



Marketing Intelligence & Planning

The brand meaning co-creation process on Facebook
Benjamin Rosenthal, Eliane Pereira Zamith Brito,

Article information:

To cite this document:

Benjamin Rosenthal, Eliane Pereira Zamith Brito, (2017) "The brand meaning co-creation process on Facebook", Marketing Intelligence & Planning, Vol. 35 Issue: 7, pp.923-936, <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2016-0171>

Permanent link to this document:

<https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2016-0171>

Downloaded on: 22 May 2018, At: 13:32 (PT)

References: this document contains references to 41 other documents.

To copy this document: permissions@emeraldinsight.com

The fulltext of this document has been downloaded 768 times since 2017*

Users who downloaded this article also downloaded:

(2015), "Consumer engagement in online brand communities: a social media perspective", Journal of Product & Brand Management, Vol. 24 Iss 1 pp. 28-42 <<https://doi.org/10.1108/JPBM-06-2014-0635>>

(2015), "Customer brand co-creation: a conceptual model", Marketing Intelligence & Planning, Vol. 33 Iss 6 pp. 848-864 <<https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-06-2014-0105>>

Access to this document was granted through an Emerald subscription provided by emerald-srm:606159 []

For Authors

If you would like to write for this, or any other Emerald publication, then please use our Emerald for Authors service information about how to choose which publication to write for and submission guidelines are available for all. Please visit www.emeraldinsight.com/authors for more information.

About Emerald www.emeraldinsight.com

Emerald is a global publisher linking research and practice to the benefit of society. The company manages a portfolio of more than 290 journals and over 2,350 books and book series volumes, as well as providing an extensive range of online products and additional customer resources and services.

Emerald is both COUNTER 4 and TRANSFER compliant. The organization is a partner of the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE) and also works with Portico and the LOCKSS initiative for digital archive preservation.

*Related content and download information correct at time of download.

The brand meaning co-creation process on Facebook

Benjamin Rosenthal and Eliane Pereira Zamith Brito

Department of Marketing,

*Fundacao Getulio Vargas Escola de Administracao de Empresas de Sao Paulo,
Sao Paulo, Brazil*

Brand
meaning
co-creation
process

923

Received 7 June 2016
Revised 16 September 2016
11 January 2017
18 April 2017
Accepted 19 April 2017

Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to propose a framework for brand meaning co-creation between brands and fans on Facebook.

Design/methodology/approach – A case study methodology was applied. Brand posts in the form of text, pictures, videos and fan comments of three brand pages – Nike Run, Mizuno and Jack Daniel's – were collected and analyzed in a netnographic manner. Seven influential fans of the Nike Run brand page, who were identified in the data, and one marketing manager of each brand were interviewed.

Findings – This paper shows how brand meanings are orchestrated by brand managers and co-created through a process in which the brand leads the dialog through several types of brand actions. It also shows how fans engage in this dialog through multiple forms of reactions. A brand page's content should be curated by its manager based on the role of the content on fans' lives and their potential reactions and not merely on the meanings that the brand desires to communicate.

Research limitations/implications – This paper proposes a conceptual framework for understanding brand meaning co-creation at the micro-level of brand-fans daily interactions. Nevertheless, this study analyzed only three brand pages in two product categories – alcoholic beverages and running. Therefore, the authors do not claim that one can extrapolate from their findings.

Practical implications – The brand meaning co-creation process that is identified here provides a useful frame of reference for brand managers who seek to understand how they can best influence fans to co-create brand meanings in directions that benefit their companies.

Originality/value – This paper evolves with the co-creation of brand meanings literature by proposing a framework of brand meaning co-creation on Facebook. This framework can help brand managers to fine tune their content strategy in social media.

Keywords Facebook, Brand meaning, Co-creation, Virtual brand community, Brand page

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Historically, brand managers have meticulously planned and delivered their desired brand meanings through mass media; they were used to controlling the messages that were received by consumers because communication was mostly unidirectional, and they were the source (Firat and Dholakia, 2006). Currently, in a context in which individuals spend much more time immersed in social media sites and less in mass media, brand managers still have a certain degree of control over some sources of brand meaning such as price, product and distribution. However, communication on social media, which is a relevant source of brand meaning, is less controllable. In this environment, the brand manager must develop content strategies that attract the attention of individuals and influence consumers' expressions in directions that are of interest to the brand in order to keep its story "as close as possible to the brand owner's desired story" (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012, p. 190). This is a difficult task considering the active role of individuals in social media and the rapid pace at which multiple interactions occur, with individuals immersed simultaneously on many platforms that attract sparse attention (Brasel, 2012).

Previous studies on brand meaning co-creation on social media sites have shown that multiple stakeholders co-create brand meanings in collaborative conversations (Iglesias *et al.*, 2013; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013; Merz *et al.*, 2009). Brands may have a leading role in engaging individuals in conversations; however, these individuals are crucial



in brand meaning co-creation because they interact with the brand and other individuals, and such exchanges alter the process of meaning creation (Muñiz and Schau, 2011). Nevertheless, the literature lacks empirical studies that demonstrate how and why consumers engage in the process of brand meaning co-creation (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013; Kornum and Mühlbacher, 2013; France *et al.*, 2015).

Co-creative environments can occur only if there are complementarities between the various parties. Understanding and influencing the co-creation of brand meanings on the basis of fans' participation is of paramount importance to the brand manager in a social media context in which the multiplicity of contents and the economic model of Facebook have caused the organic reach of brands to significantly fall. This is a problem that has been referred to as a "Reachpocalypse" (DeMers, 2015). Therefore, in this paper we ask: how are brand meanings co-created between brands and their fans on Facebook brand pages?

