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VISUALIZING BRAND PERSONALITY AND PERSONAL BRANDING:
CASE ANALYSIS ON STARBUCKS AND NIKE'S BRAND VALUE CO-CREATION
ON INSTAGRAM

by

Chia Yu Chang

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree
in Journalism
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

August 2014

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Kajsa E. Dalrymple

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Chia Yu Chang

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts
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To My Parents in Taiwan

We live in a time where brands are people and people are brands.

Brian Solis, *The Future of Business*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I never thought that I would be able to write a thesis. But last summer, I decided to challenge myself and see how far I can go. I have always been fascinated with new technologies and the opportunities they provide to bring people closer. A research on Instagram, a mobile application I use daily, is not only an academic endeavor but also a deeper understanding of myself, a typical social media and smartphone addict. I only wish my small adventure in the academia can make some contribute, in any way, to the knowledge of mobile photo-sharing or inspire people in this field. I would like to thank my academic advisor Prof. Kajsia Dalrymple for helping me come up with this thesis and providing all kinds of support tirelessly and carefully; also, my committee members Prof. Lyombe Eko and Prof. Brian Ekdale for constructive suggestions and careful examination on my thesis. I would also like to thank Brent at the Writing Center for giving me editing support. Finally, the biggest thank-you is going to my parents in Taiwan, who bear the loneliness of my absence, worrying about me day and night, and yet selflessly supporting every decision I make in my life.

ABSTRACT

This general purpose of this qualitative study is to investigate how businesses and consumers are co-creating brand value on social media by sharing photos on Instagram. The main focus is two-fold, one is to look at how corporations like Nike and Starbucks are utilizing Instagram to engage customers; another is to look at how customers presenting brand images and identify with brand personalities. This research analyzed 238 customer-created images and 62 corporate-created Instagram images using a hybrid method of qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis as an empirical way to explore the big picture of this new and understudied topic. The data was collected through Keyhole and Statigram, two online social media analytical tools. The analysis of the data shows overall positive brand image sharing among customers, implicit, indirect tactics in companies' official image sharing, and customers' use of brand as a way to promote and express themselves. Overall, customers' brand value co-creation practice on Instagram focus heavily on the individuals' self expression rather than brand community building. The study also discovered valuable themes of the use of selfies and the self-directed sarcasm among Instagramers who share brand images. The findings showed an overall decentralizing brand value co-creation process and that marketers today will face more and more challenges in controlling and managing a consistent brand image. The study contributes to the understanding of visual communication and the new marketing paradigm in a visual centric digital culture.

Keywords: mobile photo-sharing, visual communication, digital photography, brand value co-creation, social media marketing, Instagram

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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

With new advances of camera phones and digital sharing technologies, mobile photo-sharing has become an important communication activity and an integral part of many people's social lives. Since the camera's invention in 1839, pictorial artifacts have gone from being exclusive to artistic and cultural elites to becoming easily accessible to the public and the modern "snaps"(Miller & Edwards, 2007), who use their camera phones to take pictures and immediately share the photos with mass audience on social media. This phenomena not only has new implications for mass communication research but marketing communications as companies are eager to find innovative ways to engage their customers in today's fragmented and visual-driven media environment.

Among the growing mobile photo-sharing tools, Instagram has become the fastest growing social media market tool. As of May, 2013, 67% of the top 100 global brands which are recognized by Interbrand, a prestigious branding consulting firm, are on Instagram. This number has increased 14% from February, 2013, making Instagram the fastest growing social network for brands at the fourth quarter of 2013 (Finn, 2013). As of October 22, 2013, 55 million photos are posted daily, and 8,500 likes are generated per second on Instagram (Smith, 2013). With the increasing popularity of this mobile photo-sharing application, firms on Instagram are struggling to find ways to create differential brand value and worthwhile stories through the lens of mobile phones to stand out from other brands competing for their customers' attention. On the other hand, customers are provided with great freedom and convenience to share images related to their brand experiences and products with just one click on their phones. Although previous scholarship has investigated new digital photo sharing technologies, such as mobile

messaging system (MMS) and photo sharing web space like Flickr (Van House, 2009; Patela, N., Clawson, J., Voidab, A., & Lyonsc, K., 2009), limited research has focused on mobile photo-sharing application and its implications to brand value and marketing. With strong interests in the changing power between marketers and consumers on new media, strategic marketing communications, and the confluence of visual communication and mobile technology, the author aims to explore the sharing of Nike and Starbucks' brand images on Instagram as a way to add knowledge to existing literature and provide managerial suggestions for future Instagram marketers. The focus of this research is to shed light on how brand value is co-created on Instagram and how corporations and customers are presenting themselves through image sharing.

