board and interacts with club friends through the club website. She defined the club as “*home*”.

AC2Gc (male, age 34) is an active member (SCI score 10). He learned about the club from Google search engine. He has some experience in web-board discussion from Pantip, a famous web-board in Thailand, where he is also a member. He had interacted with other members on the ACT web-board before he joined in activities. He usually participates in the web-board, and this habit has become his routine. When there is a main meeting, he will try to join every time to help the club. He is more impressed by the Accord Club than the Pantip web-board. He prefers to hang out with friends in the Accord Club, whom he counts as relatives, and so he defined the club as “*home*”.

AC2Gd (male, age 31) is an active member (SCI score 10). He found the club from Google. He is logged in to the club’s web-board every day. He usually participates in all of the main meetings. In addition, he is one of sport team members in the club. He has represented the Accord Club in a number sport competition between car-consumer clubs. He always provides assistance to the club, especially in sport activities. His definition to the club is “*home*”.

AC2Ge (male, age 23) is an active member (SCI score 10). He was the youngest member to be interviewed. He found the club from Google searching tool. He logs in to the web-board everyday and always participates in the main meetings. When there are meetings, he always helps the club by acting as a photographer to take pictures of events, which are then posted on the web-board. He is close to his club friends, who he regards as siblings; and so he defined the club as “*home*”.

AC3 (male, age 34) is an active member (SCI score 8). His brother recommended him to participate in the club. He views the web-board daily because he loves the car type and brand. He occasionally helps other members by answering their queries on the web-board, but he generally prefers to be a viewer. He confessed that he was not that close to the club, but he knew some members from the club and could feel friendships with them. Because his home-town is located in the South of Thailand, he has no chance of participating in the club’s main activities which organised in Bangkok. Nevertheless, he occasionally joins in other local activities that organised by the members in the Southern zone. He acts a coordinator to the club when there is a local meeting. He feels good about the club because he has received support from club friends. To him, the club can be defined as a “*personal garage*”, which reflects on the benefits he has received and is predominantly related to the club’s functional benefits.

AC4 (male, age 26) is a non-active member (SCI Score 5). His participation in the club was due to a friend’s recommendation (AC2Gc). He used to be eager to join in the club’s meetings, but his attendance decreased when he found that many people had already formed into a sub-group. He also felt that members had different ranges of ages and talked in different styles, which was hard for him to get along with. Moreover, time was another constraint on his participation because he does not have much time to attend the club meetings. At present, he only occasionally visits the web-board.

## Case: Camry Club Thailand Respondents (CR)

There are six respondents who were interviewed in this case study. The interviews were conducted with both groups and individuals. Six people were interviewed: two are the club leader and the other four are active members. No non-active members were found in this case study. CR1 is the club leader, and he is also the owner and the administrator. CR2 is the moderator who coordinates with CR1 to monitor the club. CR3 is an active member and a member of the committee of the Royal Car Style, which is one of the sub-groups in the club. CR4 is an active member and a member of the committee of the Royal Car Style sub-group. CR5 is an active member. When there are club meetings, CR5 occasionally acts as a temporary treasurer for the club. CR1 – CR5 personally know each other from the club's meetings. When time permits, they often participate in the club's activities. CR6 is an active member, but he does not have a relationship with any of the other respondents in this case study. The respondents' profiles are summarised as follow:

CR1 (male, age 38) is the club leader who is the owner and administrator of the club (SCI score 8). He is a businessman. He has absolute authority in the club management; in other words, he is able to control all of the website content, meetings, and club structure. Despite his position his SCI result indicated a score of eight, which is a moderate SC when compared to the other club members in this case study. He confessed that sometimes he was tired of his management position but the duties force him to continue working for the club. Reflecting on his personality, he is a shy person. For example, he felt weird when his picture is posted on the web-board. Previously, he did not like to take pictures with other members because he was too shy to see himself in pictures on the web-board, and he has even tried to avoid joining the meetings to avoid having his photograph taken. He has since changed his ideas and is more accepting of the other members' behaviours because the pictures of the meetings make the club active and lively. This is representative of the group's dynamics. Despite his previous issues with photographs, he has positive feelings about the club and his club friends. He described the club as "*hobby*" because it is his hobby to work for the club, although he could not deny that running the club is another source of income for him.

CR2 (male, age 40) is the club leader who works in an advertising agency (SCI score 10). He is a pioneer member who has participated actively in the club since it started. He works as a moderator for the club. He checks the web-board everyday because of his duties. He told me that he had previously had some conflict with some of the club members which had already been solved. Despite his previous problems, he says that he loves the Camry Club and has bonded with many of the Camry Club members. He expressed his feeling that his affection to the club can be compared to children who love their school. He said that it is a commonly held view that people in general love their own institutions and wish to look after them. Therefore, he defined the Camry Club as a “*school and political party*” because both institutions have comparable social institutions in comparison to the club where many people are involved.