This paper describes how three brands and their Facebook fans co-create brand meanings through a process in which the brand leads the dialog through brand posts, and fans engage in this dialog through multiple forms of discourse. Methodologically, this paper adopts a case study perspective in a netnography of three brand pages. The results contribute to marketing theory both by demonstrating a process through which online social interactions may collectively create brand meanings and by presenting several types of brand content and fan discourse that lead to the interactions that co-create brand meanings.

Literature review

Brand meaning co-creation on social media

Brand meaning co-creation is "a discursive social process in which salient stakeholders may directly or indirectly, purposefully or coincidentally, interact via text to shape certain aspects of a brand's social reality" (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013, p. 1506). Branding in a social media context has evolved from old conceptions of branding as a process that is centered on the company as a content sender with a reasonable degree of control of the situation to multiple stakeholders as the co-creators of brand meanings (Merz *et al.*, 2009). This process occurs in the context of a dynamic in which branding has come to be "about facilitating conversations around the brand" (Christodoulides, 2009). Conversations may start with the brand by engaging consumers who in turn interact with the brand and other consumers, and these exchanges alter the process of the creation of meaning (Muñiz and Schau, 2011), which results in the brand being "conversationally co-created by many different stakeholders" (Iglesias *et al.*, 2013).

Brand meaning co-creation implies that brand meanings cannot be fixed or unified (Fisher and Smith, 2011), and brand meanings are derived from consumers' experiences as they interpret and re-signify brand stimuli in accordance with their desired social goals, life contexts, objectives and identity projects (Ligas and Cotte, 1999). In this context, brand meaning is the result of conversations that are anchored in assemblages that center on the consumer (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2016).

Brand management has been transformed by the brand meanings' co-creation logic, and managers' control over the creation of meaning has been reduced (Ligas and Cotte, 1999). The pinball metaphor that is described by Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2013) helps to explain some of these changes, with marketing actions (the ball) targeting consumers (the machine's bumpers, kickers and slingshots); however, consumers also influence marketing actions through active participation in the game. In this way, brand content may come from the brand or from the consumer, resonate with other consumers, and return to the brand in the form of feedback and the creation of meaning, thus demanding better orchestration capacity on the part of the brand owners (Gensler *et al.*, 2013).

Other concepts such as user-generated branding help to illustrate the division of power between brand managers and consumers, with brand management orchestrating multiple

stakeholders and thus acting as an influencer that facilitates interactions around a brand. The loss of power and control of the brand manager over the social media context is usually assumed to be a given in the marketing literature (Merz *et al.*, 2009; Fisher and Smith, 2011; Fournier and Avery, 2011), and the possibility of a high level of control and orchestration on the management side is rarely considered. Shao *et al.* (2015) provide a valuable example of how intended corporate brand meanings can align with consumer-generated brand meanings on social media. Hughes *et al.* (2016) also show how a luxury brand can co-create intended brand meanings by giving voice to fans in a strategy called storygiving. Singh and Sonnenburg (2012) show that by understanding the audience and its roles, by constantly improvising, and by keeping brand performance alive, a brand can sustain its performance and direct co-creation in the desired direction.

The research on brand meaning co-creation has evolved: brand power has been challenged (Shao *et al.*, 2015), strategies for brand narratives have been addressed (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012), the discursive activities of consumers (Kozinets *et al.*, 2010) or non-collaborative consumers (Cova and White, 2010) have been understood, and the role of multiple stakeholders on brand meaning co-creation have been mapped (Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013; von Wallpach *et al.*, 2017). Nevertheless, there is a gap at the process level, specifically with respect to how the co-creation of brand meaning occurs on social media platforms, how brand managers can orchestrate individuals in the co-creation process (Gensler *et al.*, 2013), and why and under what conditions brands and individuals co-create more frequently and significantly.

The co-creation of brand meanings is easily perceived, managed and measured by the management of a company if one model of brand meaning is adopted. In the branding literature there are a few different frameworks to follow. We chose Kapferer's (2008) brand-identity framework as our theoretical base because it is structured in six facets, and it presupposes the conveyance of meaning from the brand to the individual, which is relevant for a brand page. This framework is also more consumer-focused than others, and it thus accounts for individuals' inputs in the process. The physical facet is composed of the relatively more objective brand characteristics, such as product, package, colors and benefits – elements that, in general, make the brand tangible to the consumer. The personality facet is represented by the brand's emotional characteristics, the tone of voice, and the brand's personified elements. The cultural facet is profound, immersed in a system of values and practices that govern brand actions. The relationship facet is materialized in what the brand does for the consumer. The reflection facet is the perceived image of the consumer that is addressed by the brand. Finally, the mentalization facet refers to the image that the consumer creates of himself as a user of the brand. The six facets are thus defined by not only the messages that are sent by the brand to the market but also information and/or communications that are created outside of the company; these are always constructed in a communication process between the brand and its consumers.

Methodology

A case study methodology (Woodside, 2010) was used because the phenomenon (the process of brand meaning co-creation) and the context (the brand page environment) are inseparable and their relationship is complex and remains inadequately explored.

Two product categories were chosen – running apparel and alcoholic beverages – because they are categories with a high degree of involvement. Additionally, both categories are mature in Brazil. In 2010, there were four million runners in Brazil (Totti, 2010), and the consumption of alcohol per capita is 8.7 liters per year compared to the world average of 6.3 liters (Leal, 2014). The details of these brand pages can be seen in Table I. One of the authors was once a non-elite runner and has witnessed this community's passion for the activity for years. Two other criteria were also considered in the definition of the cases: a case

should involve a strong brand in its product category, and it should involve a high level of activity for both brand managers and brand fans. The Mizuno case was chosen to determine whether the magnitude of the number of fans played any role in the process of brand meaning co-creation.

