



# Bryant University

HONORS THESIS

## Seeking to Understand Subaru's Turbocharged Appeal: A study of brand communities, product utility, and corporate promotion

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**ABSTRACT**

This study attempts to analyze Subaru's significant and unique appeal in the greater automotive market. The primary research findings are presented in a video documentary, while frameworks for existing research on certain facets of brand management and consumer groups are presented in the following paper. Based on analysis of existing data and interviews conducted with people connected to the brand, we can conclude that the phenomenon is a result of an appealing product that offers differentiated utilities at an affordable price, the formation of consumer groups around the various offerings, and insightful promotion on Subaru's part. The degree to which each of these factors is responsible for cultivating a following varies based on the consumer group; the convergence of these three phenomena is, if not unique in the vehicle marketplace, very distinctive.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Automobiles have transcended their utility and become far more than just a method of getting from place to place. They are a fashion item, status symbol, and cultural phenomenon underscored by their intended function. My fascination with cars and the automotive industry has been longstanding. In approaching my capstone, I set out to combine the study of marketing, the automobile industry, and a creative medium. The inspiration to study Subaru came from personal experience as a passenger in a friend's Subaru. As we would drive down the road, it seemed that every Subaru owner would smile, wave, or give us a thumbs up. I asked him if this was commonplace and he confirmed that it happened every day and that it was a "Subaru thing".

Approaching my capstone, I wanted to explore this phenomenon in greater detail. Initial research and personal experience indicated that there was a strong sense of community amongst Subaru owners. I set out first to prove the existence of such a community and explore how strong that sense of community is. The more I looked into these buyers and spoke to various owners, the more I realized how deeply passionate people are about the brand. I then began to wonder how such passionate groups had formed under one singular brand around a seemingly mundane automobile. That is to say, these groups did not form around Italian or German exotics, but rather unpretentious affordable all-wheel drive cars.

The following paper will detail the existing literature on concepts related to the phenomena related to Subaru, and how those concepts related to findings from the primary research conducted for this study. The results and findings are best understood in conjunction

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with viewing the full documentary created for this project. A transcript of the video has been provided (See *Video Transcript*).

#### **Research Methodology**

To create this documentary, I sought out Subaru owners who were connected to the brand in a meaningful way. Those connections included vehicle ownership, affiliation with a Subaru dealership, and status as a Subaru Ambassador. I interviewed these individuals on camera and obtained signed disclosure agreements to feature their likeness and their opinions in my project.

I got in contact with a personal connection who happened to be a Subaru Ambassador. He was able to point me to a number of individuals who would be willing to interview for this project. Through social media sites like Instagram and Facebook, I reached out to these individuals to set up interviews. Some of the people I spoke to were then able to refer me to other individuals who they thought would be good candidates to interview. The network effect within the Subaru community was notable, as one single connection turned into many.

Initially, I had created a list of interview questions that I would ask my subjects. However, as the project progressed, I narrowed my focus with each subject that I interviewed, instead asking them to speak on a certain aspect of Subaru ownership that they were most familiar with. For instance, when I spoke with modification enthusiasts, I focused my interview questions on related to modification.

Some interview subjects referenced online communities and websites in their interviews. I referenced these sources to both verify and supplement the claims they made.

### **The Nature and Power of Brands**

At a basic level, brands are simply names, logos, or symbols that are used to distinguish products of similar function. A brand is however, much more than just a marketing tool to sell widgets. Brands have taken on much more meaning than we may initially realize. Citing J. L. Aaker, 1997, Sussan (2013) refers to the human characteristics that we assign to brands.

These traits are by and large symptomatic of characteristics usually used to describe human personality, which are re-appropriated by the consumer to refer to the brands themselves, resulting in a personified brand personality (J. L. Aaker, 1997)

We then use these personified brands as a social prop to create and form our identities. Jung and Merlin (2003) build on this notion, stating that purchased products have three benefits; functional, emotional, and self-expressive. The third benefit is derived from the brand itself. "Second-skin" products, including cars, are self-expressive in that others use these items to evaluate the person who uses them.

Therefore, driving a Subaru indicates something about the owner's personality. This may vary by the owner, model of Subaru, or the individual evaluating the Subaru owner. When talking to Subaru owners, especially those who modify their vehicles, it was clear that their cars were an expression of their personality. One subject in particular put incredible amounts of money and effort into making her car an expression of herself. Her interests in video games were represented on the car with various gun motifs and her favorite color, pink, was heavily used as an accent color. She even had a \$3,000 custom paint job on the car that was a shade of Subaru blue featuring a pink metal flake. The cars we choose to drive are an expression of who

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we are to the world on the motorways. By modifying their cars, owners make even more of a pronounced statement about their personalities to the world. With the prevalence of modification amongst owners, it can be said that Subaru owners are drawn to the brand at least partially for self-expression reasons.

### **The Management of Brand Communities**

Despite having human characteristics, brands are completely non-human, intangible, and non-sentient. It is therefore the job of the brand manager to define personified brands through narrative and action. In Jaworski's (2008) work on brand management he argues that brands need to have a strong top-down approach, emphasizing that control should ultimately be given to a singular brand manager; he proposes that when left to the devices of a group of people, brands cannot grow as they need to. Having a singular brand manager who controls the direction of the brand is a more effective method based on the examination of various brands. He cites one of Subaru's early mistakes trying to position Subaru as "inexpensive and built to stay that way". The brand has since moved away from this positioning as they target a different market.

Subaru's brand management dynamic is interesting with this concept in mind, because the touch points that a lot of enthusiasts interact with are not necessarily dictated by Subaru corporate. Advertising and dealership interactions are controlled (to an extent) by Subaru, but for most enthusiasts, they are interacting with the brand in many other ways. Their interactions with forums and social media are not controlled by Subaru. Even the Ambassadors are only loosely linked to the corporate brand. Information about new vehicles and announcements are controlled by Subaru, but after they are disseminated through the

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enthusiast channels, they have little to no control over that message. This has worked out favorably, as Subaru appears less heavy-handed than some other brands, while giving the enthusiast communities an avenue to interact with the brand.

**The Role of Tribes**

Scholars point out that when products can be purchased with little to no social interaction, the more important aspect to study is the value of the group associated with the brand. Cova and Cova (2002) support the view that goods are purchased as much for their ability to connect people as they are for their utility. Looking at postmodern tribes, they propose that the new tribal landscape is built on a foundation of shared passions.

The unit of reference used in tribal marketing is more a micro-social cohort of individuals who share similar experiences and emotion, and who bond together in loosely interconnected communities e.g. tribes.

They also define the characteristics of a postmodern tribe and outline the four necessary components that make up a tribe in the following diagram.