CR3 (male, age 32) is an active member (SCI score 10). He holds a position on the committee of the Royal Car Style sub-group. He originally found the club via Google’s search engine when he was searching for car modifications. He is a friendly out-going person who enjoys parties and makes friends easily. Accordingly, he often participates in club meetings. At the first meeting, he confessed that he felt scared of new people but he had received warm hospitality and friendships from club friends at that event. He was impressed by the club friends and because of this he often joins in the club’s activities. He usually checks the web-board because it helps him to keep up to date on the club movement. He visits the web-board every day, whenever he has free time. He mentioned that members could express all matters on the web-board. He expressed the view that he is addicted to the club like a person who is addicted to a drug. He defined the club as “*friends*” because the friends are a reason for him to continue his participation in the club.

CR4 (male, age 31) is an active member (SCI, score 10). Like CR3, he holds a position on the committee of the Royal Car Style sub-group. He was asked to join the committee by CR1 and CR2. He was previously a member of the Accord Club until he had changed his personal car to the Camry car model. He also found the Camry Club via a Google search. Although his name still appears on the Accord Club web-board system, he does not participate in the Accord Club as often as he does in the Camry Club. He had previous experience of participating on web-boards before he participated in the Camry Club, and as such he has some prior experience of how to interact on the web-

board. He has contributed much of his time to the Camry Club. Consequently, he attempts to participate in all meetings if his time permits. His impression of the club has increased following his receipt of a number of benefits from the club which he did not expect. He viewed the Camry club as “*a community club*” which is open for everyone who is interested.

CR5 (female, age 24) is an active member (SCI score 11). She participates in the club because she wants to seek car-knowledge about the Camry car. She found the club via Google’s search engine. She said that the Camry club was her first club. She had previously noticed the Camry Club from a sticker that was attached to a car, which triggered her curiosity. She said that this sticker was the reason why she searched for the Camry Club through the internet and found the website. At first, she declined to join in the meeting because she was afraid of being a stranger among other club members. However, in the meeting, she met new friends who offered her a warm welcome and hospitality that surprised her. Consequently, she feels now feels very much impressed about the Camry Club, especially in view of the friendship she has received from her club friends. Now when there are the meetings she is willing to assist the club in a number of ways (i.e. acting as treasurer, buying club souvenirs and volunteering to show her car in the events without any charge). She said that she was pleased to work for the club because what she has received from the club is massive (she refers here to the friendship which she has received from club friends). Therefore, she wants to support the Camry Club in order to sustain it in the long-term. She compared the club to a “*home*” where she has brothers and sisters who care for her and listen to her on all matters. So far, the club has made her feel very happy.

CR6 (male, age 30) is an active member (SCI score 9). He personally likes car modifications. He searched for the Camry Club via Google. He mentioned that the first time that he participated in a club activity he met other people who shared common interests and that this helped him get along with them faster. He has some previous experience in a car club from a car-consumer club, but he was not close to the members of that club. He usually visits the club website daily. When there is a meeting that he can participate in, he acts as a volunteer staff member to look after the event. He participates in this club because the club has represented a true friendship to him. He

said, *“Friendship is forever and the friendship from online community can be found in real.”*

## Case: Jazz Club Thailand Respondents (JZ)

The face-to-face interviews were conducted with four respondents individually: one is the club leader, two are active members, and a non-active member is also included. JZ1 is the administrator. JZ2 and JZ3 is an active member. JZ2 has known JZ1 as the administrator but he does not know her personally. JZ4 is a non-active member. JZ3 and JZ4 are club friends. They know one another from the Jazz Club but they do not know JZ1 and JZ2 in person. The respondents' profiles are summarised as follow:

JZ1 (female, age 33) is the club leader who is the administrator (SCI score 9). She learnt about the car-consumer clubs from Pantown web-board. She currently works in a computer division, which explains her ability to operate the website. Because of her duty in the Jazz Club, she often checks the website on a daily basis in addition to participating in the main activities that are organised by the club. During each activity, she acts as a coordinator on behalf of the Jazz club, especially in the joint-activities of the car-consumer clubs. She has enjoyed these sorts of activities since she was a college student. She has a good impression on the club because she has received a number of benefits that have exceeded her expectations. She said that she neither expected the number of the club members would be massive, nor did she think that the club would come this far. Her definition of the club is: *"Friendship in the cyber world is possible if you believe."*

JZ2 (male, age 27) is an active member (SCI score 7). He has heard about the Jazz Club before he participated in the club. He searched for the club on Google when he wanted to find car-knowledge on the Jazz car club. The Jazz Club is the first car-consumer club that he has joined. Even though nowadays he is a member of another car-consumer club, he still prefers to participate in the Jazz club. He often takes part in the web-board and helps other members in answering the queries. He likes to play badminton. On some occasion, he played badminton with his Jazz Club friends. He often volunteers to help the organiser when the club holds meetings. He feels good in the club because he has obtained a group of good friends from this club. When members have any troubles, other members will try to help each other. He defined the club as *"another home"* where members always give one another a helping hand. When the interview was

undertaken JZ2 was less involved with the club than he had previously been and, therefore, his SCI index is moderate.

