

# Consumer Tribalism in Buying Decision Role

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## ABSTRACT

Not all brands are able to cater to the entire market. While companies have the resources to market their brands across market segments, many marketers choose not to do so. This will not only weaken the marketer's message of the brand, but will also prevent the marketer from building a strong relationship with the consumer. Consumers generally have a specific buying role, and the role of each specific consumer requires a more specific message and attention from marketers. However, as market continues to adopt consumer tribalism, traditional buying role is becoming obscure. This research approach uses an interpretation based on an inductive mindset by utilizing the phenomenological paradigm. This approach is taken in context to better understand social phenomena about target market and target audience. The company can only direct opinions, messages, and impressions to them as phenomenon of tribalism is prevalent in the market today. Marketers need to pay attention to the unique things that are created in the concept of tribalism. Although there is a key opinion leader who holds the position of "tribal leader", the attitude of the consumer tribe towards the product is organic.

**Keywords:** *Buying decision role, phenomenological paradigm, consumer tribalism, marketing management*

## 1. BACKGROUND

Honda in Indonesia is one of motorcycle manufacturers that focuses on the large-motorcycle market-segment in Indonesia. Honda's line of big-capacity engine motorcycle, called the Big Wing, was positively accepted by the market in Indonesia, and the best-selling model was the Honda CMX 500 Rebel. The 471cc twin-engine motorcycle has a manly and masculine appearance, with light-weight and low-seating height made for an enjoyable driving position.

Launched in 2017, Honda Rebel became the Honda's best-selling large-motorcycle in Indonesia. The popularity of Honda Rebel in Indonesia cannot be separated from its manly design, favored by motorists who like to take road-trips but still want to look modern. According to the Indonesian Motorcycle Industry Association (AISI), in 2019, Honda Rebel contributed more than 50 percent of Honda Indonesia large-motorcycle sales by Astra Honda Motor (AHM), with the total sales volume of large-motorcycle category by Honda each year of 500 to 600 units [1].

Honda Rebel 500 is a motorcycle with sporty-cruiser style, and is suitable for long trips. The design of this motorcycle is the main attraction, and is available in Graphite Black and Matte-Armored Silver Metallic, and in 2020, it presented a new color-option: Blue Metallic Jeans. After three years, Honda Rebel got a minor-model refreshment, with Thomas Wijaya, as the Marketing Director of AHM, stating that although the large-motorcycle market in Indonesia is stagnating, contributing below one percent to

Honda Indonesia motorcycle-business, the demand for Honda Rebel is the largest in the category.

For Indonesian large-motorcycle enthusiasts, Honda Rebel is an attractive prospect in regards to its pricing. Compared to other 500cc-capacity motorcycles, it sits currently in the middle of the market with a price-tag of 180 million Rupiah. With a relatively-affordable price and sharp design, it is clearly aimed at the young generations and the those who are young-at-heart. Demographically, the target market for Honda Rebel 500 is males aged between 18 and 55 years old, who live in Indonesia capital city or large cities.

The question arises about who were the real buyers, and who initiated the purchase? Not all brands are able to cater to the entire market. While companies have the resources to market their brands across market segments, many marketers choose not to do so. This will not only weaken the marketer's message of the brand, but will also prevent the marketer from building a strong relationship with the consumer.

While some marketers may argue that marketing to a large audience is the best way to reach as many potential customers as possible, there is an evidence that this approach is no longer effective at reaching the right people. Therefore, the question arises, are there any influencers who influence the actual buying decision? Who is the real Honda Rebel 500 user? Who actually decide to buy? As these questions suggest, the reality of buying and selling is often not as what it seems. The psychological and emotional factors that play a strong role in buying and selling are usually not observed. By ignoring this less-tangible aspect of selling, vendors can lose sales and do not even understand why. This study

examined the procedures for analyzing purchasing decisions and understanding the decision-making process, and determining the purchasing process. The steps in the process include identifying actual decision-makers, determining how they perceive their personal interests, and using that information to develop an effective sales strategy. The main problem in this study is how to understand the audience's role as the marketing target of Honda Rebel 500. The purpose of this study was to determine the role of the audience as a target in the marketing activities of Honda Rebel 500.