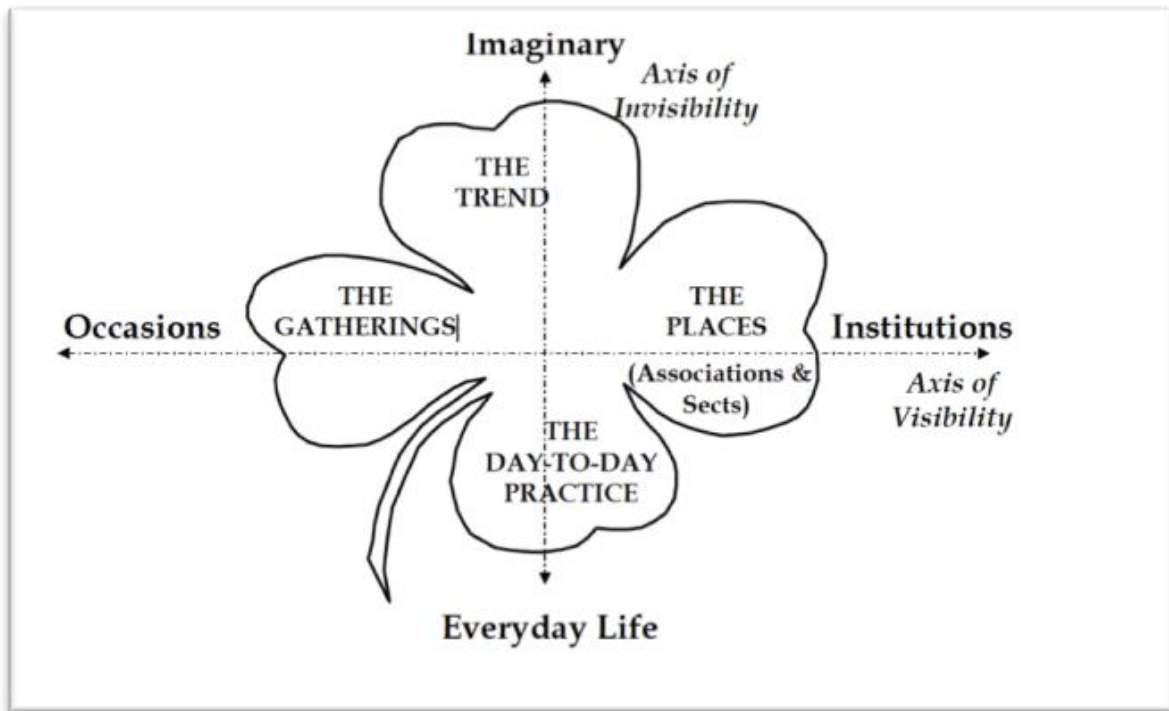


Figure 1. The tribal clover (Cova & Cova, 2000, p. 13)

In this framework, the physical evidence of tribes is (sic) located on the horizontal or "visible" axis (traces or evidences). This includes, on the temporal plane, the moments when tribal members come together for their rituals (occasions), and on the spatial plane, the physical meeting places and virtual spaces (institutions) where tribes convene. On the vertical or "invisible" axis (hints or shadows), we detect the signs coming from day-to-day activities (the personal and shared experiences) as well as the trends and vogues and other constituents of fantasy and imagination that sweep briskly through society.

This model pertains to a wide number of brands and company entities and is applicable to the Subaru enthusiasts. The day-to-day practice encompasses all the group-interaction that Subaru owners engage in. Whether it is giving each other a thumbs up on the road, or communicating

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with each other on an online forum, there are many ways for members of the Subaru tribe to interact with each other. The gatherings of Subaru owners are the events that are facilitated by enthusiasts. This includes events like Wicked Big Meet (described in the video) or local meetups. On the other side of the axis are Institutional events. This would include things like Subaru sponsored meetups or events at individual dealerships.

The meeting places where these tribes exist varies tremendously. Subaru has the advantage of having multiple touch-points where owners can interact and strengthen their connection to the community. These touch-points include online forums, social media, dealerships, events, and even on the road. The fluid existence of all of these places for facilitating community interaction is at least someone unique to Subaru in the car industry as a whole.

Acknowledging that these groups exist, brands have to understand their role in marketing to them. Cova and Pace (2006) first establish that the product is a tool of self-expression and then conclude that brands should enable communities in a non-intrusive manner.

The virtual community that gathers around a convenience product brand shows a new form of sociality and customer empowerment: it is not based on interaction between peers, but more on personal self-exhibition in front of other consumers through the marks and rituals linked to the brand. The company should play the role of non-intrusive enabler of these personal expressions, reducing its control over the brand's meanings.

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While this research was conducted in regard to convenience products, the message is still applicable to car brands. Heavy involvement in spurring customer interaction with the product and the brand can have the opposite effect, turning customers away from the brand. As mentioned before, Subaru is fairly hands off with their community interaction, beyond scheduled events. According to one Subaru Ambassador, the only regular communication ambassadors have with the brand is through monthly check-ins (M. Randall, personal communication, February 24, 2018). On social media and online forums Subaru has little to no direct communication with buyers. Beyond posts by the brand, most forum and social media activity is facilitated by owners and enthusiasts between each other.

#### **Group and Social Dynamics**

One of the ways in which great brands form is through brand communities. According to Relling, Schnittka, Ringle, Sattler, and Johnen (2016) brand communities help to build brand equity by enhancing consumer loyalty. Citing Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) they suggest that the mechanisms by which this customer loyalty is enhanced include "high levels of consciousness of kind, shared rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral responsibility among community members, which imply a notion of "brand community character"" (p. 108). Using these metrics and a few others, the authors created a scale used to evaluate various brand communities. The study notes that brand communities are of great interest in "both academia and practice, especially considering the tremendous growth of company-managed brand communities on social networking sites." (p. 108). The video accompanying this work dives into Subaru's brand community in great detail.

### **Harley Davidson and Intergroup Hostility**

Identification with a brand community welcomes conflict with other groups. As brands take on personified characteristics, they also invite competition with rival brands. In a study by Hickman and Ward (2007) intergroup hostility was studied amongst Harley Davidson owners. The researchers found that those who associated more closely with the Harley Davidson community were more likely to stereotype members of other groups. Additionally, those same people were more likely to "trash talk" those members of the outgroup in and outside the Harley Davidson community. In this, we see that those individuals whose identity is rooted heavily in the brand are more likely to attack other groups to "defend" theirs. Thus, the inherent payoff of having an ingroup/outgroup dynamic is fierce brand loyalty.

The concept of people defining their brand loyalty by attacking other brands is referred to "oppositional brand loyalty". Avery (2011) provides supporting evidence from other authors of this sentiment in her examination of the Porsche brand.

Politicized ingrouping/outgrouping processes have been previously documented in brand community research (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Muniz & Schau, 2005) that shows that the community members often view themselves as an ingroup and those who use the competitive brands as an outgroup, an inter-brand effect.

While the research suggests that loyalty can be heightened with greater levels of intergroup hostility, no such dynamic was apparent in my study of the Subaru community. I had initially thought that there might be some intergroup hostility between owners of the Subaru WRX STi and the Mitsubishi Evolution, as they are both frequently compared models. Both cars are four-wheel drive sedans with turbocharged engines and are fairly well matched

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from a performance standpoint. There is a natural competition that exists between these two vehicles as a result of their similar characteristics.

However, when reading on the NASIOC forum (North American Subaru Impreza Owners Club) members were fairly supportive on a post about one former STi owner's decision to trade in his Subaru for an Evo. For example, SpicyPeaNut (2012) said "Thanks for sharing. As long as you are happy that's really all that matters." Moonrider 99 (2012) said of the decision, "Thanks for the review, I like both cars. Congrats on the evo, looks like a lot of fun to drive." It seemed that Subaru owners were relatively supportive of one of their own making the switch to the "rival" brand. While the research is limited, this does suggest that the Subaru community does not behave like the study concerning Harley Davidson would indicate.

The same previously mentioned study on Harley Davidson also found that community status was correlated with more expensive motorcycles within the group. The more expensive the motorcycle, the more prestige the owner had within the group. This is a logical finding, as prestige is often linked with price. One would assume, given this finding, that there would exist some kind of hierarchy in the Subaru community based on the price of each vehicle.