Other Brazilian brand pages in these categories – Adidas, Asics and Budweiser – were initially examined but were not selected because of the low levels of activity and/or consumer involvement on their brand pages at the time.

Data collection

All of the brand posts and fan comments on the Brazilian Nike Run, Mizuno and Jack Daniel's brand pages were collected in a netnographic manner (Kozinets, 2006) to analyze the interactions between the brand and its fans and between the fans. In the Nike Run case, the types of brand content and fan comments became repetitive after six months (we collected data from May 2011 to October 2011), which indicates saturation, and thus, the data collection was terminated. In the Mizuno and Jack Daniel's cases, saturation occurred after four months (we collected data from September 2011 to December 2011 and from October 2011 to January 2012, respectively).

The marketing managers of Nike and Mizuno were interviewed while the Facebook data of these brands were being analyzed. The interviews were necessary to facilitate an understanding of the brands' marketing strategies and to validate the findings in terms of brand actions and fans' reactions on the brand pages. The interview with the Nike manager took place in a cafe in Sao Paulo and lasted approximately 90 minutes; the other interview took place at the company's offices and lasted approximately 60 minutes. An informal conversation, which lasted 30 minutes, was held with a Jack Daniel's marketing executive; however, the conversation could not be recorded.

Additionally, seven fans of Nike Run, four of whom were also fans of the Mizuno brand page, were interviewed by e-mail and by Facebook messenger to not only to understand their reasons for liking and participating in the brand pages but also obtain additional insights into the social dynamics of the brand page. The exchange of messages lasted several weeks, which allowed time for reflection on the part of both the interviewed parties and the interviewer. In a case study, the search for triangulation is a source of deep understanding (Woodside, 2010, p. 6). These members were chosen because they were frequent and influential participants on the Nike Run brand page. The Jack Daniel's case did not present any type of influential fans. Therefore, we did not interview any fans for this brand.

Data analysis

The Nike Run page was analyzed first, which allowed the authors to obtain an understanding of the emerging brand meaning co-creation process before the analysis of the other brand pages. The code categories related to brand actions (e.g. the runner's history,

Brand page	Number of fans	Object of analysis	Volume of data (word count)
Nike Run	1,000,000	Brand posts, members' comments, photos, videos, links, and interviews with 7 fans of the page and 1 brand manager	100,000
Mizuno	7,500	Brand posts, members' comments, photos, videos, links and an interview with 1 brand manager	26,000
Jack Daniel's	190,000	Brand posts, members' comments, photos, videos, links, and conversation with 1 marketing executive	17,600

Table I.
Characteristics of the brand pages studied and the amount of data analyzed

category habits and questions) and fan reaction dense descriptions and the grounded meanings that were found in the text (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Analytically, following the tradition of discourse analysis, the themes and functions that were present in the discourses of both the brand and the fans were sought (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). After several rounds of coding (Spiggle, 1994) for brand actions and fan reactions, the final code categories were established. Guidelines for the definition of each code category were produced to increase the internal validity of the coding process. Notes were taken during the process of codification on a weekly base during the four to six months of the netnography on each Brand Page, and the authors continually exchanged reflections on the ongoing analysis. The software HyperRESEARCH 3.0 was used in the codification process.

Each of the six facets of Kapferer's brand-identity prism – physical, personality, culture, relationship, reflection and mentalization – was used as a higher order code in the analysis of the interactions between brand and fans in the search for co-created brand meanings. All of the text (pictures, words, links and videos) was analyzed line by line, in the search for units of data (Spiggle, 1994) in brand-fans, fan-fan and fan-brand interactions that contained content that represented one or more than one of the facets of Kapferer's prism. The authors exchanged opinions about whether the content that was being coded represented none, one or many of the facets of Kapferer's prism. Examples of how this process occurs can be found in Tables AI and AII.

Results

The co-creation of brand meaning on brand pages is an iterative process that starts predominantly with the brand strategy and its choice of content – content that is centered on the brand and content that is centered on topics that are related to the consumption category (the types of brand content that are found in this research are illustrated in Figure 1). The interaction rapidly continues from fan to fan, who comments on, likes, shares or invites others to see it. Because brand managers curate the content, they exercise a high level of control over the topics that are discussed on the brand page. However, the fans have the

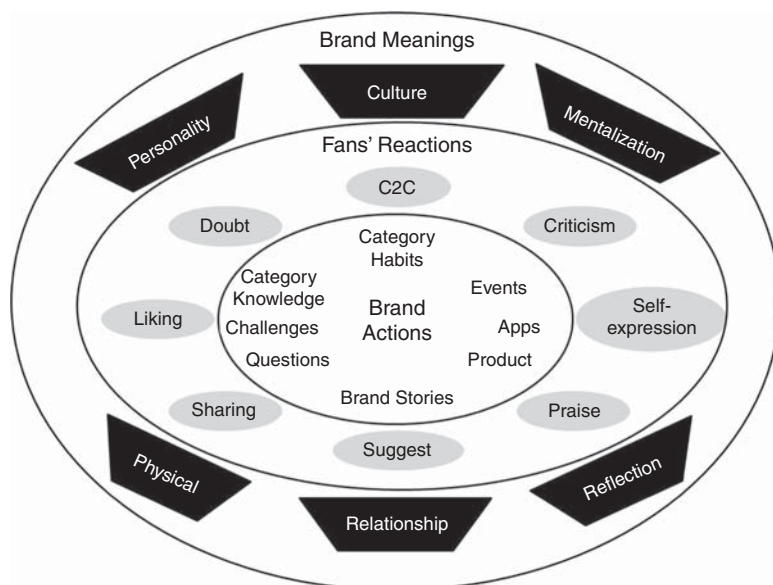


Figure 1.
Brand meaning
co-creation process
on brand pages

option of ignoring or commenting in any direction that they choose to pursue. Thus, through their engagement level, fans exercise a form of control over what the brand posts.