JZ3 (male, age 28) is an active member (SCI score 10). He searched for the club from Google. He participates in the club because he wanted to meet people from different occupations who may have different points of views. He often takes part in the club web-board. He likes chatting and kidding with friends in the web-board. He always participates in the activities as often as he can because he personally likes having activities. He feels positively about the club because he is close to club friends and appreciates their friendship. He defined the club as *“Friends who cure the loneliness”*, he described his reasons for this as being because club friends and beautiful Jazz cars can make him feel relax whenever he is suffering stress from his job.

JZ4 (female, age 29) is a non-active member (SCI score 5). She heard about the Jazz Club from her friend, and found the club from Google search. She used to believe that this club was supported by the company so she decided to participate in the club. Later on she found out that the club is run by the members themselves. She was enthusiastic about the club at the beginning of her membership. At that time, she frequently visited the web-board and participated in activities. Nevertheless, she had a conflict with the club members over souvenir ordering issues that made her feel disappointed with the people in the club. After this experience, she decided to take less participation in the club but still maintain her membership status in the club as she found it useful for her car. Subsequently, she now visits the website once a month. In her opinion, most of the members participate in the club with the main purpose to search for new friends, but not her. She defined the club as *“a group of people gathering with hidden agenda.”*

## Case: Yaris Club Thailand Respondents

There are seven respondents who were interviewed in the Yaris Club case. The face-to-face interviews were conducted with both groups and individuals. The interviewees were composed of two club leaders and five active members. The non-active member is not found in this case. YC1 and YC2 are the club administrators. They knew each other from a prior car-consumer club. YC3, YC4, YC5Ga, YC5Gb, YC5Gc are active members. They are club friends because they know each other from the club. YC5Gb and YC5Gc are in a relationship. YC3 is a leader of the Southern zone, which is a sub-group of the Yaris Club that is located in the South of Thailand. All of them are members of the Southern zone. The respondents' profiles are summarised as follow:

YC1 (male, age 38) is the club leader who held a position as the president of the club (SCI score 11). He used to be a member of a car-consumer club. He began to establish the Yaris Club based on his experience in the previous car-consumer club. As he was impressed in the car-consumer club, he decided to launch the Yaris Club in order to exchange car-knowledge and discuss the Yaris car model. He also has some experience in organising events, and he brings this experience into the Yaris Club. He always checks and monitors the web-board movement owing to his position. He compared his duty in the Yaris Club as more of a part time job than a hobby. To him, a hobby can be done occasionally but a part-time job is a special job that needs regular work. He expressed his feeling that he felt affection for, and a connection to, the club because he has built the club from scratch. Moreover, he felt secure in the club and wanted to stay there. These feelings are derived from club friends who have constantly given their understanding, thoughtfulness and provided moral support to one another. He defined the club as an "*Amusement Park*" in that it is a fun place and people here are lively and joyful.

YC2 (male, age 34) is the club leader who held a position as the administrator (SCI score 11). He knew YC1 from a car-consumer club. He was an administrator of the previous club, so he has experience in website operation. Because of his duty as the club leader, he has to be a member in other car consumer clubs in order to cooperate with other clubs and make a connection with them. Being in the car club is fun for him so he usually checks and monitors the web-board on his daily basis. He said that the

club had rewarded him beyond his expectation. He compared the club as “*High School*” which it provided happiness and fun, and especially one where the members were close to each other.

YC3 (male, age 34) is an active member (SCI score 10). He is a leader of a sub-group of the Yaris Club which is called the Yaris Club-Southern zone. He is responsible for the other members’ application and activities in the Southern area. Therefore, everyone, who wishes to be an official member in the Southern part of Thailand, has to apply in person with him and obtain the club sticker directly from him. He personally likes activities so he often organises club meetings for members in the Southern zone. He found the Yaris Club from the Google search engine. He also participates in a few car-consumer clubs; however, because of his duty as a sub-group leader in the Yaris Club, he is involved with the Yaris Club more than any other car-consumer club. He loves to join in the car-consumer clubs because these clubs make him feel that he is not driving alone. He said that if you were in the car club, you could meet friends on the road. Previously, he had promoted the Yaris Club by making brochures which were paid for by himself. When he had been a member of the Yaris Club for several years, he felt tired in organising activities. However, he is still happy with the club because he never thought that the club would come this far. He feels proud of this achievement.