Online, this status/hierarchy concept does not seem to translate to the Subaru brand. There are a number of differences between Subaru's top two performance model (the WRX and the WRX STi). The difference between a base model WRX and base model WRX STi is about \$10,000 (Subaru, 2018). Most of the differences between the two models are in the engine and handling and are therefore unseen on the road. The most prominent difference between the two cars is a very large rear wing on the back of the STi that is not on the WRX. Some WRX owners purchase STi wings and mount them to their cars. If hierarchy and status

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were very important to Subaru owners, it would seem logical that STi owners would discourage WRX owners from this practice, as adding the wing makes the WRX appear to be an STi. However, posts on the NASIOC forum indicate that this was not the case. In a thread where one user was asking the forum what their opinion on putting an STi wing on a WRX was, Bunz559 (2015) said, "Completely up to you. No one can make this decision for you. Find what you like and go for it. I have a feeling that if u have to ask, then you've contemplated getting one. If you have contemplated, you've taken some liking or interest. So just do it." In another thread on the same topic, user PlasticFoamMan (2011) said, "Why not? It's a big piece of plastic that apparently performs over the WRX wing on the track. If it's for looks, same deal in my opinion [sic]. The STi is not so special that it should have its own spoiler and no one else can have it." Clearly, Subaru owners do not subscribe to a hierarchy based on purchase price (at least to the extent other brands do).

This notion was further confirmed during my interaction with "Team Subie Snails". In terms of vehicle cost differences there were vehicles at the meetup that I attended that were worth as little as \$5,000, all the way up to brand new WRX STis that start at around \$36,000. Despite the price discrepancy, no sort of hierarchy was apparent amongst the owners. While I did not spend an extended period of time with the group, it seemed that interactions were unrelated to the Subaru models each owner drove.

### **Study of the Porsche Community**

Other scholars have studied the notion of hierarchy within brand communities in greater detail. The release of the Porsche Cayenne offered an interesting look at how a brand community reacts to a product that challenges their expectations of their brand. The Cayenne

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is an SUV offered by Porsche, who has been manufacturing sports cars for almost 100 years. As Deighton et al. (2012) describes when the news of Porsche manufacturing an SUV broke, current Porsche owners on an online forum were furious. There was a great deal of backlash against the SUV with claims that it was weakening the brand.

Current Porsche owners encouraged each other on the forums not to flash their headlights at Cayenne owners. They did not view the SUV as a real Porsche, and therefore did not welcome it into their club. There were more posts on the forum stating how Cayenne owners should not be let into any Porsche owners clubs either.

Avery (2011) in her study analyzed the behavior of people who bought the Cayenne and posted online. She found that buyers engaged in overly masculine behavior in order to defend their ownership of a "feminine" car. She also found evidence of excessive "one-upmanship" from these owners as well. Cayenne owners on the Porsche forums claimed that they used their SUVs to go off-road, tow their racecars and boats, and use them to go hunting or skiing. They even claimed to be faster than other Porsche models at the track with stories of beating Porsche Boxsters and 944s. The Cayenne owners were then trying to position themselves above "lesser" Porsche vehicles in the eyes of the superior 911 owners.

Sensing an opportunity for one-upmanship, given the Porsche brand community's longstanding ostracism of the Porsche Boxster and 944/951 owners, the Porsche Cayenne SUV owners pit themselves (and their vehicles) against these weaker owners in an aggressive show of force to curry favor with the Porsche 911 owners who reign at the top of the status hierarchy.

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This behavior was nowhere to be found in the Subaru community. The inclusion that I witnessed looked nothing like the power-jockeying described in the previous study. Generally, Subaru people are welcoming of other Subaru owners regardless of the vehicle they drive from the lineup.

The new Subaru Ascent provides a very similar case to compare with the Cayenne release. Just this year, Subaru announced a new SUV that deviates from the normal Subaru lineup. It is substantially larger than most other Subarus and features more creature comforts. It is marketed towards mothers who need more room to haul their kids around. Given the findings of the Cayenne studies, one might think that WRX and STi owners would be hostile towards a vehicle that will attract more "normal" people to the Subaru brand. This is however, not the case. When I was invited to meet up with the Subie Snails, the reason they had gathered was to go to the Providence Auto Show and see the new. Many of the drivers at the meetup owned WRXs and STis and were very interested in the vehicle when we got arrived.

Comments on NASIOC threads also offered little indication that anyone was worried about Subaru watering down the brand with this offering. People posting on the forum were only concerned about trim levels, pricing, and design cues. Scrolling through most of the threads on both the concept and the production car, there was no negative commentary about the kinds of people that Subaru would be attracting to the brand with the Ascent.

The other notable point in the Cayenne articles was the fact that Porsche owners flash their lights at each other to acknowledge other Porsches on the road. This is similar to the Subaru wave in terms of reinforcement of community through acknowledgement. The Porsche



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acknowledgement ritual never came up during my research on brand, the only other brand I encountered with a similar ritual was the Jeep community with their wave. There are a number of reasons the Porsche flashing might not have come up in my research. It could be that since the Porsche community is relatively small as a result of their more exclusive cars, not many car enthusiasts talk about "the Porsche flash". It could also be that the price difference between Subaru and Porsche is so wide that there is little to no ownership overlap between the communities and thus my interviewees were not aware of it.

The hostility that Porsche forum-goers exhibited towards Cayenne owners has no parallel in the Subaru community. The kind of defenses that Cayenne owners had to come up with and the animosity they faced on the forums is nothing like the inclusion and acceptance that the Subaru community exhibits online and in person. We can speculate that Porsche owners are more concerned about people viewing their cars as status symbols on a basis of price and racing heritage. In that case, a cheaper SUV driven by "soccer moms" and people who do not appreciate the Porsche heritage, would in fact devalue the brand and result in hostility.

### **Cause Related Marketing**

Subaru's now famous "Share The Love Event" is an example of how the brand exemplifies love in their actions. Since 2008, Subaru has donated \$250 to charity for every car they sell or lease during the span of the sales event. The buyer of the car can choose from a number of pre-selected national and local charities. To date, Subaru has donated over \$94 million dollars as a result of the campaign (Subaru, 2017). The Share the Love Event is an example of Cause Related Marketing. Cause Related Marketing (CRM) is defined as "a mutually

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beneficial collaboration between a corporation and a nonprofit designed to promote the former's sales and the latter's cause" (Grantspace). Subaru is attributed as being one of the first companies to participate in CRM and is praised for its work with non-profits. For Subaru, this event helps to build brand equity as consumers associate positive attributes with the company for their philanthropic work. On the consumer side, the campaign creates a heightened sense of involvement by allowing the customer to select the charity that receives the donation (Mermod et. al, 2014). It also allows the customer to feel good about their decision to purchase a Subaru because they are giving back.

The charities that Subaru gives to through the Share the Love Event are consistent with the interests of their main customers. The image below shows the iconography Subaru uses on their website to show the recipients of their charitable actions. It is worth noting their use of the word "Love" in this copy.