Brands can promote content about themselves – products, roles, solutions, values or history – as is done by the iconic Jack Daniel's and its founder, "Mr. Jack" (Holt, 2006). Brands can also communicate about matters that are related to the category, such as a fashion brand that covers Paris Fashion Week, a brewery company that reveals the history behind Abadia beer or a running-shoe company that pays tribute to the Berlin Marathon. In both strategies, the brand managers believe that their chosen type of content is not only the best way to communicate what their brand is but also what is important for the fans, which increases their engagement with the brand.

Nike and Mizuno post content is predominantly focused on category topics. However, the content of Jack Daniel's posts is centered on brand topics. Category topics included communications that are related to running challenges, runners' profiles, specialist opinions on running matters, various contests, and personal questions about running. Brand topics included TV commercials, promotions, sponsored events, products, packaging and the brand history, e.g., "Mr. Jack" and the history of the old Lynchburg distillery. Examples of brand posts, fans' comments and the consequent co-creation of brand meanings for Nike and Jack Daniel's are shown in Tables AI and AII. Mizuno is omitted because of its similarities with the Nike case.

Brand-fan interaction and brand meaning co-creation

We noted that fans interacted with brand posts in eight main ways, as Figure 1 illustrates. Obviously, other brands in other categories may find additional forms of interaction with their fans. This paper does not suggest any type of universal typology of fan reactions. The eight main forms of fan reactions are like, share, criticize, doubt, suggest, praise, self-expression and engagement in consumer-to-consumer (C2C) communication. We will show how these various types of reactions to brand posts constitute interactions that explicitly or implicitly contain brand meanings of one or more of the six facets of Kapferer's prism.

Liking and sharing are basic forms of engagement; they mean that fans enjoy the content, support what the brand publishes, and want to be associated with that content. When the fans share content, they are disseminating the meanings that the brand intended to communicate. Fans shared the Jack Daniel's content because of its ability to communicate what they value and how they intend to be perceived. Brands such as Jack Daniel's that have a strong culture may benefit from this identity-related motivation. Sharing Jack Daniel's content, for instance, was a common act of co-creating the meanings that are associated with the cultural facet of the brand.

Self-expression aggregates several types of expression about the product category or brand matters. When Nike asked, "If your shoes could speak [...] what would they say?" fans had the opportunity to present themselves as serious runners (e.g. "Take it easy! Why so fast?") or as someone who has run in Disneyland ("I loved to run in Disneyland with you!!!"). In both cases, Nike content is being used as a tool for self-perception and the communication of meaning – the mentalization facet of Kapferer's framework. Similarly, Nike invited fans to express who they were as runners in the posts that asked "Morning, afternoon or evening? What is your training schedule?" These are questions that open up opportunities for individuals to express their preferences and attitudes as runners. Self-expressions on the Nike Run and Mizuno pages were similar to runners' interactions during their social encounters in parks and racing events in the offline world. Posts create a contextual trigger for fans to express, in a strategy that is similar to the storygiving of Hughes *et al.* (2016), or to basement building and showcasing in the LEGO case of von Wallpach *et al.* (2017). The orchestration capacity (Gensler *et al.*, 2013) of brand meaning co-creation comes from the ability of brands to set conversation topics and let fans proceed with the conversation.

Praise and criticism are contextually dependent on the perceived value that brands deliver to consumers, and their abundance on social networks are the result of the transparency that is intrinsic to this medium. Praise and criticism are similar to the Offense and Defense discourse strategies that are described by Vallaster and von Wallpach (2013) and to the Missionizing Performance of von Wallpach *et al.* (2017). In one of the examples, Nike presented new running shoes that provide the sensation of being “barefoot.” Fans presented mixed attitudes toward the new trend, with critics (“for many years we were encouraged to believe in research that affirmed the opposite! Now, this barefoot trend? I’ll keep doing what is comfortable for me”) and praise (“I bought mine and they are very comfortable. They improved my speed on my last run!”). Fans’ evaluations co-created the brand meanings that are associated with the physical facet. Posting content that directs the interactions toward a brand’s products allows fans the opportunity to express their impressions. The more confident a brand is about its product performance, the greater the likelihood of positive brand meanings being co-created in these interactions.

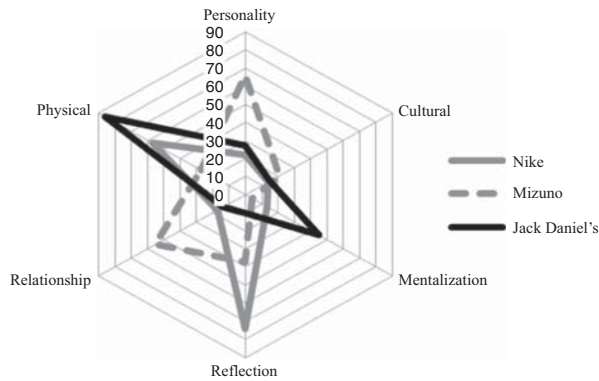
Doubt and suggestion comprised comments about technical difficulties, information about events, problems with an app, the appropriate product for each person, difficulties in finding a product and places to buy novelties. Doubt and suggestion were important types of communication not only between the brand and fans but also among fans. Commonly, the answers to doubts came from fans, not from the brand. In addition, this type of communication provides a rich source of evaluative information for the brand.