Instagram: The Fastest Growing Social Mobile Application

Instagram is a Facebook-owned mobile photo-sharing application and is quickly becoming one of the fastest growing social media platforms on the Internet. Launched in October 2010, it took 19 months for Instagram to generate 50 million users. The growth sped up in 2013 after Facebook purchased the app in 2012, reaching 150 million users in September, 2013. An official Instagram blog post stated that, “now, more than ever, people are capturing the world in real-time using Instagram—sharing images from the farthest corners of the globe. What we see as a result is a world more connected and understood through photographs” (Instagram Today, 2013). Instagram also quickly became the fastest growing marketing tool on social media. As of May, 2013, 67% of the top 100 global brands which are recognized by Interbrand, a prestigious branding consulting firm, are on Instagram. This number jumped 14% in February, 2013, making Instagram the fastest growing social network for brands that quarter (Finn, 2013).

According to Smith (2013), the 76 brands out of the top 100 brands that are on Pinterest have a collective audience of 500,000, while Instagram's 67 brands have over 7 million followers. As of October 22, 2013, 55 million photos are posted daily, and 8,500 likes are generated per second.

Instagram's most distinctive feature is the photo filter, a digital layer that, when added to the original photo, gives the photo an appearance of professional look. Without using actual photo-editing software, the Instagram filter automatically adjusts the brightness, enhances the colors, and gives soft glow to the photos to create vintage appearance. There are twenty digital filters to choose from, creating different tones and atmosphere. After the filter being applied, the photo is ready to be shared on Instagram or to other social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, or foursquare. Below, there are three pictures showing the interface of Instagram and the process of shaping, filtering, and sharing. The first one shows a picture being taken, the second one shows digital filters being applied, and the third one shows the filtered photo being shared to other platforms.