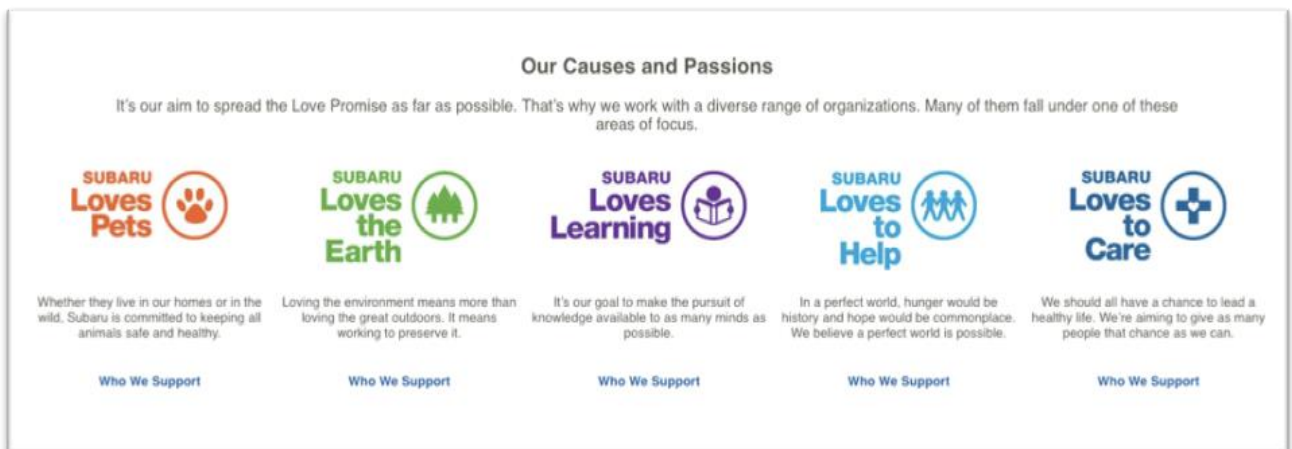


Figure 2. Our causes and passions (Subaru, 2017)

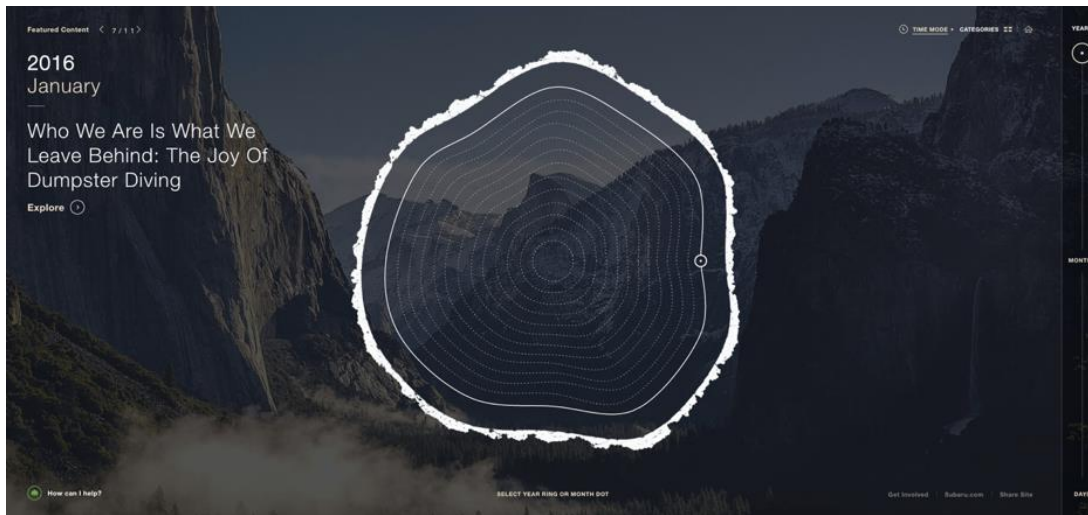
Each category takes the user to a page that talks about the charities that Subaru donates to in the category. The "Subaru Loves the Earth" icon takes the user to a microsite (pictured below) that goes into great detail about their efforts in energy conservation, zero-landfill initiatives,

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and national park partnerships. Their emphasis on this aspect of their initiatives indicates that they value environmental conservation very highly.



*Figure 3.* Each ring on the tree cross-section graphic takes the user to a page detailing Subaru's efforts and awards in that year of their campaign. Landing page (Subaru, 2017a)

A 2016 study by Kull and Heath studied the effects of a CRM on consumer brand relationships. Their three findings showed that providing consumers with the ability to choose the recipient of the donation improves brand attachment and brand attitudes. The results from the second study showed that feelings were consistent even when consumers were presented with 48 recipient choices. Their third study emphasized that these positive association improvements were only present for brands that already had a positive or neutral brand image. However, for the brands that had a preexisting positive or neutral brand image in the consumer's mind, the effect of adding the choice of donation recipient was as or more impactful than the addition of the donation campaign by itself (Kull, Heath, 2016).

The various categories for donation through the Share the Love Event appeal to the demographics of buyers that Subaru has identified. Elizabeth Husted identified the types of

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buyers she most commonly sees in her work as a salesperson as engineers, educators, and healthcare professionals (E. Husted, February 27, 2018). Subaru's donations to education and health related charities appeal directly to these consumers. Their work with dogs was a common theme that came up in research. 70% of Subaru owners have a dog and so their work with pet-related charities appeals to these consumers.

The Share the Love Event is not the only philanthropic activity that Subaru facilitates. Through the Subaru of America Foundation Subaru donates grants and scholarships, participates in employee donation matching, and facilitates employee volunteering events. Some of the charities Subaru sponsors through these events include the National Ski Patrol and the International Mountain Bicycling Association. Wiley, 2016).

### **Subaru's Association With Lesbians**

There is a modern stereotype that implies that women who own Subarus identify as lesbians. The existence of such a stereotype was confirmed by several sources that I spoke to, including Elizabeth Husted, who sells Subarus and is herself a lesbian (E. Husted, February 27, 2018). Both Elizabeth and another lesbian Subaru owner that I interviewed indicated that there is little truth to the notion that many lesbians drive Subarus. They were familiar with the stereotype and indicated that it had little influence on their decision to buy a Subaru. Interestingly, Elizabeth indicated that she actually sees a fairly high proportion of gay male Subaru buyers in her dealership. The other subject I interviewed echoed this notion, saying that a lot of her gay male friends owned Subarus (C. Jernigan, March 3, 2018).

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The association between lesbians and Subaru is likely a result of the company's early efforts to market to the group in the 1990s. The campaign was a result of Subaru identifying five core groups of Subaru buyers who sought out four-wheel drive vehicles. As it turned out, lesbians were four times more likely to buy a Subaru than straight individuals (Myyasi, 2016). Lesbians found a number of factors appealing about Subarus as mentioned in the following excerpt.

"There was such an alignment of feeling, like [Subaru cars] fit with what they did," says Paul Poux, who later conducted focus groups for Subaru. The marketers found that lesbian Subaru owners liked that the cars were good for outdoor trips, and that they were good for hauling stuff without being as large as a truck or SUV. (In a line some women may not like as much, marketers also said Subaru's dependability was a good fit for lesbians since they didn't have a man who could fix car problems.) "They felt it fit them and wasn't too flashy," says Poux.

With this core group identified, Subaru began to market to lesbians to build on the existing appeal. To begin the campaign, Subaru had align its policies with the message in their advertising. They implemented LGBT-friendly policies and benefits to match existing policies for straight couples and individuals (Halliday, 2002). The automaker then turned to Mulryan/Nash, an advertising agency that specialized in gay and lesbian advertising, to craft its campaign. The most effective way to reach the lesbian market was to include subtle references in messaging and copy. Little reference to places like Provincetown (a vacation hotspot for gays and lesbians) and headlines with dual meanings like "Get Out. And Stay Out" were added to their advertising (Mayyasi, 2016).