Usually, doubt and suggestion behaviors were involved in the co-creation of brand meanings that are associated with the physical facet. In technically rich categories such as running, fans constantly have product-related doubts, including whether it is suitable for the person’s needs, where to find it, how to use it, or how to solve problems. As an example, one fan criticized the Nike + app: “I cannot upload my runs any more. Not even on the Nike website. What a pity! If anyone can help I’d appreciate it.” Other fans rapidly got into the conversation, describing their own problems with the system, co-creating negative meanings regarding the physical facet.

C2C gathers all types of communication between fans, including information on various situations in which fans resolved each other’s doubts, exchanged opinions about products, events, apps or impressions about the posted topic posted, maintaining the brand page as a social environment in which people expressed support and understanding toward other fans. One of the Jack Daniel’s posts explained how to prepare a Jack and Coke: “Ice, Coke and 50ml of Jack Daniel’s Old N°7 [...] if you do not have a dispenser, turn down the Jack bottle and count: 1001, 1002, 1003, 1004, 1005, 1006. That’s it, you’ll have 50ml of Old N°7 [...]” The fans promptly interacted with each other, debating about whether it was acceptable or a sacrilege to mix Jack Daniel’s with some other liquid (“I’d never spoil the Old No 7 with anything!!! But I can try [...]”) and remembering that this was the favorite drink of a famous rock star (“Almighty God Lemmy likes it this way, but I prefer cowboy”). This preference for drinking Jack Daniel’s in a “cowboy fashion” is part of the tradition of the brand, which is reinforced continually by the voices of the fans, thus building brand meanings in the physical, personality and mentalization facets. Iconic brands such as Jack Daniel’s have greater potential to concentrate conversations on social media around the brand (Christodoulides, 2009).

Brand meaning co-creation: shape and size

Figure 2 presents a visual map that compares the resulting co-creation of brand meanings in the three cases. The Nike case is more characterized by the brand meanings that are associated with the physical and reflection facets. For the Mizuno brand, there were brand meanings that reflect the relationship and personality facets.



Source: Based on Kapferer's Prism

Figure 2.
Occurrence of brand
meaning co-creation

The differences between these three brands are the result of variations in content strategies and relationships with their fans. Nike's posts about professional runners, which continually communicate Nike's vision of the ideal runner, led to fans' approving of these posts and co-creating meanings that related to the reflection facet. Mizuno's strategy of activities such as sponsoring running competitions or providing information that is crucial for runners led to fans' reactions that co-create brand meanings that are related to the relationship facet. The Jack Daniel's' case was predominantly marked by brand meanings that are associated with the physical and the mentalization facets because the brand posts emphasized the drink, the traditional square bottle and icons such as the "Old N° 7" logo, and the comments of the fans emphasized who they were as Jack Daniel's drinkers.

Interestingly, the co-creation of brand meanings associated with the cultural facet was observed but only moderately in the interactions. Although Nike is known for its strong brand culture, the company appeared not to push its culture in every post. A Nike brand manager revealed in the interview that the brand deliberately devotes specific amounts of its page content to services for runners, running events, the Nike + challenge, products and global content – posted simultaneously and in a similar manner on every brand page of Nike worldwide.

In the Nike and Mizuno cases, the mentalization facet was the least prominent. Interestingly, runners did not use the Nike or Mizuno brand to state something about themselves (as Jack Daniel's fans did). These fans do not explicitly say that Nike or Mizuno reflects their identity; instead, they communicate their identity in a more implicit way, through participation in the community of runners.

Discussion

Based on our data, we state that brand meanings on brand pages can be orchestrated by brand managers (Gensler *et al.*, 2013), keeping brand meanings close to brand managers' desired direction (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012), and that brand content curation should be a function not only of the brand meanings as planned by brand managers but also based on what fans can do with the content (Kuksov *et al.*, 2013). Wirtz *et al.* (2013) suggest that the brand communities that are commanded by a brand traditionally produce brand-oriented content, especially when the brand has a strong brand identity. According to these authors, when the brand does not have a strong brand identity, it should center its content on topics that are engaging for consumers. We propose that brands such as Prada, Cooper, Starbucks and Levi's, as the Nike case shows, should decide what content to post based on a deep reading of the product category, the identification of what matters to fans, and how the content can affect the life of the fan.

Fan reaction to content strategy is uncontrollable but manageable. It is uncontrollable because it is fluid and dynamic. People read, interpret and appropriate content in light of their own experiences, values, lifestyles and ideologies. Possible asymmetries between the “source” and the “receiver” increase misunderstanding in the communication process (Hall, 2006). Kozinets’s (2017) analogy in which brand meanings are similar to something that stays on a tiger’s back, that is on an elephant’s back, that is on a turtle’s back, and so on, is useful. Brand meanings are always nested in the elements of the brand ecosystem. Therefore, brand managers should concentrate their efforts on producing content that reduces possible asymmetries and facilitates potential symmetries, engaging fans in communicative interactions to co-create brand meanings.

The presence of individuals with similar interests on brand pages creates the perfect audience for individual expression. In two of the brand pages runners encouraged each other in areas such as training, competing, adopting a certain diet or exercise routine, and recovering from injuries. The audience’s likes and comments reinforced members’ need for affirmation as runners. Nevertheless, not every comment was reinforced. Much of what was written was ignored. Consequently, the mirror is indeed sometimes a social experience and sometimes merely imagined or desired.

In this sense, brand pages are environments with characteristics of the brand publics studied by Arvidsson and Caliendo (2016), with many of the expressions being not interactions but merely individual expressions. The co-creation of brand meanings on the Jack Daniel’s brand page was a result of the collective (though not communal) expressions of fans. However, the co-creation of brand meanings on the Nike Run brand page was a result of collective and also communal interactions by fans. Brand pages can assume the characteristics of these two concepts (virtual brand communities and brand publics).