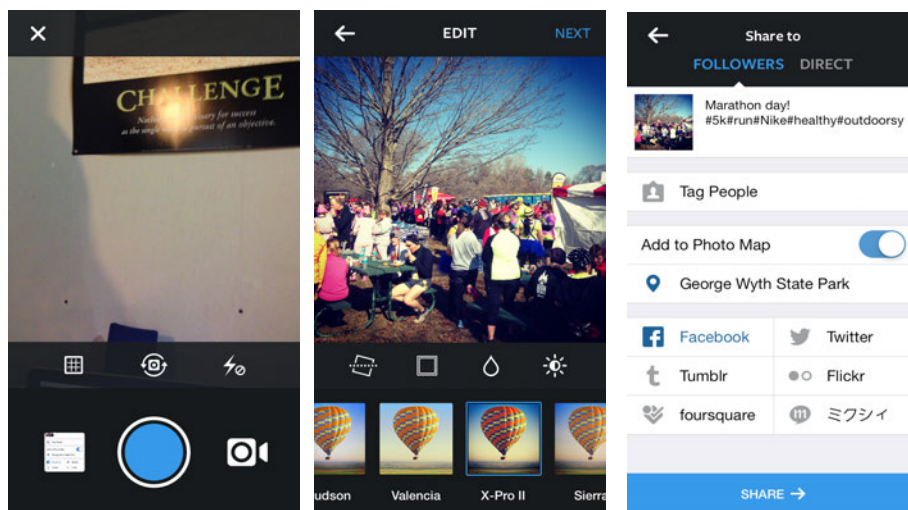


Figure 1: Three Steps of Sharing on Instagram: Snap,

When sharing the photo, the users can add a caption for the photo. In the caption, the user can choose to “hashtag” certain words to emphasize. Hashtag is an invention of Twitter. In 2007, web developer Chris Messina proposed that Twitter begin grouping popular topics using the hash(#) symbol. Twitter initially rejected the idea. But in October 2007, the hashtag activity took off when citizen journalists began using the hashtag #SanDiegoFire to tweet updates on a series of forest fires in San Diego (Hiscott, 2013). Now the hashtag has been widely used for popular topics, names, and just about any words. The use of hashtags has also extended to other social media platforms like Instagram. Adding a hash sign (#) turns any word or group of words that directly follow it into a searchable link that puts captions into categories. Today, companies on Instagram are struggling to find ways to create differential brand value and worthwhile stories through the lens of mobile phones to stand out from other brands competing for their customers’ attention. On the other hand, customers are provided with great freedom and convenience to share images related to their brand experiences and products with just one click on their phones. Now, customers are sharing brand images in a pace that is a lot faster than the brand itself. For example, Starbucks posts photos in an average of 3 times a week on its official account, while there are approximately 10,000 photos hashtagged Starbucks (#Starbucks) being posted everyday by customers.

The Evolution of Photography and Visual Communication

When Louis Daguerre invented the first practical photographic method in 1839, it was considered to be a great progress in science which allowed reality to be captured and documented in light. Photography was a rare technology and was exclusive to social elites and artists. In order to make photography more easy and accessible, the first step

was to transform the all-mechanical camera system into electronic mechanism and digital processing. The first recorded attempt at building a digital camera was in 1975 by Steven Sasson, an engineer at Eastman Kodak. He used the image sensor chips developed by Fairchild Semiconductor in 1973. In 1888, the Eastman Kodak Company introduced the first commercially successful Kodak camera that used flexible roll film instead of heavy glass photographic plates. The portability and affordability of Kodak cameras, especially the Kodak Pocket cameras introduced in 1895, initiated the first wave of digital photography.

Today, with the invention of digital photography and the ability to mass-produce images, photography becomes more and more popular and ubiquitous. “Personal photography has diversified from the expensive and to some extent, difficult production of single images during the nineteenth century, through the mass production, distribution and consumption of ‘snaps’ throughout the twentieth century, to the apparently infinitely expanding and diverse personal images people instantaneously produce and consume in the twenty-first century” (Hand, 2012, p.10). Photos gradually become an integral part of our daily lives. Many researchers started to wonder how the rise of photography means to our culture and change the way people communicate. Mitchell (2006) in his book, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images*, suggests that images are not just inert objects that carry meaning but animated beings with desires, needs, appetites, demands, and drives of their own.

Past research on photo-sharing has focused on family photography and the role of photos in the home (Chalfen, 1987; Spence and Holland, 1991), and, to a lesser extent, tourist photography (Haldrup and Larsen, 2003; Larsen, 2005). Today, with the invention

of camera phones, taking and sharing photos has become extremely cheap, instant, and convenient. Miller and Edwards (2007) conducted a study on personal photo-sharing on Flickr.com. They concluded that the digital photography and web-based photo-sharing has created a new type of culture that is different from the “Kodak Culture,” where photos are not replicable. Chalfen (1998) coined the concept of “Kodak Culture” to explain a home mode of photo sharing among close friends and family who usually know the people in the images and have prior knowledge about the events that are captured in the photos. In the Kodak Culture, images are supplements of oral story-telling.

Miller and Edwards (2007) use the concept of “Kodak Culture” to describe the group of people who share the images only with friends and family, and, in the digital age, with emails and high privacy settings. They found that the new technology has created a type of participation they called the post-Kodak “Snapr Culture.” “Snaprs” are people who use camera phones to take pictures and share the images online. For Snaprs, photo-sharing is a way to document their everyday lives, and they view photo sharing as a fundamentally public, even global, act (p. 835). Van House (2009) took a closer look at the mindset of the photo-sharing participants on Flickr.com. She argued this kind of participation is a way of “performing,” and that the process is more important than the production, the images (p.1084). With Instagram and a more public, instant photo-sharing practice, it is time to investigate the culture of “Instagramers.”