YC4 (female, age 29) is an active member (SCI score 8). She often participates in all of the main meetings. She likes meetings because they provide a chance for her to meet old and new friends. She found the club from a Google search engine. She was recommended to participate in this club by a friend and the Yaris Club is her first car-consumer club. She has felt happy with the club so far, and defined the club as a “*Party*” because she can enjoy dining and having fun with club friends.

YC5Ga (female, age 32) is an active member (SCI score 11). She found out about the Yaris Club from a brochure which YC3 made. Because she owns a Yaris car, she decided to participate in the meeting and then applied to become an official member in person with YC3. She often participates in meetings. She felt good with the club because of her club friends with which she shares good times. She defined the club as “*Friends*” because club friends are like-minded people who have something in common and who talk in a similar language.

YC5Gb (female, age 22) is an active member (SCI score 9). She occasionally visits the web-board when she wants to find car-knowledge. She found out about the Yaris Club from a club sticker that was attached to a car, so she was curious and tried to search for more car-knowledge on the Internet. Once she found the website she applied first to become a web-member. She then posted a query asking if there is a sub-group in the Southern part of Thailand. When she received an answer from YC3, this was the starting point of their friendship. She is close to club friends and often participates in club web-board and activities, so she feels good about the club. She defined the club as “*Friendship*” because she this is how she feels about it.

YC5Gc (male, age 23) is an active member (SCI score 10). He is the boyfriend of YC5Gb. He found out about the club from a club sticker attached to a car which was owned by YC5Gb. He participates in the club because he wants to have the club sticker, which represents the sense of belonging. He often participates in the meetings together with YC5Gb. If he had not participated in the club, he would not have had a chance to know the other club friends. He also finds out about the details of car accessories shops through the club. Consequently, he felt good about the club. He defined the club as “*Friendship*” because he found that members always help each other.

## Appendix IX: Sample of Key Themes, Sub-Themes and Codes

Key Theme	Code	Sub-Theme	Code
Brand Community	BC	Consciousness of Kind - Legitimacy - Oppositional Brand Loyalty Shared Rituals and Traditions Shared Sense of Moral Responsibility	CK CK-L CK-O  RT MR
Behavioural Perspective Model	BPM	Consumer Behaviour Settings - Social Setting - Temporal Setting - Physical Setting Learning Histories Reinforcement - Functional - Symbolic Rule-Governed Behaviour - Pys - Tracks - Pliance - Tracking	CBS CBS-S CBS-T CBS-P LH R FR SR RGB RGB-P RGB-T RGB-PL RGB-TK
Collective Intentionality	CI	Cooperative Behaviour Shared Beliefs Shared Desires Shared Attitudes	CI-B CI-SB CI-SD CI-SA