Boyd (2014) calls social networking sites “networked publics” in the sense that they unite people through technology and social practices. The Nike Run brand page was an online environment in which people could communicate their identities because the posts were about running practices. Individuals aggregate themselves into groups that are related to activities of common interest (Kozinets, 1999); therefore, brand pages with fans that are connected to others through an activity may benefit from the connective power of social networks. Brand pages can be the place where individuals discuss the social practices of their preference. These social practices can be the base of content curation that maximizes brand meanings’ co-creation.

Managerial implications

The co-creation process of brand meanings brings complexity to the brand management function. Although brand managers clearly play a leading role in the co-creation process, this power only manifests itself if the content stimulates brand-fan or fan-fan interactions. Nike and Mizuno contents have a high level of involvement because these brands are inserted into assemblages (Ramaswamy and Ozcan, 2016) that involve the brand, the individuals and their running activities. Nike and Mizuno contents are not only interesting but also connected to the life of the runner. In the case of Jack Daniel’s, the content is connected to the identity of the fan. Therefore, brand managers need to understand how their content fits into these assemblages.

Brand content must inspire fans and thus influence their probability of commenting on, liking, tagging or sharing brand posts. Brand managers should accomplish this goal by also considering the brand meanings that they intend to build. Therefore, managing brand pages entails planning content that is pertinent for the category and for the individuals who liked the brand page. Content attractiveness depends on what fans value, and it is the base of brand managers’ dominance over the flow and results of communication. Post quality is manifested through engaging videos and pictures (e.g. seductive pictures of the

Jack Daniel's square bottle, the logotype "Old No 7" and black and white images of Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin and Sammy Davis, Jr. Images are the first thing that one notices when navigating Facebook. Attractive images increased fan engagement and provoked more favorable comments (De Vries *et al.*, 2012).

Brand managers that work in categories of low involvement or categories that do not play an exciting role in the life of the individual (e.g. cleaning products) will have a harder time trying to engage their fans. France *et al.* (2015) have already stated that product category involvement is an antecedent of customer participation in co-creation. Fans' engagement increases in the encounter between social practices and brand content. Thus, category involvement (Kaufmann *et al.*, 2016) is a contextual element that is important for brands that are immersed in communities of practices that are based on consumption behaviors such as sports (e.g. running, diving, skating and surfing) or topics of interest (e.g. literature, photography, collecting and organic food).

In addition, brand managers must monitor stakeholders' interactions and measure their effects on brand meanings. Social media analysis has already developed metrics for engagement, sentiment analysis and lead users' opinions. Social media analysis could move forward and quantify the resulting brand meanings of brand-fan interactions. Kapferer's framework is just one example, and the process that is described here may apply to any brand meaning or brand image framework. Managers may evaluate whether the interactions on their brand pages are embedding brand meanings in a manner that is consistent with brand objectives. Managers can fine tune the content that is posted on their brand pages to obtain desired meanings.

Limitations and future research

In this research, two product categories that feature high levels of user involvement were studied. Thus, in this research, we did not consider the most common everyday categories, such as cleaning products. Brand pages in these categories might face distinct challenges in engaging their fans, and they might use different content strategies to pursue their communication goals.

Future studies could provide insight into communication strategies for each product category and even indicate intrinsic limits to fan engagement and to the ability to generate meaningful interactions on social networking sites.

In addition, future studies could investigate the effect of the multiplicity of platforms (e.g. Instagram and Twitter) and content with respect to brands' capacity to engage individuals and co-create meanings on social media. The limits to the co-creation of brand meanings in such a fast-paced, content-rich and attention-scarce environment remains to be investigated.

Finally, the type of analysis that is used in this research is fundamentally qualitative. The quantification of these interactions on platforms that collect and analyze massive data from brand pages could produce insights into the extent to which interactions on brand pages reflect the desired brand strategy and determine the degree to which results approach or diverge from brand objectives.

References

- Arvidsson, A. and Caliandro, A. (2016), "Brand Public", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 42 No. 5, pp. 727-748.
- Boyd, D. (2014), *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, Yale University Press, New Haven, CT.
- Brasel, S.A. (2012), "How focused identities can help brands navigate a changing media landscape", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 55 No. 3, pp. 283-291.
- Christodoulides, G. (2009), "Branding in the post-internet era", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 141-144.