Instagram and Branding

With this new technology and empowered customers, brand value creation thus started to shift from a firm-centric and top-down approach to online social sharing of personalized customer experiences. Customer-to-customer and firm-to-customer

interactions are both important elements in the process of brand value creation. Instagram allows users to take a photo, apply a professional-looking filter, and share it on Instagram or other social networking platforms. With its visual centric and transient nature, both the businesses and customers are adapting very different ways to tell the brands' own stories, or to use the brand to express themselves. This creates a drastic blurred domain between the business and the consumers, the photographers and the viewers, the professionals and the amateurs, and the promoters and the promoted on Instagram. Drawing from the theoretical frameworks of Prosumerism and the studies of electronic word-of-mouth, (eWOM), the author argues that a brand's Instagram presence is co-created by the images posted on the brand's official accounts and images from customers with "hashtags" (#) of the brand's name. The company created images are posted in the company's official Instagram feed while customer shared images are posted on customers personal feed but can be searched by typing in hastag (#) with the brand's name.

New Marketing Paradigm and Challenges

The consumers who are sharing content and experiences about brands are usually doing it voluntarily instead of being converted or paid by the brands to do so. However, these brand sharing activities on Instagram have at the same time disillusioned executives' ideal of having a strong control over content about their brands. Facing the rise of customer brand sharing activities, most of the companies are left wondering how to adapt and transfer their brand value to a new platform. In the past, marketers were used to buy media and plan out the advertising mix according to companies' budgets. Now, the most effective marketing channel can not be bought anymore, but to be earned and owned by

companies who successfully utilize social media tools and connect with their customers and generate organic conversation about their brands.

However, social media marketing is extremely hard to measure and control. Grainger (2010) researched how the Fortune 500 companies are using, perceiving, and measuring social media as a marketing tool. He found that although most of the companies deem social media as an increasingly important marketing tool, more than 60% of the Fortune 500 respondents admitted that they did not include social media when they are calculating the return on investment (ROI) of marketing campaigns. This suggested the still-peripheral status of social media. However, more and more marketing professionals are aware of the quickly growing importance of social media in today's marketing landscape.

In his series of books discussing the future of business in the digital revolution, Solis (2011; 2013) suggested that the only way for brands to engage their customers in this new marketing paradigm is to pay close attention to what their customers want to talk about. Although the new marketing channels are abundant and free, the relationship business hope to have with customers through these new devices, applications, or networks, most of the time, is still woefully one-sided and usually not to the advantage of customers (Solis, 2013, p.151). To understand what the customers really want and to engage in their conversations, businesses need to be aware of what customers are sharing about their brands and use empathy to understand customer experiences. It is important to remember that the foremost desire of human communication is to connect with people who are similar and have the same interests with themselves (Mangold & Faulds, 2009, p. 361). Despite the prevalence and importance of brands' Instagram presence in today's

market place, little known research has focused on the content of Instagram images being shared and their qualitative value. By analyzing brand images and the brand value creation activities on Instagram, this research helps future marketers identify what and why their customers are sharing.

CHAPTER II LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumers' Role in the Era of Prosumerism

In the age of Web 2.0 and social networking, traditional marketing has become decentralized, democratized, and fragmented in a “prosumer” culture where consumers become co-creators and collaborators who participate in telling brand stories and showcasing brand experiences (Deuze, 2007). “Prosumerism” originated from Alvin Toffler’s book *The Third Wave* (1980) in which he argued that consumers are a phenomenon of the Industrial Age, as society moves toward the Post-Industrial Age, consumers will be replaced by “prosumers,” people who produce many of their own goods and services. Jenkins (2003) extends this concept to the production of media and calls the audience “empowered consumers.” Deuze (2005) in his article “Towards Professional Participatory Storytelling in Journalism and Advertising” proposes a form of collaborative story-telling in journalism and advertising experience between the traditional content providers and consumers. With the consumers’ increasing ability to co-create content and stories, there comes a “consumer-to-business and upstream marketing” model that overturns the traditional marketing narratives. “Advertisers and journalists should be trained to think about the stories they tell as co-created with those once they identified and thus effectively excluded as audiences, users, consumers, or citizens” (Deuze 2005, p.6).