**Key Theme:** Brand Community (BC)

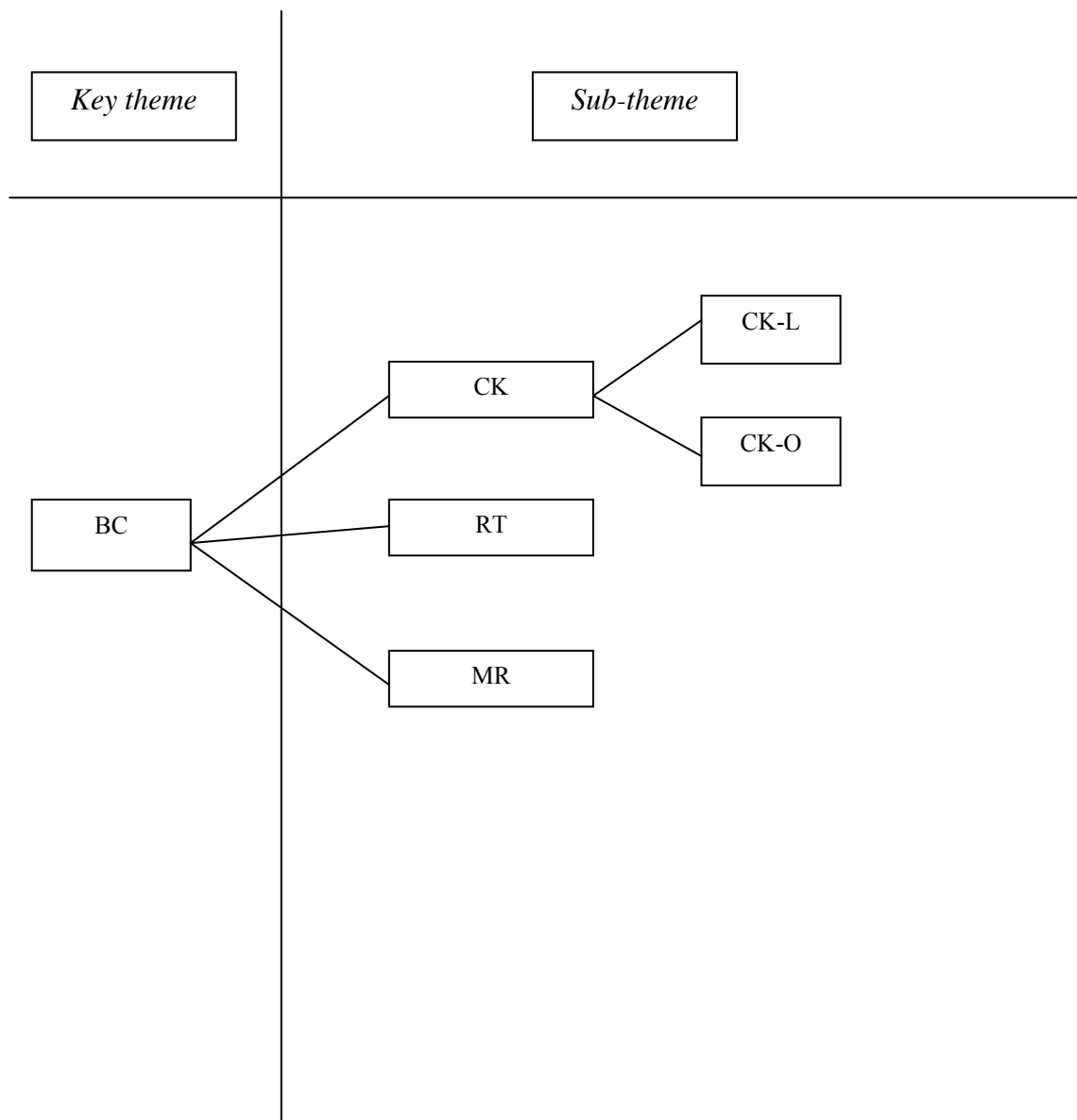
**Sub-theme**

Consciousness of Kind (CK)

- Legitimacy (CK-L)
- Oppositional Brand Loyalty (CK-O)

Shared Rituals and Traditions (RT)

Shared Sense of Moral Responsibility (MR)