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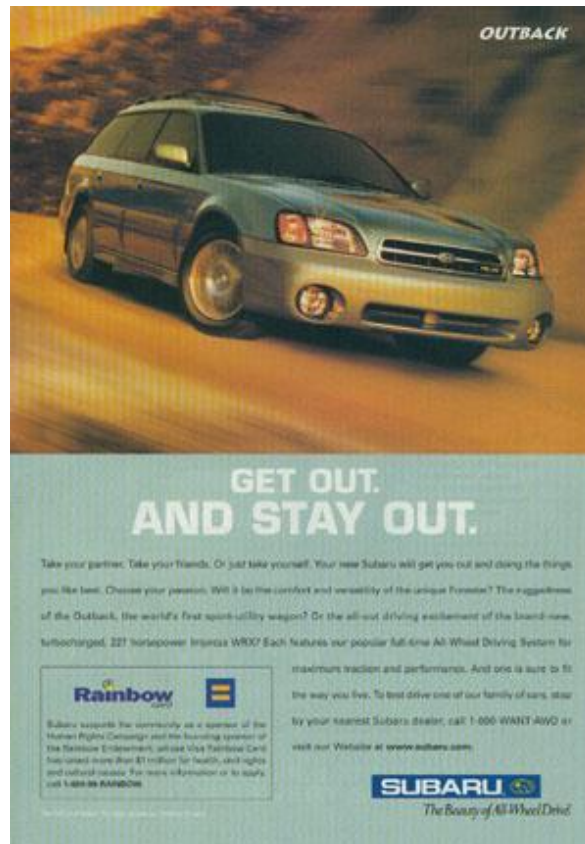


Figure 4. Get out. And stay out (GLAAD, 2012).

It is worth noting that the aforementioned ad appeals to both lesbians (referring to coming out) and to outdoor enthusiasts (in reference to the great outdoors). These subtle hints are referred to as “gay vague” when they appear in advertising. At the time, this sort of subtle marketing, while being preferred by the target audience, also mitigated Subaru’s risk. Conservatives who were likely to react negatively to this kind of messaging often times did not pick up on the hidden meaning of these ads. These subtle efforts worked for Subaru as Halliday explains (2002).

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Research shows gays and lesbians prefer advertisers that make the extra effort to tailor creative to them," Mr. Nash says. He pointed to 2000 MRI data of *The Advocate* and *Out* in which readers said they'd be 1.5 times more likely to buy a Subaru than another car brand. The brand then doubled its frequency in those titles and readers are now 2.6 times more likely to buy a Subaru than non-readers, a 73% jump.

Subaru was intentionally non-discreet in their efforts in other areas. Their efforts included sponsoring gay pride events, partnering with the Rainbow Card, and hiring Martina Navratilova, a lesbian professional tennis player. They did experience some backlash early on, but it came from conservative groups who were unlikely to purchase Subarus in the first place. The brand's early marketing to the gay community was very successful, and helped to drive sales in the 1990's.

Today, Subaru still engages in marketing activities tailored towards members of the LGBTQ community. Their *Share the Love* event donates \$250 to various charities for every vehicle purchased during the promotion. Buyers get to choose from several national charities that Subaru selects, and dealerships often match that donation to a local charity. These local charities can include things like pride events and other LGBTQ groups. Elizabeth mentioned that her dealership in particular sponsors a team on a gay softball league.

### **General Subaru Advertising**

In 1993 a well-executed campaign involving Paul Hogan brought the company out of a seven-year sales decline. The association with the cowboy-like figure Hogan played in the movie *Crocodile Dundee* created an image association with the Subaru Outback in the United States (Randazzo, 2006). In more recent years, Subaru has focused on the hobbies and

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interests of buyers as well as the appeals of the vehicles (King, 2016). In a recent advertising campaign with Carmichael Lynch, Subaru emphasized four thematic pillars of the brand; longevity, safety, versatility and adventure (Nudd, 2013). The common thread in modern Subaru advertisements is a tie in to love. At the end of almost every Subaru commercial the word "Love" appears on the screen and then twirls away into the stars of the Subaru logo (Subaru, 2017). No matter if the commercial is for the Forester, Outback, or WRX STI the same word represents the brand at the end of the commercial. This unifying "love" theme is an important part of Subaru's brand, but is also a promise by which they and their customers live by.

### **Conclusion**

Subaru is a fascinating brand from a number of perspectives. Many would refer to them as a "cult" brand with a dedicated following of enthusiasts unlike any other car manufacturer. One only need look as far as the Subaru Ambassador program to see how dedicated their followers are. There are few brands out there that can lay claim to the fact that they attract so many unpaid promoters that they have to shut down admissions every few months. Subaru's functional appeal is rooted in their affordable all-wheel drive utility. Beyond that, the following that has amassed around the brand is a result of careful support from Subaru that has been embraced by the community. They have been able to build a strong brand over many years by committing to endeavors that their buyers are interested in. As a result, more like-minded people are then attracted to the brand and thus the enthusiast base grows. These kind of feedback loops operate in sequence and work to further develop the



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brand over time. The value that this community of dedicated enthusiasts provides is simply immeasurable.

The implications of this research are relevant to brands and marketers that want to develop a similar following for their brand. Subaru has become the entity that they are today after decades of careful marketing and product decision-making. However, studying things like the way Subaru uses cause-related marketing to associate themselves with positive causes is a useful activity. There is also much to learn from Subaru's marketing to individuals who modify their cars. Brands with products that promote modification and customization can learn from the way Subaru handles this consumer segment. Even studying the way forums have been built around Subaru's offerings is a worthwhile endeavor.

While the individual aspects of their success are useful to study, building such a strong brand takes a very long time. With some careful planning and continued dedication to a core set of beliefs, Subaru has become an example of how a product can transcend utility and become a phenomenon.

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**APPENDIX**

***Video Transcript***

- Narrator: My first interaction with the Subaru culture came in the summer of 2016. My buddy Matt and I would take his 2004 WRX STI to monthly car shows in the area. Every so often we would pass another WRX and my buddy would exchange a thumbs up over the steering wheel with the driver of the other car. I asked him what that was all about to which he replied, it's a Subaru thing.
- Narrator: Fast forward to the following summer when I bought my own Subaru, a 2013 BRZ. My car is in a weird middle ground where it's kind of a Subaru but it's also kind of a Toyota. Subaru makes the engine and drive train while Toyota supplies the rest. Subaru and Toyota both sell variants of the car and I was initially looking for the Toyota version. I'm glad I got the Subaru though because now when I see someone in a cool WRX or an XTI, I exchange the thumbs up. Over the course of this project I interviewed dozens of Subaru enthusiasts to try and understand why people have fallen in love with this brand. This is what I found.
- Narrator: It would seem logical that the Subaru following is rooted somewhere in the functionality of their vehicles. I talked to owners and people who work on Subaru's to try and understand that functionality. When I asked people to talk about the utility of their Subaru's, almost everyone referenced their performance in the snow.
- Bob Randall: I am a dispatcher full time, 911 dispatcher and I work part-time as a police officer. With my profession I needed something that was reliable, that if it snowed there wasn't an option of calling out if it's too snowy or I can't get out of the driveway. I'm there no matter what.
- Narrator: Most of the people I interviewed were from the northeast so the utility of all wheel drive was mostly applicable to driving in the snow. But as I learned from Cliff who used to work on Subaru's in Florida, there are other applications for all wheel drive.
- Cliff O.: Subaru down south is great on the beach. You don't think about it. Everybody's like what do you need all wheel drive for in Florida. The beach, you can drive on every beach you go to, Daytona Beach, St. Augustine Beach, Del Ray Beach, West Palm, Ft. Lauderdale, you can drive on all those beaches. All wheel drive, you can drive right on the

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beach, you have a two wheel drive or anything, you're gonna get stuck. Then you come here and you have the snow.

Narrator: Reliability was another factor that was commonly referenced.

Cliff O.: I had a customer and he had 336,000 miles on their Forester. 336,000 miles and they take care of their vehicle.

Narrator: Yeah.

Cliff O.: Down south, I had a mail woman, she delivered the mail. She had two Subaru Legacy's. Each one of her cars had over a half a million miles on them.

Narrator: Wow.

Cliff O.: Half a million miles.