Another branch of scholarship that considers the power of consumer-generated content online is research on electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). The invention of Web 2.0 and the emergence of social media grant a forum for consumers to recommend, compare, and share experiences about brands. This particular type of communication that

happens among consumers about companies' reputations has been called the Word of Mouth (WOM) communication. Past scholarship has shown that Word of Mouth has a significant impact on consumer choice as well as post-purchase product perceptions. Today, with the advent of the Web 2.0, WOM communication takes a new form online. This form of electronic word-of-mouth communication (eWOM) has been shown in certain situations to be more effective than the traditional marketing tools of personal selling and various types of advertising (Gruen, Osmonbekov, & Czaplewski, 2005; Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009). However, past research focuses on the sharing of text instead of images in the eWOM communication. Lin, Lu, and Wu (2012) published a study on the effect of visual information in eWOM communication. They found out that their research subjects rated eWOM articles in blogs with visual information significantly higher than identical articles without visual information. The sharing of visual information also generated greater product interest and purchase intention. On Instagram, customers' sharing of brand experiences through images thus becomes a topic worth further exploration.

Conceptualizing Brand and Brand Value

Brand, in Old English, was used before the 12th century as the word "bærnan," meaning to burn. It later extended its meaning to indicate the burning mark made by hot iron to designate ownership or manufacturing quality (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Today, a simple definition of a brand, from the American Marketing Association, is the "name, term, design, symbol, or any other feature that identifies one seller's product distinct from those of other sellers" (AMA, n.d.). A strong and valuable brand is considered to bring companies more sales and reputation. The definition of brand value is "the totality of

perceptions and feelings that consumers have about any item identified by a brand name, including its identity, quality and performance, familiarity, trust, perceptions about the emotions and values the brand symbolizes, and user imagery” (Batra, Ahuvia & Sankaranarayanan, 2012, p.1).

In traditional marketing theory, brand value creation depends on the firms’ advertising expenditure, pricing techniques, and product solutions, and can be measured by collecting data on customers’ ability to associate brand and their perceived quality of the brand’s products (Kamakura & Russell, 1992). From a previously established managerial perspective, brand value (or equity) is the outcome of long-term investments designed to build a sustainable, differential advantage relative to competitors (Doyle, 1990). In this traditional view, consumers are merely the receivers of brand value and interact with the firms only at the point of sale.

With the advancement of technology, it is harder and harder for firms to have control over brand value. “The meaning of value and the process of value creation are rapidly shifting from a product- and firm-centric view to personalized consumer experiences. Informed, networked, empowered, and active consumers are increasingly co-creating value with the firm” (Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, p. 5). In this sense, the interaction between the firms and the consumers becomes a process of brand value co-creation rather than the exchange of money and products.

Brand Value Co-Creation

In regards to new dynamics of the market place, the concept of brand value co-creation becomes extremely relevant. The relationship between companies and customers are no longer based on goods and monetary exchange but on sharing and co-creating

brand value through dialogue or, in the case of Instagram, image sharing. From the 1980s, researchers started to challenge the old “good-dominant logic” of marketing in which focused on the exchange of tangible goods and shifted the focus to the “service-dominant logic” with emphasis on the exchange of intangibles goods like skills, knowledge, and process (Payne, Storbacka, Frowe & Knox, 2009). “ From a goods-dominant logic perspective, suppliers produce products and customers buy them. With a service-dominant logic, customers engage in dialogue and interaction with their suppliers during product design, production, delivery and consumption” (Payne, et al., 2009, p. 80).