**Key Theme:** Behavioural Perspective Model (BPM)

**Sub-theme**

Consumer Behaviour Settings (CBS)

- Social (CBS-S)
- Temporal (CBS-T)
- Physical (CBS-P)

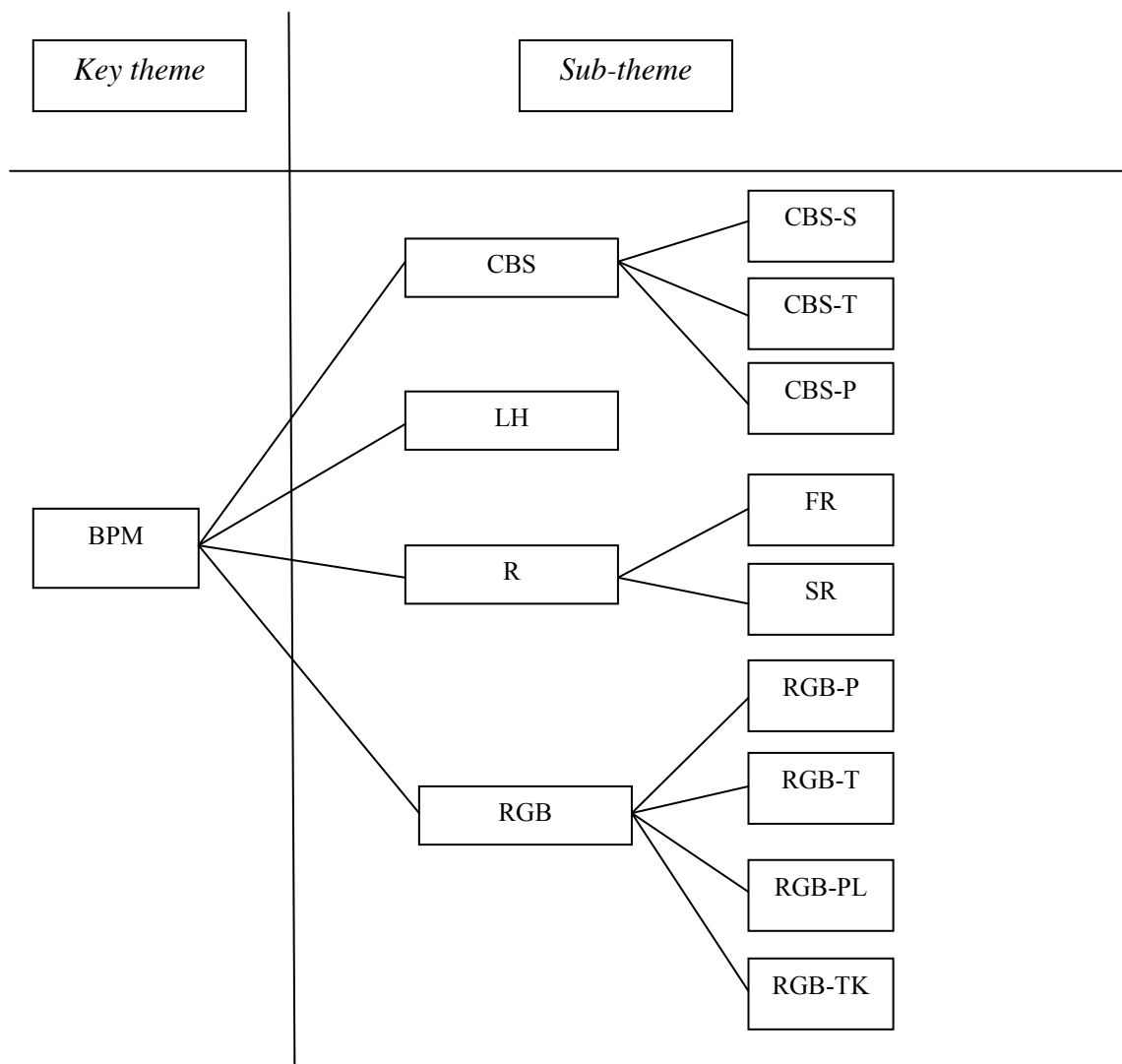
Learning Histories (LH)