## 2. THEORETICAL BASIS

Marketing refers to organizational goals, trying to market the products to meet consumer needs through a series of integrated communication activities. Consumers in general have a specific role, and this role requires a more specific message and attention from marketers. As individual consumers have a more specific role, they will have an influence on the actual product selection decisions. As individuals may not necessarily have the final authority to buy, they can influence, initiate, and even suggest to interfere, or even discontinue others to buy a particular brand. This specific group of people are decision influencers. Marketers need to understand the role in more details in determining who the real consumer is. Each role can drive a specific agenda and provide arguments that can encourage specific action. Therefore, marketers need to know every role of consumers as their marketing communication effort.

Consumer tribe is not a new phenomenon, and in fact, is a natural evolution from the traditional-buying decision process that involves influences and references from other person in the inner-circle of family of the person wanting to consume the product being marketed. Consumer tribe evolves from traditional-buying decision process that the inner-circle is now exponentially extended, including people outside the family-circle and incorporating people who are beyond the family but with similar interests. This is because as irrelevant influences from family have been provided, human beings are still a social creature, and seeks recognition from their peers. Most importantly, it is the sense-of-belonging that makes a person seek out a group of like-minded people to converse and discuss the same things that they have been preferred to. This phenomenon is call tribalism, and mostly involves a group of people congregating on the same principles and interests. When it involves a product or service, this group is called consumer tribe [2].

A target market group consists of one or more individuals who have different roles in the buying decision process. Roles consist of specific behaviors expected of a person in a certain position [3]. If someone takes a role, then normative pressure will affect them to act in a certain way. In the buying process, people are divided into five roles, namely: (1) Guardian of the Gate; the person who firstly takes the initiative to propose the idea of buying a product or service. (2) Influencers; people who have the ability to

influence decision-making based on their suggestions and views. (3) Determinants; people who make decisions in the buying process, including the decision not to buy, how to buy, and where to buy (4) Buyers; people who actually make a purchase, by going to the counter directly, or by some other means. (5) Users; people who consume or use certain products or services [4].

## 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research was to explain thoroughly about the problem to be studied and observed, especially the understanding of the target audience as a whole. The purpose of this research was to answer the questions posed through the formulation and identification of problems. This research uses an interpretation based on an inductive mindset, a method of reasoning in which the premises are viewed as supplying some evidence, for the truth of the conclusion and utilizing the phenomenological paradigm. This approach was taken in the context to better understand social phenomena about target markets, target audiences, and its relevance in buying-decision process. 25 Participants were selected as if there were a point of diminishing return whereas increasing the sample size no longer contributes to the evidence. The sample does not need to be large enough to support the statements of prevalence or incidence. As such, qualitative samples for a single study involving individual interviews only often lie under 50 respondents [5]. Although the sample size is contingent on a number of factors related to epistemological, methodological, and practical issues, [6] agreed that 15 is the minimum number of interview sample to reach data saturation.

Data in this study was processed by inductive methods and qualitative approaches. The purpose of this research was to reveal the facts, circumstances, phenomena, and variables that occurred during the research and functioned as they were. This qualitative research would interpret and describe the data concerned with the current situation, attitudes, and views that occur in marketing activities. Phenomenological approach has a purpose to illuminate a specific phenomenon, in order to identify it through how they are perceived by the person experiencing it. Epistemologically, phenomenological approaches are based in a paradigm of personal knowledge and subjectivity, to emphasize the importance of personal perspective and interpretation. As such, they are powerful for understanding subjective experience, gaining insights into people's motivations and actions, and cutting through the clutter of taken-for-granted assumptions and conventional wisdom.

This empirical phenomenology approach involves the process of connecting individual experiences to acquire a fundamental and comprehensive picture as a reflective structural analysis to summarize the essence of the discussion. Phenomenological research is a research design that comes from economics, especially management and psychology, whereas the researcher

describes a study of individual life experiences about a phenomenon as described by the participants [7].

In-depth interviews provide the opportunity for researchers to take notes about personal experiences such as speculation, emotions, problems, ideas, thoughts, impressions, and prejudices. To search for more complete information, researchers would also conduct participant observation and in-depth online interviews with participants using snowball techniques, which were conducted in Jakarta from June to August 2020.