The dialogue between customers and suppliers breaks down the wall of traditional marketing and provides opportunities of brand value co-creation. We started to see the emergence of “customizing consumer” – consumers who examine market offerings and create a customized consumption experience for themselves (Bendaupudi & Leone, 2003, p. 14). However, scholars in the 1990s who studied customer participation mainly focused on assessing benefits, mostly monetary, that can be brought by customers’ co-production process and how firms should treat customers as partial employees in order to efficiently manage them (Bendaupudi & Leone, 2003, p.15). Many researchers in the 2000s focused on the consumers’ participation in the production of content and innovation of services with little mention on the brand value (Potts, Hartley, Banks, Burgess, Cobcroft, Cunningham & Montgomery, 2008; Vargo, Maglio & Akaka, 2008; Bendaupudi & Leone, 2003). Exceptions are Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) and Payne, et al. (2009) who focus on the co-creation perspective in which the brand value become customized experiences consumers share among themselves. Related the concept

to this research, the sharing of brand experiences on Instagram can thus be seen as an on-going process of brand value co-creation.

According to Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004), the market is a forum for the consumers and firms to interact and create unique value and “the roles of the company and the consumer converge. The firm and the consumer are both collaborators and competitors: collaborators in co-creating value and competitors for the extraction of value” (p. 11). This research is thus to investigate how this brand value co-creation is being processed on Instagram between companies and customers.

The following illustrated the changing marketing paradigm and how brand value creation shifted form firm-centric to co-creating.

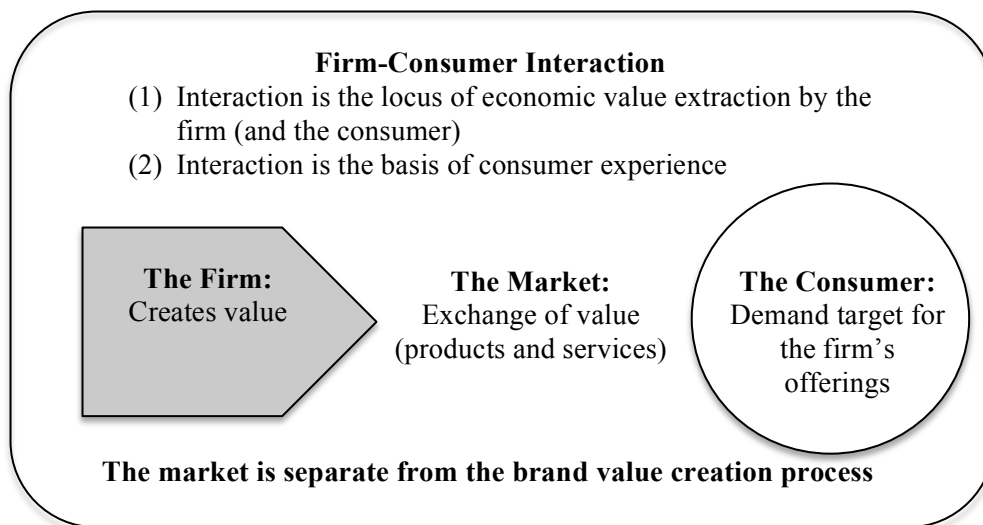


Figure 2: The Traditional Concept of the Market

Source: Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, Co-Creation Experiences:

The Next Practice in Value Creation. Journal of Interactive Marketing.