Narrator: Even the people who work on them have nothing but good things to say.

Matt B.: My name is Matt Bergeron. I'm a Subaru Tech in Brattleboro. I've been working on these cars for a couple, three years now. Couple years up there in Vermont and I'm driving a 2002 WRX today. Subaru's, in my opinion, are the easiest car to work on and one of the most reliable cars on the road. They're the only car with real true symmetrical all wheel drive. It crushes the competition if you watch it and that's not just my bias, that's a fact. You go online and try to see higher end cars that cost twice as much, try to perform where these things can but the all wheel drive systems will never touch them. Being in the snow, especially up in Vermont, or any place like New England that's got severe snow weather for half the year it just makes no sense to drive a car that only has two wheel drive when you can get something that has comparable gas mileage and just the same expectancy of life of about 300,000 miles, like your other four cylinder vehicles. So, in my mind, there's no competition.

Narrator: It's important to point out that the appeal of having a vehicle capable of handling snow or sand isn't just relevant in application. Buyers are attracted to the thought of having a vehicle capable of overcoming adverse conditions regardless of if they will actually use that functionality or not.

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- Narrator: With a good product as a starting point, I set out to talk to enthusiasts about what makes the Subaru community so special. To get a better understanding of what the community looked like I attended Wicked Big Meet this past summer. Wicked Big Meet is the biggest Subaru gathering in the northeast. Thousands of Subaru's from slammed STI's to lifted Crosstrek's were on display. According to the organizers, over 8,000 people showed up to the 2017 show. Modifying your car is a major part of Wicked Big Meet.
- Sam Whipple: We decided to come to Wicked Big Meet because it's Subie Fest and you got to come to Subie Fest with your Subaru and figure out what you want to do to your car, get some ideas and just meet a lot of great people. It's really fun. Even though it's all Subaru, and you're seeing a lot of the same things, they're all unique, they're all different and I've gotten so many ideas about what I want to do to my car. She's definitely not done, not done at all.
- Narrator: There were many vendors set up displaying their Subaru related products. From exhaust setups to shift knobs, you could practically replace every part in your vehicle from stuff at Wicked Big Meet. Tuning shops were showing off some of their latest and most insane project cars. Since the event is held at a race track, there was even an auto cross event set up for any Subaru that wanted to put down some lap times. One thing was clear at Wicked Big Meet, the Subaru community loves a well muffled vehicle.
- Narrator: Wicked Big Meet shows just how passionate Subaru owners can be about their cars. The amount of time and money that goes into modifying some of these vehicles often totals more than the original car is worth. People drive for hours just to see each other's cars and be in a space where they're surrounded by other Subaru fans. Wicked Big Meet also shows how invested Subaru is in their communities. They help sponsor the event and have invested a lot of money in having a corporate presence at the show. From what I saw at Wicked Big Meet, it was clear that there is a strong link between modification and enthusiasm for the Subaru brand.
- Sam Whipple: I only have 8,000 miles on it and I already voided my warranty.
- Narrator: I talked to Alberto who owns a well known Subaru tuning shop in Massachusetts about his involvement with the brand.



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- Alberto R.: I guess I fell in love with Subaru when I first bought my WRX, I think it was about, gotta be about 10 years ago now and I started seeing and kind of falling in love with the community, believe it or not, and started organizing meets for a forum and then once that took off, I started tinkering with my car because I tinker, that's what I do. I've never driven another car like Subaru, whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, but I will say this, it's its own animal. It's its own ... it's got its own unique personality and it definitely does attract a certain type of person and I tell ya, I've seen more people falling in love with these cars than I ever thought I ever would. And I'm one, I'm included in that.
- Narrator: This was one of his customer builds showcasing modification to an extreme.
- Alberto R.: And here's another example here. This guy wanted ... he's inspired by the colors on Sully from Monsters, Inc., which threw me for a loop but, look at it. It works. I mean, this went to the New York Auto Show in April and it blew ... everybody loved it. They had nothing but good things to say about it and that inspires me to keep doing what I'm doing and put my little twist on it and I keep meeting great people doing this stuff.
- Narrator: To a lot of Subaru owners, their car isn't just a car. It's a platform. More specifically, it's a platform for performance modification and personalization.
- Doug Abbott: Well, why I think people really like about Subaru's, or more specifically, the performance is there's something for everybody. I mean, you don't necessarily have to go full out race car, you can start yourself off from the bottom and you can basically do whatever you want with it. You can turn it into a drifting machine, you can turn it into just a show car. You can do whatever you want with it, the sky is the limit.
- Narrator: Some owners go to the extreme to make their car their own.
- Sarah Yang: My name is Sarah Yang, I'm a Subaru master. This is my 2007 Subaru XTI, which I've had for about eight years now so it's been a work in progress. Basically, all the internals, I have a Dom [phonetic 00:09:17] 1.5 turbo, Fullen video and Warne [phonetic 00:09:23] exhaust system and it's tuned by Matt Liner.
- Narrator: Modification to this extent necessitates a certain level of passion and it's clear that Sarah didn't lack any love for her vehicle.

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- Sarah Yang: Whenever I drive this car, I always have a smile on my face. It's just something about the car, driving it, being behind the steering wheel, it's just like a mutual love between the car and me.
- Narrator: Acknowledgment within the community is a big part of what binds it together.
- Bob Randall: I mean, you're familiar with the Subaru wave. I mean, just driving down the road, you pass a Subaru and somebody waves to you and you wave back.
- Ty Randall: Daily, I mean everyday I go out somebody will make a comment of the hat or the shirt or driving by they'll say something about the car and it's always, most of the time, positive. They're just really cool people. Subaru's a really cool, little world within itself.
- Narrator: The community extends far beyond in person interactions. Online forums provide useful user generated feedback, advice, and instructions on how to maintain and modify your car.
- Bob Randall: I mean, I learned basics from my father growing up, you know brake jobs and stuff. A lot of it is forums, NASIOC, you can learn anything on YouTube, on forums, you can find anything you need and that's where I learned a lot. That's where I went from just an old WRX just throwing an intake and a downpipe, not tuning it, not knowing any better to actually doing things right and making power and doing it the right way. NASIOC is a great tool. It's a great tool, you know we talked about the sense of community, you have that there or, you even have all the resources, the how to's, the classifieds, anything Subaru related you need, it's there. And it's easily accessible.
- Narrator: Instagram and other social media sites are another means of staying connected to the Subaru community.
- Lynsey: In January, I had the opportunity to volunteer for a few hours at the New England International Auto Show in Boston and it was myself and another girl whom I had never before. She was another ambassador, and we were in the Subaru booth to just talk about our experiences as being Subaru owners. So, people asked what kind of car do you have, what do you like about it, how does it do in the snow and all. I only have positive things to say about my car. There's a reason I'm on my second one because it's really dependable and reliable and it's safe and fun. But, Sarah and I had some time to talk in between talking with attendees of the show, and we were talking about Instagram, and I asked her, her

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name on Instagram and she told me, and I thought, oh, that sounded familiar, so I asked her again later, so I could put it into my phone and send her a friend request and so I did. We were talking some more, and a couple of minutes went by, she glanced at her phone, and she looked up at me and then she looked at her phone again, and she did this sort of, you're her, that's you, that's your car? You're one of my idols. It was really flattering and really sweet and kind of funny. I guess it just shows the power of social media and how close the Subaru community is even without knowing each other, I mean, you know people's cars from seeing them online, and I remember my first meet with my team. I parked in the parking lot, I hadn't met anybody before, and I'm trying to put names and faces together to cars, but I felt like Instagram had come to life in the parking lot basically. It was a pretty cool experience.