- Cova, B. and White, T. (2010), "Counter-brand and alter-brand communities: the impact of web 2.0 on tribal marketing approaches", *Journal of Marketing Management*, Vol. 26 Nos 3/4, pp. 256-270.
- De Vries, L., Gensler, S. and Leeflang, P.S. (2012), "Popularity of brand posts on brand fan pages: an investigation of the effects of social media marketing", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 2, pp. 83-91.
- DeMers, J. (2015), "Why your organic Facebook reach is still falling – and what to do about it", *Forbes*, May 13, available at: www.forbes.com/sites/jaysondemers/2015/05/13/why-your-organic-facebook-reach-is-still-falling-and-what-to-do-about-it/#5ee951e2c84b (accessed June 5, 2016).
- Firat, A.F. and Dholakia, N. (2006), "Theoretical and philosophical implications of postmodern debates: some challenges to modern marketing", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 123-162.
- Fisher, D. and Smith, S. (2011), "Cocreation is chaotic: what it means for marketing when no one has control", *Marketing Theory*, Vol. 11 No. 3, pp. 325-350.
- Fournier, S. and Avery, J. (2011), "The uninvited brand", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 54 No. 3, pp. 193-207.
- France, C., Merrilees, B. and Miller, D. (2015), "Customer brand co-creation: a conceptual model", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 33 No. 6, pp. 848-864.
- Gensler, S., Völckner, F., Liu-Thompkins, Y. and Wiertz, C. (2013), "Managing brands in the social media environment", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 27 No. 4, pp. 242-256.
- Gyrd-Jones, R.I. and Kornum, N. (2013), "Managing the co-created brand: value and cultural complementarity in online and offline multi-stakeholder ecosystems", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66 No. 9, pp. 1484-1493.
- Hall, S. (2006), "Encoded/Decoded", in Durham, M.G. and Douglas, M.K. (Eds), *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden, MA, pp. 163-173.
- Hennig-Thurau, T., Hofacker, C.F. and Bloching, B. (2013), "Marketing the pinball way: understanding how social media change the generation of value for consumers and companies", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 27 No. 23, pp. 237-241.
- Holt, D.B. (2006), "Jack Daniel's America Iconic brands as ideological parasites and proselytizers", *Journal of Consumer Culture*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 355-377.
- Hughes, M.U., Bandoni, W.K. and Pehlivan, E. (2016), "Storygiving as a co-creation tool for luxury brands in the age of the internet: a love story by Tiffany and thousands of lovers", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 357-364.
- Iglesias, O., Ind, N. and Alfaro, M. (2013), "The organic view of the brand: a brand value co-creation model", *Journal of Brand Management*, Vol. 20 No. 8, pp. 670-688.
- Jorgensen, M.W. and Phillips, L.J. (2002), *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*, Sage, London.
- Kapferer, J.N. (2008), *The New Strategic Brand Management*, Kogan Page, London.
- Kaufmann, H.R., Kaufmann, H.R., Loureiro, S.M.C., Loureiro, S.M.C., Manarioti, A. and Manarioti, A. (2016), "Exploring behavioural branding, brand love and brand co-creation", *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, Vol. 25 No. 6, pp. 516-526.
- Kornum, N. and Mühlbacher, H. (2013), "Multi-stakeholder virtual dialogue: introduction to the special issue", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66 No. 9, pp. 1460-1464.
- Kozinets, R. (2017), "Brand networks as the interplay of identities, selves, and turtles: commentary on 'interplay between intended brand identity and identities in a Nike related brand community: co-existing synergies and tensions in a nested system'", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 70 No. 1, pp. 441-442.
- Kozinets, R.V. (1999), "E-tribalized marketing? The strategic implications of virtual communities of consumption", *European Management Journal*, Vol. 17 No. 3, pp. 252-264.
- Kozinets, R.V. (2006), "Netnography 2.0", in Belk, R.W. (Ed.), *Handbook of Qualitative Research Methods in Marketing*, Edward Elgar Publishing Inc., Northampton, MA, pp. 129-142.

- Kozinets, R.V., De Valck, K., Wojnicki, A.C. and Wilner, S.J. (2010), "Networked narratives: understanding word-of-mouth marketing in online communities", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 74 No. 2, pp. 71-89.
- Kuksov, D., Shachar, R. and Wang, K. (2013), "Advertising and consumers' communications", *Marketing Science*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 294-309.
- Leal, A. (2014), "Consumo de álcool no Brasil supera média mundial, segundo OMS", *Agência Brasil*, May 15, available at: <http://agenciabrasil.ebc.com.br/geral/noticia/2014-05/consumo-de-alcool-no-brasil-supera-media-mundial> (accessed April 3, 2017).
- Ligas, M. and Cotte, J. (1999), "The process of negotiating brand meaning: a symbolic interactionist perspective", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 609-614.
- Merz, M.A., He, Y. and Vargo, S.L. (2009), "The evolving brand logic: a service-dominant logic perspective", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 37 No. 3, pp. 328-344.
- Muñiz, A.M. Jr and Schau, H.J. (2011), "How to inspire value-laden collaborative consumer-generated content", *Business Horizons*, Vol. 54 No. 3, pp. 209-217.
- Ramaswamy, V. and Ozcan, K. (2016), "Brand value co-creation in a digitalized world: an integrative framework and research implications", *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, Vol. 33 No. 1, pp. 93-106.
- Shao, W., Jones, R.G. and Grace, D. (2015), "Brandscapes: contrasting corporate-generated versus consumer-generated media in the creation of brand meaning", *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, Vol. 33 No. 3, pp. 414-443.
- Singh, S. and Sonnenburg, S. (2012), "Brand performances in social media", *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, Vol. 26 No. 4, pp. 189-197.
- Spiggle, S. (1994), "Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 21 No. 3, pp. 491-503.
- Strauss, A.L. and Corbin, J. (1990), *Basics of Qualitative Research*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park, CA.
- Totti, I. (2010), "Mercado em alta performance. Corrida de rua tem 4 milhões de adeptos", *O Globo*, July 17, available at: <http://oglobo.globo.com/blogs/pulso/posts/2010/07/17/mercado-em-alta-performance-corrída-de-rua-tem-4-milhoes-de-adeptos-308846.asp> (accessed January 17, 2014).
- Vallaster, C. and von Wallpach, S. (2013), "An online discursive inquiry into the social dynamics of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 66 No. 9, pp. 1505-1515.
- von Wallpach, S., Hemetsberger, A. and Espersen, P. (2017), "Performing identities: processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 70 No. 1, pp. 443-452.
- Wirtz, J., den Ambtman, A., Bloemer, J., Horváth, C., Ramaseshan, B., van de Klundert, J. and Kandampully, J. (2013), "Managing brands and customer engagement in online brand communities", *Journal of Service Management*, Vol. 24 No. 3, pp. 223-244.
- Woodside, A.G. (2010), *Case Study Research: Theory, Methods, Practice*, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, Bingley.