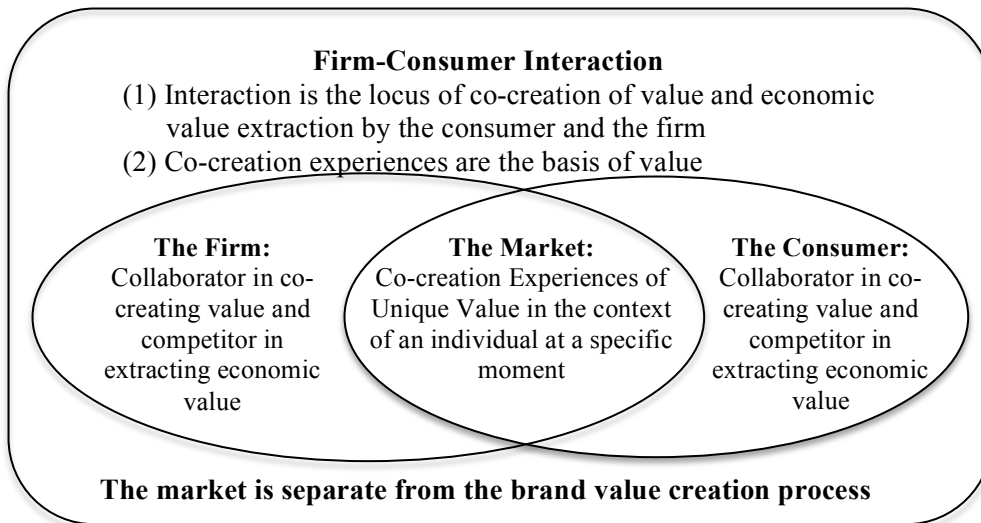


Figure 3: The Emerging Concept of the Market

Source: Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004, Co-Creation Experiences: The Next Practice in Value Creation. Journal of Interactive Marketing.

CHAPTER III

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A careful review of the literature suggested that the brand value co-creation practices model, brand personalities congruency, and the explicit and implicit promotion strategies are best suited for this study as useful theoretical foundations to further explore the topic in mobile photo sharing, brand value co-creation, and brand personalities.

Brand Value Co-Creation Practices in Brand Communities

Social media like Instagram provides a platform for customers to not only create content about brands but also connect with others who admire the same brands. The virtual social networks created by brand admirers are called “brand communities.” The concept of brand community was first introduced by Muniz and O'Guinn (2001), they defined the concept as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand” (p.412). Online brand communities give customers the opportunities to actively participate in brand discussion and not just passively receive the brand values created by companies. Some researchers argue that brand communities’ participatory activities are critical sites of brand value creation in the digital age. Schau, Muñoz & Arnould (2009) completed a long-term observation of 9 brand communities on social media and conducted in-depth research to find the consumers’ common practices that represent value-creating dynamics. They claimed that brand value resides in the consumers’ interaction and behaviors in brand communities. They found four thematic categories of value creating practices in brand communities, *social networking*, *impression management*, *community engagement*, and *brand use*. Social networking practices focus on creating ties and reinforcing bonds with

other individuals on social media; impression management practices are those that focus on creating positive images for the brand, to evangelize and justify the brand; community engagement are those practices that reinforce members' escalating engagement by staking, milestoneing, badging, and documenting things about brands; brand use practices are those that improve or enhance the use of focal brands by grooming, customizing, and commoditizing (p. 32-34).

Among these four practices, social networking and community engagement practices require more time and effort to develop, while brand use and impression engagement relate to the immediate consumption of products. Social networking and community engagement practices are thus seen more often in more cohesive and resilient brand communities where participants actively try to sustain, enhance, and create ties among each other. Schau, Muñiz & Arnould (2009) claimed that brand values are co-created by consumers' active participation in brand communities, and that the more practices seen in a community, the more vital the community is. "Stronger brand communities present a more diverse constellation of practices than weaker brand communities. Furthermore, the practices of stronger brand communities are more complex and require more insider knowledge than the practices of weaker, less cohesive brand communities" (p. 39).

Focusing on one platform (Instagram) and two brands (Starbucks and Nike), the first research question digs deeper into the brand communities on Instagram and how value creation practices were carried out by customers and companies via photo sharing:

RQ1a. How are Nike and Starbucks' customers constructing brand communities using social networking, community engagement, brand use, and impression management practices?

RQ1b. How are Nike and Starbucks participating in the social networking, impression management, brand use, and community engagement using their Instagram accounts?

Answering these questions will allow us to see how strong Instagram brand communities are, and how customers are creating brand communities using photos.

Brand Personality and Brand Value

The human attributes that are associated with a brand are called “brand personalities” (Aaker, 1997). Besides brand value creation practices, how companies and customers are using and identifying brand personalities also provides implications for brand value co-creation. In today’s market place, products and services are no longer the only determinants of brand value. All companies are facing challenges from competitors in the same industry. To stand out, businesses need to find value beyond products and services. Establishing brand personalities thus becomes a popular practice for marketers to further connect brands with their customers. In the 21st century, brand personalities will reflect a company’s values, words, and actions of all employees of the firm (Ritchey & Keller, 2006).