Narrator: Whether it's through Instagram or waving to another driver on the road, the Subaru community is kept alive through constant reinforcement. The Subaru wave is a well-known piece of culture in the car community.

Narrator: It's Sunday and you're driving your mom home from a nice ass brunch in your STI. You pass another WRX going the opposite direction, he waves, you wave. Your mom's like do you know that young gentleman, honey? Yeah. I kinda do. Little does your mom know that you're part of another family. You're part of the Subie Nation, baby.

Narrator: There are other car brands that have their own well-known waves.

Bob Randall: You're familiar with the Subaru wave. I mean, just driving down the road you pass a Subaru and somebody waves to you and you wave back. Except in like the Jeep Wrangler community, I've never seen that anywhere else.

Narrator: I kept hearing about the Jeep wave so I asked Mike to tell me more about it.

Narrator: It's definitely, you're kinda like, yeah, yeah, hey nice Jeep, you know, that's kinda looking ... ya know. So, I'm normally a Jeep guy, come from the Jeep club, I had four or five different Jeeps. There's a lot of ... in the Jeep community there's kind of a split between the old school Jeep guys and the new school Jeep guys. You've got the new style of Jeeps that the old school guys can't stand the new style Jeeps because it's thinning out the ... I don't want to say thinning out the group but there's a lot of

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people who are buying the Jeeps that aren't taking them off road 'cause that was the whole purpose of the Jeep was to go off road. A lot of old school guys don't like the new Jeeps. Actually, quite frankly hate 'em. The Jeep wave was like a notorious, like that was like a Jeep thing. That's the other thing that's like a lot of people hate the new Wranglers because they don't do the Jeep wave anymore. They don't wave to older Jeeps, you know 'cause they don't even know about the older Jeeps because they don't know the heritage about the older Jeeps, which is kind of why that whole thing is splitting.

Narrator: The split in the Jeep community doesn't seem to exist in the Subaru community. However, there does seem to be a strong sense of belonging amongst Jeep owners who belong to the in group. But, as it turns out there are actually brands out there that don't appreciate the camaraderie all together.

Bob Randall: Yeah I mean with owning Mustangs, there was nothing like Subaru's. There was no sense of community. There was no ... if you wave to a Mustang driver you might get the finger back, I mean, you just have no idea.

Narrator: Having verified the existence of a thriving community fueled by events, modification, and acknowledgment on the road, I set out to explore the ways in which Subaru markets to their customers. At a corporate and dealership level, Subaru knows their customers really well. Betty sells Subaru's at a local dealership in Massachusetts.

Betty H.: The top three professions I found in my experience, number one are engineers. Engineers love the way Subarus are built, they appreciate them, the whole boxer engine concept as well as all the safety features and the well thought out safety features that just Subaru has. The number two profession, anyone in the medical field from doctors who love their touring Outbacks to nurses who generally like Foresters or Cross Treks to medical assistants to radiologists to everybody in the medical field, pretty much loves Subaru's and if they're a first time Subaru buyer, it's usually because they're coworker had told them to go check one out. And then number three are educators. Educators, of all kinds, you get teachers from elementary to college professors and ...

Narrator: One of the associations that Subaru has been able to effectively identify and utilize has been between Subaru drivers and pet ownership.

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- MaryFran Randal: Oh yeah, oh yeah, there is like the hashtag ambassadog and all of that and they have just so much animal gear and they just focus on them. You walk into a dealership and there's generally a dog there, and I think it really appeals to people who are animal lovers.
- Betty H.: We're dog friendly anyway, so all of our customers can bring their dogs, which is great and we just ran out but, we had Subaru little bandanas that say Subaru loves pets, for dogs and we always have treats on hand. We love it.
- Narrator: A lot of Subaru's marketing material plays up this aspect of pet ownership. It seems to be working as the top six most popular videos on their YouTube channel all feature dogs. Besides pet ownership, Subaru's promotions and connections to charitable work are well tailored to the demographic of consumers that purchase their vehicles.
- Betty H.: We also do advertising through NPR. That's always good because 90% of our customers listen to NPR so, if somebody's like, oh, well I play recreational whatever, I can be like, oh, we're sponsoring a softball team actually or they're a huge Patriots fan and oh, we just did our Share the Love event and our local charity was for Malcolm Mitchell, the wide receiver of the Patriots. It was for his organization, Reading with Malcolm and he came in and took a tour of the dealership and signed a whole bunch of books for us that he wrote so ...
- Betty H.: The Reading with Malcolm one, I think is great especially we do get educators in a lot and so to let them know that is pretty great and also librarians too. I mean they're technically educators but we do have a lot of librarian clientele too.
- Narrator: While it is, at the end of the day, a promotional tool, Subaru's Share the Love event does a lot of charitable good. They have been smart to donate to both national and local charities.
- Betty H.: There's four or five national charities they can choose from and then each local dealership chooses a local charity.
- Narrator: In parallel, Subaru's advertisements work to emphasize feelings and emotions over more technical aspects of their products.
- Father: So, you're seats good? You got the mirrors all adjusted, so you can see everything okay? Just stay off the freeways, all right? I don't want you going out on those yet. Just leave your phone in your purse, I don't want you texting ...

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Daughter:               Daddy, okay.

Father:                 Okay, here you go. Be careful.

Daughter:             Thanks Dad.

Father:                Call me, but not while you're driving.

Father:                We knew this day was coming, that's why we bought a Subaru.

Narrator:             Any car company can do this sort of charitable work and run these kinds of advertisements but Subaru has done a great job of holistically branding themselves with feelings and emotions that resonate with their customers. It feels genuine when it comes from Subaru because their commitment to their love promise is exemplified in their actions and their marketing material everywhere you look.

Narrator:             The social marketing that Subaru does is effective in convincing customers interested in the more mundane models in their lineup like the Cross Trek, Forester and Outback. Marketing to the customers interested in the sportier models like the WRX and STI, looks very different. A lot of buyers who are interested in the performance oriented vehicles that Subaru sells know what they're buying. The appeal of Subaru's charitable work and the safety is usually a secondary benefit of the power and all wheel drive performance of the vehicle. The advertising that Subaru uses to promote these vehicles reflects this emphasizing the sound and excitement of driving a Subaru.

Narrator:             A big part of the appeal of the WRX and STI are their turbo charged engines and availability of after-market parts. It's easier to tune more power into a turbo charged engine than a naturally aspirated one. That is part of what has grown the community of modification enthusiasts. Of course, Subaru can't promote the modification of their vehicles for warranty reasons but they can show support with events like Wicked Big Meet.

Narrator:             However, Subaru does demonstrate the tuning ability of their vehicles with their participation in rallying. In these races, stock cars are modified to an extreme in order to navigate the tight off road circuits as fast as possible. Marketing material for the WRX and STI celebrates this connection to the sport.

Narrator:             While rallying isn't as popular in the U.S. as it is overseas, there is still some fans of the sport stateside.