Reinforcement (R)

- Functional (FR)
- Symbolic (SR)

Rule-Governed Behaviour (RGB)

- Pys (RGB-P)
- Tracks (RGB-T)
- Pliance (RGB-PL)
- Tracking (RGB-TK)



**Key Theme:** Collective Intentionality (CI)

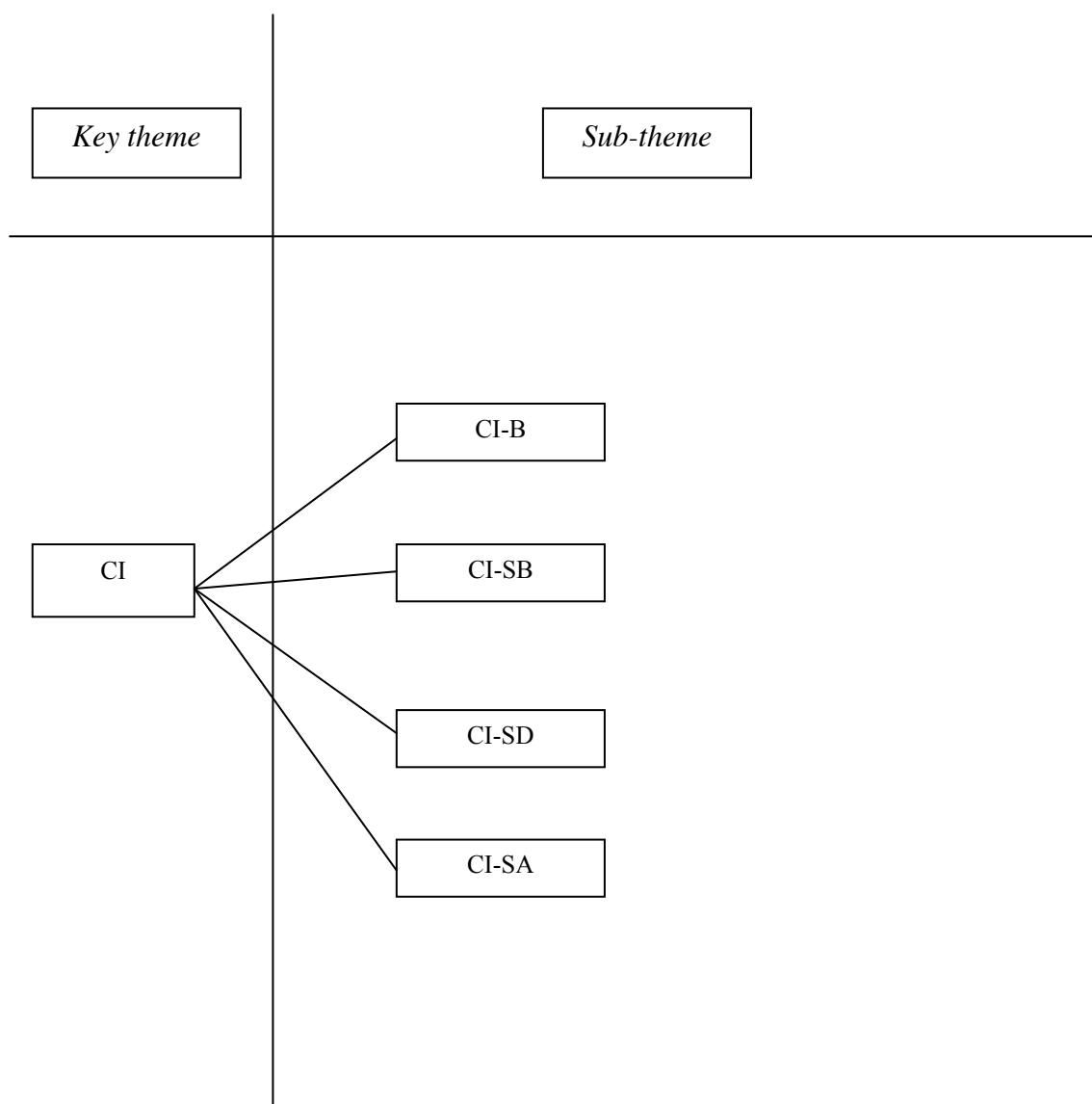
**Sub-theme**

Cooperative Behaviour (CI-B)

Shared Beliefs (CI-SB)

Shared Desires (CI-SD)

Shared Attitudes (CI-SA)



## Appendix X: Sample of Code Book- Themes and Definitions

Key Theme: Brand Community		
Sub-theme	Code	Definitions
Consciousness of Kind	CK	We-ness feelings such as “we are together” and “we are friends”.
- Legitimacy	CK-L	The degree of closeness to the community, products, and brand.
- Oppositional Brand Loyalty	CK-O	The members’ offensive behaviour towards competing brands; such as, insulting consumers of the competing brand and challenging the other brand consumers to defend their choice.
Shared Rituals and Traditions	RT	Norms and cultures within their community, including: celebrating the history of the brand; sharing brand stories and myths; and, creating a special lexicon and icons as codes of conduct in order to reify the community.
Shared Sense of Moral Responsibility	MR	Sense of duty which BC members have for their BC as a whole and for other members individually; such as, sharing knowledge with one another and helping each other.

<b>Key Theme: Behavioural Perspective Model</b>		
<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
Consumer Behaviour Settings	CBS	Discriminative stimuli that identify controlling elements and which are antecedents of current behaviour.
- Physical Setting	CBS-P	Physical surroundings that can encourage behaviour from the expected benefits which the members may receive; such as, website, website atmosphere, and aesthetics.
- Social Setting	CBS-S	This describes a member's decision making process to consume products and services which is affected by other people (such as friends and other consumers). It also includes their decision-making process which is affected by other people, when they decide to participate in the club.
- Temporal Setting	CBS-T	The time allocation and timetable of the members which will have an impact on club participation.
Learning Histories	LH	The experience of being a member in the club which has an influence on the recurrence of consumer behaviours.
Rewards	R	Positive consequences which have an effect on continued participation in the car-consumer clubs.
- Functional	FR	Functional reinforcement which derives from the benefits of the direct possession of products and services. It is related to pleasure in terms of a respondent's verbal assessment of the environment as happy, pleased, satisfied, contented, hopeful, and relaxed.
- Symbolic	SR	Symbolic reinforcement which an individual achieves from their performance; such as, social status and social esteem. It is associated with arousal in terms of verbal reactions to an environment which shows the respondent to be stimulated, excited, frenzied, jittery, wide-awake, and aroused.

<b>Key Theme: Behavioural Perspective Model</b>		
<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
Rule-Governed Behaviour	RGB	The behaviour that is controlled by verbal stimuli.
- Pliancy	RGB-P	The rules for pliance from the speaker, which are those statements that imply the expected action from the listener and which are contained in the words “would” and “should”.
- Tracking	RGB-T	The rules for tracking function as a kind of signpost in guiding behaviour which specifies environmental contingencies that already existed before the rule was stated.
- Pliance	RGB-PL	Includes behaviour such as following orders and commands. It also includes the behaviour of someone who does something in order to please someone else who asks them to do it. It can also describe the behaviour of an individual who conducts themselves by their own self-rules from their learning histories, even though the reinforcement in this case is mediated by others.
- Tracking	RGB-TK	Includes behaviour such as using manuals or written instructions as a behavioural guideline for individual behaviour.

<b>Key Theme: Collective Intentionality</b>		
<b>Sub-themes</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Definitions</b>
Cooperative Behaviour	CI-B	Collective actions or cooperative behaviour of two or more people.
Shared Beliefs	CI-SB	The intentionality of members towards the existence of objects.
Shared Desires	CI-SD	The intentionality of members in relation to their desire.
Shared Attitudes	CI-SA	The member's attitudes and we-intentions to do something, or the intentional social action of members.