Brand content codes	Fans' reactions codes	Brand meaning co-created
Category knowledge: today is a day on which to honor our greatest all-time hero, the legendary Steve Prefontaine... even after his death, he continues to inspire us today. Steve said: "Over the years, I've been looking for a thousand reasons to keep running, but always come back to where it all began, self-satisfaction and fulfillment" Question: if your shoes could speak [...] what would they say?	Self-expression: "When I run, I feel free, my mind empties, my heart beats faster [...] and with that I feel more and more at ease. Even among cars, buildings, noise, and pollution, I keep running and admiring the landscapes through which I run with other eyes [...]"	Culture; personality; reflection
Category habits + brand app + question: morning, afternoon or evening? What is your training schedule? Defend your choice in the new virtual challenge that Nike + has opened [...] Let's see who runs more: morning, afternoon, or evening runners? Challenge + brand app: we have already accumulated 935 K in the virtual challenge commemorating 5 years of Nike +! If you're a Nike + member, do not waste time: join the team "Nike + Party" [...] and get to this party	Self-expression: "Take it easy! Why so fast?"; "Come back here! You're too lazy!"; "This girl will go far!"; "I loved to run in Disneyland with you!"; "Faster!!!!"; "Trade me for a Nike Free Run!!" Self-expression: "anytime! I run, run, run [...] endorphin and happiness always turned on!"; "5:15 am!!!"; "in the morning is better [...] energy for the rest of the day!"; "I train twice [...] in the morning and at the end of the afternoon, when my pace improves" Doubt: "I cannot upload my runs any more. Not even on the Nike website [...]. If anyone can help I'd appreciate it" C2C: "I've done my part today, folks [...] 8 km [...] let's go!!!!" Criticism: "the chip works, it connects with the i-pod [...] but it doesn't save my runs anymore [...] it makes me angry!"	Mentalization; culture; physical Relationship; mentalization Physical
Category knowledge + brand product: studies show that runners who train barefoot develop stronger feet. After all, the natural movement increases strength, and strength means speed. Nike Free Run + 2 is also this: speed. It helps to build "powerful muscles" – but go slow because the runner is not used to these movements, and it takes a while to get accustomed to them	Praise: "beautiful! How much?" Self-expression/praise: "I bought mine and they are very comfortable. They improved my speed [...]" Criticism: "for many years we were encouraged to believe in research that affirmed the opposite! Now this barefoot trend? I'll keep doing what is comfortable for me" C2C: "I agree with him! I'll keep my old shoes"	Culture; reflection; physical

Table A1. Examples of brand content (actions), fan engagement (reactions) and brand meaning co-creation for Nike Run

Brand content codes	Fans' reactions codes	Brand meaning co-created
<p>Brand stories: legend has it that the two chairs besides the grave of Mr. Jack were for the ladies of Lynchburg to cry for his death [...] Is it too macabre for Halloween? Would anyone here celebrate this occasion besides Mr. Jack? P.S. Take a look at the empty bottles near the grave. Tense!</p> <p>Brand stories + question + product: the most famous Old No. 7 drink and a favorite of rock legends: Jack Coke! Ice, Coke and 50ml of Jack Daniel's Old N°7. So, Jack's crowd: any recipe for the summer? Take a look at a fan's tip: if you do not have a dispenser, turn down the Jack bottle and count: 1,001, 1,002, 1,003, 1,004, 1,005, 1,006. That's it, you'll have 50ml of Old N°7 in your glass Brand stories: no matter how long it takes, do your best, anywhere in the world. Cheers for the independent spirit of Jack Daniel's! Link to a youtube video "Jack Daniel's: Yee-Haw Poster Documentary" Product: it's impossible not to be proud of the most famous square bottle in the world! What many people don't know is that Mr. Jack bottled his whiskey in ceramic jars at the beginning! Can you imagine it, Jack's crowd?! Only in 1870 did Mr. Jack surrender to the square bottles! At the beginning, he chose a default bottle, round [...] but because his whiskey was different, he believed that the bottle should be distinct too! So in 1895, a salesman from the Alton Glass Company showed him an unconventional square bottle [...] 100 years later, we can only thank Mr. Jack for making the right choice! Cheers!</p>	<p>Self-expression: "after a few bottles of Jack I would easily go [...]"; "the guy knew how to treat ladies [...] hahaha" Praise: "this guy has done a lot for mankind, so let's celebrate his passage through this life."; "I would go anywhere to drink Jack!" Doubt: "So, when will we have Jack Honey in Brazil?" Self-expression: "I'll count real slow [...]"; "Almighty God Lemmy likes it this way, but I prefer cowboy" Praise: "I'd never spoil the Old No 7 with anything!!! But I can try [...]"; "Jack is always Jack! Jack Coke was consecrated long ago [...]" C2C/praise: "I also find it a waste"; "yeah, you can't mix it with anything. What a sin!" Self-expression: "Cheers to being unique!!!"; "I want one of these handmade posters!" Praise: "The best whiskey that I ever drank in my life."; "to create a poster like this [...] only with the true spirit of Jack!" Self-expression: "partner for the best times!"; "king of whiskeys and the first which knocked me over too"; "from what I read Mr. Jack started to use the square bottle because whiskey was transported in carts and the round bottle took a lot of space and it broke more often" Praise: "#Nectar"; "Saintly remedy!"; "there's nothing to compare with it!"</p>	<p>Personality; mentalization; culture; physical</p> <p>Physical; reflection; personality; mentalization</p> <p>Culture; reflection; physical; personality</p> <p>Physical; personality; culture</p>

Table AII.
Examples of brand content (actions), fan engagement (reactions) and brand meaning co-creation for Jack Daniel's

Corresponding author

Benjamin Rosenthal can be contacted at: benjamin.rosenthal@fgv.br