#### **4. DISCUSSIONS**

Marketers tend to focus on consumers, because businesses are built around the consumers themselves. Any adjustments in the marketing approach must consider the consumer as the core of the strategy. Every action taken must take into account the views of consumers in assessing its products. Classifying consumer segments can help identify strategies for growing market share [8]. In general, an effective segmentation requires a market segment to have six attributes: it must be measurable, accessible, substantial, distinguishable, actionable and stable. In practice, fulfilling all the six attributes is often difficult. The characteristics of segmentation, such as personality traits, accessibility, are often difficult and expensive to measure, to be successful in marketing activities. Success in marketing requires more attention to segmentation. The segmentation that has been previously stated, can be in form of geographics, demographics, psychographics, behaviors, and benefits.

The simplest of all segmentation strategies is the geographical segmentation. Geographical segmentation is quite simple, focusing about the location of the consumer being analyzed. Another very common form of segmentation, demographics, includes the factors such as age, race, gender, education, occupation, income, and economic status. A segmentation area provides a reflection of the characteristics of a group of people. The downside of this type of demographic segmentation is that there is a big assumption that people with the same characteristics will behave in the same way, which in some cases is far from the truth. For example, someone who is aged 45 years, unemployed and poorly educated, might have peers who are roughly in the same demographics, but they might behave differently in attitude and frame of thought. Historically, it has been difficult to understand consumer behavior, but in the world of Big Data, marketers can better understand consumers, especially those in the digital space. This method classifies consumers by buying patterns and usage behavior. This non-traditional approach looks at the demographic, psychographic, behavioural, and geographic profile of the target audience and determines what surface, vehicle, or type of event that will or will not reach it [9].

This is an excellent way to talk to individuals in a way that resonates with them. Behavior can change according to the consumer's lifestyle. Marriage, starting a business, can lead to behavioral change [8].

Behavioral change is something that is important to understand in marketing, as understanding changes in behavior is in fact based on consumer perceptions, thus perception is the key. Consumer perceptions make the same product different. Harley Davidson motorcycles, seen as a sign of achievement; others see it as a luxury motorcycle. It is the result of perception - the process by which an individual selects, organizes, and interprets the information to create a meaningful picture of the world [10]. This perception underlies the segmentation of benefits perceived by consumers. Many businesses use this to understand the consumer base and to inform product development and marketing opportunities. The perceived benefits of motorcycles are different for each different segment, so may be marketers need to change the perception of motorcycles or issue a new model to attract new segments. Psychographic segmentation sounds very complex, but it is only an understanding of the consumer's lifestyle. This includes learning activities, opinions, beliefs and interests. Understanding these elements can, similar to behavioral segmentation, produce messages and products that really resonate with individual consumers.

From the observation of Honda Rebel 500 among users who have been interviewed, it can be concluded that Honda Rebel 500 motorcycle consumers are seemingly free from segmentation restrictions. Geographical segmentation that divides the world into geographic subsets, such as residential areas, does not apply to Honda users. Honda Rebel 500 users are scattered in urban areas. Demographic segmentation which is widely used and based on available and measurable consumer characteristics, also does not apply. The users of Honda Rebel 500 have no significant group of people and it is difficult to categorize into age, gender, family size, income, profession, and education. The psychographic segmentation of Honda Rebel 500 users is very diverse in attitudes, interests, opinions, values, and lifestyles because of the range of differences in education, experience, and life views expressed in consumer behavior. Honda Rebel 500 users gave positive responses to Honda's promotional activities. Honda focuses on the benefits or value that consumers want to obtain, creating segmentation based on benefits. Honda Rebel 500 users view their motorcycles in accordance with their expectations of social activities.