## Appendix XI: Examples of Club Stickers and Club T-Shirts

### Club Stickers



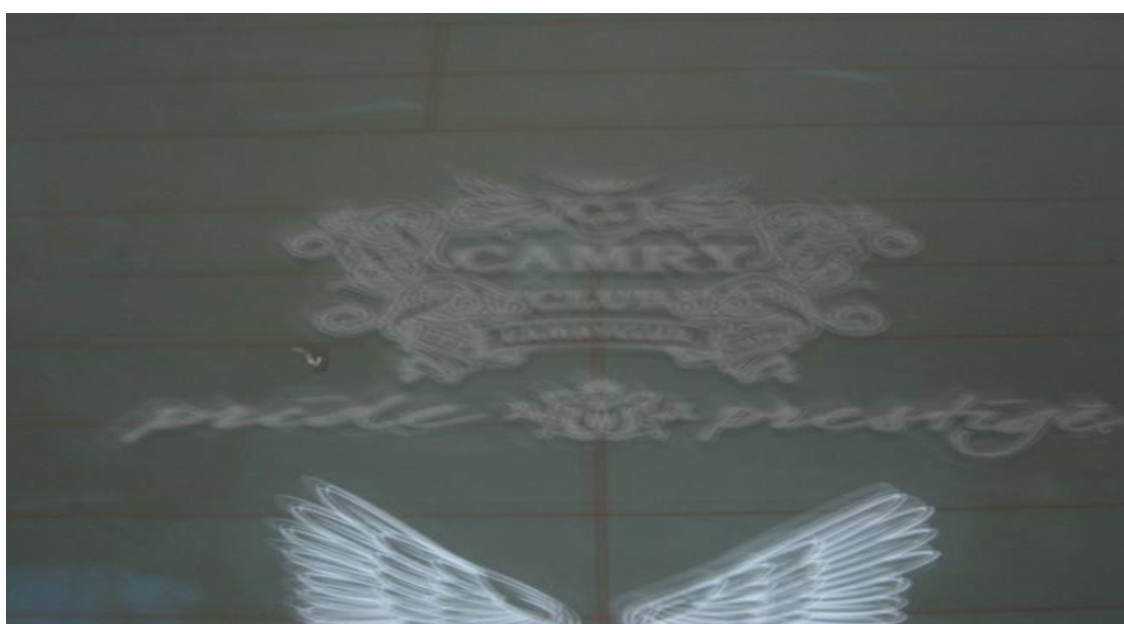




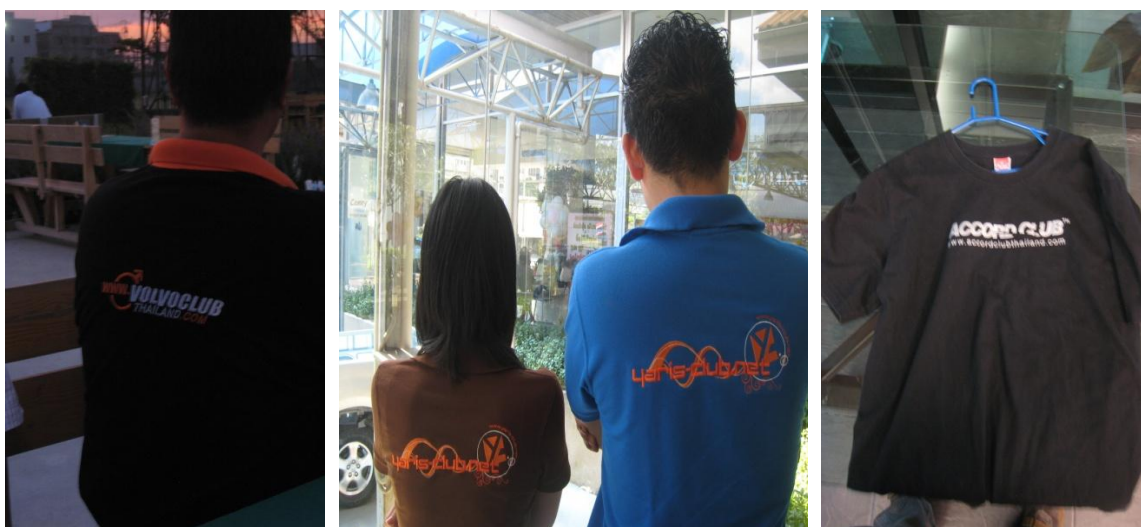








## Club T-Shirts



## Appendix XII: Examples of Club Logo



WWW.BMWSOCIETY.COM



## Appendix XIII: Sample of Club Activities

### Motor Show



### DIY Meeting



## Club Meetings



## Tam-Boon Events



## Nork-Rorb



## Sport Competition