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- Bob Randall: If you haven't done it, you have to experience it. You absolutely have to. There is nothing like a car flying by you in the woods on a logging road doing 80 miles an hour. It's something you have to experience.
- Narrator: Do you see a lot of Subaru people at these events?
- Bob Randall: It's probably 75% of them are. At least.
- Narrator: As previously stated, Subaru buyers interested in the WRX and STI are already fairly well versed on the product. Subaru also doesn't sell very many of these models relative to their other offerings. Therefore, Subaru's marketing efforts towards these consumers is limited in its scope. One of Subaru's most valuable and remarkable marketing tools is their Subaru Ambassador Program. No other car brand has anything like the Subaru Ambassador Program and it is remarkable for a number of reasons. For only the cost of free merchandise every few months, Subaru has created a loyal forest that not only promotes the brand but, also does good in the community on their behalf.
- Lynsey: So I'm a Subaru Ambassador. I've been an ambassador since, I think, April of 2017. The Ambassador Program is a brand ambassador program that Subaru has where basically they give people a quarterly budget to buy like give-a-way things and stuff to use to help promote the brand and we just talk to people about Subaru, the brand, what they stand for, our love of the cars and just kind of sharing the Subaru love, love of the brand.
- MaryFran Randal: It's like October, I believe, was Subaru Loves Pets Month so they encourage ambassadors to go out and do things that regarded with pets and then use the hashtag and then they've done Subaru Loves Learning so, right by the end of summer, early fall, they sent out little lunch boxes with crayons and that sort of stuff for kids and they encouraged us to go hand them out to kids who might need them. I contacted the school in town and I brought them to the guidance office for kids who might need them, who might not have money for things. They kind of like cement month by month and then they encourage the ambassadors to go out and do it and I love that they kind of hold them accountable by social media, which is the biggest thing now and have you hashtag it and do all that. They're definitely motivated by social media and trying to get things out there but not like be pushy. We're not salespeople. We're just trying to connect the bridge between people who like Subaru's and people who might not know about them but they definitely use Instagram to network to people.

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- Narrator: Becoming a Subaru ambassador is a fairly selective process. Candidates have to show that they are dedicated to the brand and that they represent Subaru's values.
- Lynsey: To get involved, you go online, you fill out a short form that says you're interested and I think they do like a sort of rolling admissions so as spaces open up in a region they invite you fill out an application and so it took me maybe three or four months before I was able to apply and then about three or four weeks later, I got an email that said I had been accepted into the program, which is very exciting.
- Narrator: At the time of this film's production, applications to become an ambassador were closed. The value of having a basically unpaid brand advocate that will promote your brand is immense. Ambassadors do a fair amount of work in their positions. Their motivation to do all of this free promotion varies but it is rooted in a love for the brand.
- Bob Randall: I think it's because I've always been passionate about the brand, I mean, to own that many, to work on them, to help friends work on them, to introduce friends to them, to get friends to purchase them, I've just always been passionate about the brand. I think that's what compels me to further do so.
- Narrator: Other Subaru ambassadors are motivated to do this work to meet other enthusiasts.
- MaryFran Randal: We like to both attend events together and the community with the children. We have a little Subaru car for the kids, we just kind of use it to connect to other people and give back a little bit more.
- Sarah Yang: I heard from other friends that you get to connect with other Subaru enthusiasts. And that you get to just talk about your experience. A lot of networking.
- Narrator: By hiring enthusiasts to promote the brand, Subaru effectively reinforces the community of enthusiasts through their involvement while simultaneously promoting it to the general public.
- Narrator: Distribution of merchandise is an often overlooked promotional tool. But in the context of a cult brand like Subaru, it is extremely effective. By giving ambassadors free merchandise to give away, Subaru further positions themselves as a generous brand while turning the people who wear and use that merchandise into walking billboards for promotion.



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Narrator: I contacted a local Subaru ambassador on Instagram asking if she would be willing to interview for this project. She ended up telling me about a group she's part of called Team Subie Snails. The group is going to meet up at a local Subaru dealership that weekend to take some pictures of their cars and then head to the Providence Auto Show. She invited me to join. Even though it was raining, everyone who showed up seemed really happy to be there. We drove in a convoy to the event and parked next to each other for some more pictures. The group was interested in seeing Subaru's new SUV, which was being featured at the show.

Narrator: I was able to talk to Lynsey, the ambassador I reached out to, about her involvement with Subaru and her enthusiast group.

Lynsey: I'm also involved in a car club, I guess, for lack of a better word called Team Subie Snails. The group started in California a few years ago and it spread across the country and around the world. I am an admin for the group so I help bring people into the group, keep an eye on our group activities, make sure everybody's behaving. And we have car meets, which is what we're doing today. There's a group of about 10 of us who met, came from New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Connecticut and came to Providence to go to a car show together. We do things like attend events like this and sometimes just get together to hang out.

Lynsey: We use a chat app to keep in touch so not everybody is close enough to always get together but we talk to each other on a daily basis and feel like we've known each other for a long time and we use the term family a lot to talk about how we feel about each other and I think it's true. We've been through a lot together. People have gotten engaged and had kids and are going in to the military and we know everything about each others lives and it goes way beyond our love of our cars.

Narrator: Membership in the group isn't an exclusive process. It seems that the only qualification necessary is Subaru ownership.

Mike: I actually met Lynsey, she came into my shop. She wanted me to fix her headlights and I said, really awesome Subaru and I was telling her about mine. I actually didn't even have mine at the shop that day so she was like, oh, you should join the Subie Snails. So I signed up and bought some stickers and so this is my first outing with these guys. It's kind of interesting to see what they're all about.

Ty: Ah, I was doing an Instagram give-a-way with my new ambassador stuff and somebody from the team ended up winning and he was like hey,

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you should totally check us out, seems like you're kinda into the car thing so we all are and we're a great group of people so I checked them out and bought a decal, slapped it on and I haven't looked back.

Narrator: While most members of Team Subie Snails have made some modifications to their car, it isn't a requirement.

Ty: Yeah, there's a few people on the Subie Snails that have an Outback and they've maybe done like one small cosmetic change to it but we welcome everybody. Other teams might only offer memberships to certain years or certain styles of cars and I think that's what makes Subie Snails special. It's like we accept everybody, it doesn't matter if you want to keep it stock or if you want to go lowered or if you want to jack it up and go off-roading.

Narrator: On a personal note, I was shocked by how friendly these people were. Despite never meeting me before, everyone was more than happy to talk to me and tell me their stories. They even invited me to lunch afterwards. Furthermore, the makeup of the group was very diverse, from the cars to the people who drove them. Subie Snails illustrated the closeness of the Subaru community and how smaller groups form within the larger community. It also showed me the local nature of these communities. While reviewing footage from Wicked Big Meet, I recognized one of the members that I had just met. His car was just as loud the second time I saw it.

Narrator: You would be hard pressed to find more loyal customers than Subaru buyers.

Bob Randall: I've owned a total, I believe, 10 Subaru's now.

MaryFran Randal: His first birthday we were like, let's do cars themed because, obviously, my husband loves cars. Do you want to go see Dada? So, we're thinking about it and Subaru makes a little infant rally onesy and I wanted it for ever. Well, we're really into Subaru's and it would be a good excuse to buy that onesy so we decided to give him a rally Subaru themed birthday party for his first party.

Sarah Yang: I've had 11 Subaru's now. I have my Subaru tattooed on my foot. I got about a year after I got the car. I always knew that I would love this car because it's been my dream car so I figured I might as well get it on myself permanently.

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- Narrator: If you observed each facet of Subaru's business strategy in a vacuum, it wouldn't be all that interesting. Any car company can make a good product, there is certainly a number that do. Any car company can make charity work part of their corporate strategy. These days it's almost a requirement and any car company can market their product using dogs. But Subaru does it all and they do it well. They have a following of extremely dedicated enthusiasts, not just because they make a good product at a good price but because they realize that there's a culture built around their offerings. They would be foolish to ignore the stereotypes and demographic and psychographic information about their customers but they don't. They realize that a lot of people buy their products because they want to feel safe in the snow with their dogs. They realize that a lot of young engineering types buy their WRX's so they can take the whole thing apart and crank up the boost. They get it and they support it without being too heavy handed.
- Narrator: As for me, I happily keep enjoying my half Subaru, half Toyota and every time I get a wave from another owner, I'll be glad to be part of the club.