The view point of Honda Rebel 500 motorcycle users group forms a persona into the same group, namely glorifying Honda. This group is a collective one, whereas each member has a strong relationship about the brand, but in daily activities only has an ordinary relationship. This collective relationship places someone who is dominant in the group as a determinant in making purchasing decisions. Each group member obeys what the leader who acts as a charismatic decider. This charismatic leader more or less sets the agenda for the group, acting akin as the parental figure in the group, a respected senior who dominate and direct the group. This group has taken a new form as a contemporary consumer embodiment of the extended family or the traditional form of Indonesian society. Basically, human beings are still social creatures and feel the need to be part of the community. These

communities develop into small tribes of consumers and they grow as human beings who have basic need for social relations. This is not new, and of course marketers have long applied the Abraham Maslow's theory, to position the brand as a way of accessing social relationships. As those needs are partially fulfilled, consumers move up the pyramid to higher needs of physical safety, affiliation or social connection, and esteem. At the top of the pyramid is self-actualization [11].

Social relations among members of consumer tribes support the principle of belonging, in order to be accepted in the group. By being included in the Honda Rebel 500 community, a person will feel that they are part of something bigger. That is why when it comes to contemporary consumer tribes, one must use the term 'linking value'. The value of interconnection indicates that the tribes gather together around what they have collectively imagined or built. Honda Rebel 500 users apply as a set of shared values, practices, and emotions that are applied when riding and hanging out together. The main role of consumer tribes is to support the value of tribal linkages, in which this concept is very important for the practice of consumer tribes [2].

This idea of the value of tribal linking is fundamental to tribal consumer practice. Tribal members are affiliated together, first and foremost because of their shared values and emotions. Tribal members share values, including the principles of usefulness, independence, personal freedom, and togetherness within consumer tribal groups. These consumer tribes are not united by some sort of need to remain in a community solely for this sense of the social connection provided. Conversely, social relationships stem from shared emotions, shared beliefs, that the shared objects or practices really matter. Honda Rebel 500 motorcycle users finds the objects or the importance of sharing information, sharing current conditions, and traveling together as the things that are important to them. Members of the tribe were excited about AHM activity regarding Honda Rebel 500. They genuinely want to form social relationships with the fellow Honda Rebel 500 motorcyclists. The brand of this motorcycle, or the corporate activities associated with it, and what it represents, really matters to Honda Rebel 500 users, and consumers are willing to be involved and want social connections with other Honda Rebel 500 users. As a result, Honda Rebel 500 users are part of the same consumer tribe.

Group narcissism is another key concept that defines consumer tribalism. Group narcissism is the formation of tribal identities and associated values built on a shared passion, whether a passion for a brand, an activity, or both, and this shared desire is demonstrated and enforced. Consumers show that their personal identity, activity, or object of shared service is important as part of their tribal beliefs. As much as belonging, the tribe also enforces demonstrative actions. The importance of this identity is affirmed together by participating, often in a very visual way, in the documentation of tribal activities. Honda Rebel 500 users, especially through social media, share the information, photos of activities, recreation areas they

visit, culinary delights, in order to help each other maintain their youthful activities.

This youthful appearance, although not the characteristic of all consumers tribes, does serve to highlight the importance of participation. For all tribes, participation is mandatory, so there is something for members and everyone to really see and enjoy. The only real taboo - if one wants to become a member of the tribe - is not participating. Group narcissism is called as such because of the collective self-indulgent and satisfying nature of the activities at the center of the whole consumer tribe phenomenon. There is no limit to how many members there are in consumer tribalism, but in fact, the more member they are, the more amplifying effect is applied in the community. The arrival of new members in the community affects the overall conceptualization to a certain extent; however, this effect is not as drastic as one might imagine at first sight when interpreting that the socially-constructed nature of a community identity is individually-driven [12].

The tribe members who admired Honda as the brand, will immerse themselves in exhibitionistic forms. This exhibitionist is more of an expression of group narcissism, easily fulfilled in far more subtle ways than demonstrative behavior. Group members demonstrate their fulfillment of requirements to become members of the consumer tribe by visualizing the activities they participate in. This participatory visualization shows the values that connect the interactions between tribal members and help perpetuate the consumer's ethnic identity. This identity is reflected in value links; practice of group narcissism, and brand concentration [2].

The identities of Honda Rebel 500 users are linked to values, including the principles of usefulness, self-confidence for independence, personal freedom, and togetherness. This togetherness allows them in their group to connect with each other, exchange information, upload photos online to show others how they ride their Honda Rebel 500. Honda Rebel 500 users give each other the advice on better ways to keep their motorcycles in prime condition. These enhanced experiences and usage practices serve to renew and perpetuate the enthusiasm and pride in Honda Rebel 500, and simultaneously the Honda brand itself. Referring to the simplification of the Honda Rebel 500 tribal topology of consumer ethnic values, owning the motorcycle and belonging to a group amplifies the tribal linking, group narcissism practices, and brand concentration.

Honda Rebel 500 users view that the motorcycle purchasing decisions require high consideration, so they require the sources of information that are known to consumers. Purchase decisions are based on the feelings of the consumers themselves. Such purchases are driven by emotion and for self-indulgence and satisfying one's ego. Such purchasing decisions require self-assurance during the decision-making process. The purchase decision is based more on the feeling of conformity, after which it is studied about the possibility of buying the motorcycle. This purchase decision was made collectively in the

conversation of family and peers in a group of Honda Rebel 500 users.

The purchasing process of the Honda Rebel 500 is unique as it is not distinguished exclusively into separate roles such as: Gate Keeper, Influencer, Decider, Buyer, and User. In fact, the role of an individual is changed because of the era of interconnectivity.

Entering the era of interconnectivity is supported by the internet as a source of information and social media. Various sources of information make Honda Rebel 500 users have something in common: the value of connectedness, narcissism, and promotion of the Honda brand. Honda Rebel 500 users who carry out purchasing roles have increasingly mingled, and through social media have gathered into one unit, becoming a tribe. Traditional marketing efforts to map the target audiences into a single entity are no longer applicable in this modern era, whereas thanks to the Internet, everyone can easily connect, create the communities and a distinct understanding of the products they use communally. The use of traditional distribution channels through second-party or third-party physical shops is no longer relevant. The speed provided by internet technology allows manufacturers to engage their consumers directly. As a result, there are several points that can be concluded from this tribal-based marketing activity. The internet is an ideal communication platform for users to gather and share the stories about unique activities among their peers. Not only do they come together to share internally, but they will also spread their opinions externally to other groups or people.

The concept of tribalism becomes a congregation between users and marketers. Users and marketers are now already in close proximity, because there are no interfering voices in communication that can break the understanding of the two. These meetings also create a fast exchange of information between users and marketers so that the feedback on quality improvements or feature additions can occur quickly. There is no longer any need for research efforts through third parties that are prone to communication breakdowns and bias.

A large company with rigid hierarchical structure might be limited in its activities to engage the communities, however, an abundance of results can be enjoyed on achieving such feat. Generally, these engagements can only be done at a small scope like on a family-owned business, in which the company owner can communicate directly with their users and makes the changes accordingly. There are also negative opinions about large corporations regarding the corporation's propensity to focus more on profits, thus only care about catering the larger community and leaving the small one behind [13]. Small companies that can communicate effectively are assumed to be able to move more freely in welcoming their user's tribalism.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The concept of consumer tribalism instigates the unification of traditional marketing and e-commerce

activities, whereas previously marketers sell via third-party e-commerce, now they can easily attract their users back to the company's website and expose potential consumers to images, stories, and events that benefit the company without direct comparison. Companies should increasingly pay attention to marketing strategies that apply the segmentation flexibly, without rigid boundaries such as creating community forums, which are moderated so that they are immediately exposed to the conversations of their users and can implement changes as quickly as possible. This event will directly develop the consequences of commercial purchases [14].

The theories supporting the concept of tribalism also fully support personal networking as an important weight to consider in creating marketing activities. This personal network is the relationship between individuals in their personal circle of relationships. The personal relationship weighs more in consideration compared to the professional consideration that weighs opinion on facts. Being part of a consumer tribe is not only being loyal to a product or service, but also being an active part of spreading messages and good impressions. This makes marketers need to pay attention to the unique things that are created in the concept of ethnicity. Although there is a key-opinion leader who holds the position of "tribal leader", the attitude of the consumer tribe towards the product is organic. The company can only direct opinions, messages and impressions to them. Forcing the traditional marketing metrics or concepts toward these tribal consumers will be disastrous, because the concept of ethnicity is organic.

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