A considerable amount of attention has been given to the construction of brand personality in previous consumer behavior research. Summarizing different scales of brand personality, Aaker (1997) categorized brand personality into five traits: *sincerity*, *excitement*, *competence*, *sophistication*, and *ruggedness*. Sincerity, represented by attributes such as down-to-earth, real, sincere, and honest; excitement, typified by

attributes such as daring, exciting, imaginative, and contemporary; competence, represented by attributes such as intelligent, reliable, secure, and confident; sophistication, represented by attributes such as glamorous, upper-class, good looking, and charming; and ruggedness, typified by attributes such as tough, outdoorsy, masculine, and western. With the Internet, social media, and mobile communications that enable companies to interact with customers, brand personality becomes even more important. Starbucks' Instagram account for example, can be seen as an extension and personification of the brand. When customers look at pictures posted by Starbucks on social media, they are looking for content that can connect to their own emotions and personalities, not merely content created to sell.

On the one hand, brand personalities are promotional tactics for companies; on the other hand consumers associated with brands personalities as symbols of their own identities and ideal selves. Aaker, Garolera, and Garolera (2001) argued that customers' consumption of symbols, such as commercial brands, is a way to convey their values and beliefs. They concluded that "the study of consumption symbols, such as commercial brands, is a useful approach to the understanding of how cultural beliefs and values are represented and institutionalized" (p. 507). Timothy (1996) also suggested that the degree of congruence (similarity) between a brand's image and a consumer's self-image (self-concept) can have significant effects on consumers' brand evaluations and purchase intentions. The consumers not only purchase services or products based on the tangible values, but based on their desire to express their ideal personalities. Congruence in branding refers to "the match between consumers' self-concept (actual self, ideal self, etc.) and the user image (or "personality") of a given product, brand, store, et. (Kressmmna,

Sirgy, Hermann, Hyber, & Lee, 2006, p.955). Kressmman et al. (2006) conducted an empirical study on the relationship between customers' congruence to brand personalities and the level of brand loyalty. The results showed paramount importance of self-congruity in predicting brand loyalty, suggesting that the first step in building brand loyalty for every company is to construct a brand personality which can be related to customers' ideal selves.

Instagram provides us with a window to look at how companies are constructing brand personalities and how the customers are identifying with these brand personalities. With social media, the customers may not only identify themselves with the original brand personalities created by companies but by attaching new ideas and new values to brands to show different personalities. The companies need to know how the customers are attaching personalities to their brands and if the values attached are in accordance with the brand personalities they want to promote. The author will thus investigate how brand personalities (sincerity, excitement, competence, sophistication, and ruggedness) are shared by Starbucks, Nike, and their customers.

RQ2a. What are the brand personalities presented in the official brand images of Starbucks and Nike?

RQ2b. What are the brand personalities presented in the customer-created brand images of Starbucks and Nike?

The Promotion of Brand and Self

The third topic of this research focuses on how companies are promoting brands and how customers are promoting themselves using brands and brand images. Based on the literature review from the above section, customers' motivation to purchase is

strongly related to their desire to express ideal selves through the consumption of brand personalities attached to certain products. Older marketing models suggest more top-down promotion approaches where customers are seen as passive receivers of the brand's established personalities and have nothing to do with the construction of brand personalities. On Instagram, customers (or the "prosumers" discussed in earlier sections) have more power to not only consume the products or brands but share their experiences with others. Instagram provide us an opportunity to see how customers interact with the brand after they make the purchase and how they use brands as "props" to promote themselves. Lindahl and Ohlund (2013) did a qualitative interview study on how individuals alter and create their identity through Instagram images. They found that Instagramers see images as a means of conveying identity for recognition and tend to share only positive aspects of their lives. Instagram is seen as a personal branding tool by the participants to gain attention and popularity online. Past research about branding could only trace how many customers made purchases or asked attitudinal questions about why the customers made purchases. A look at the images on Instagram will allow the author to investigate how the customers use and showcase brands online.

In addition to brand personalities, the strategies of using brand images to promote brands and customers themselves are also investigated in this study. When creating a persuasive promotional message, two strategies are usually applied. One is utilizing direct and propositional message to clearly identify the subject being promoted; the other is to use an indirect associative message where the promoted product is not clearly showed but indicated. This process can be related and conceptualized by the soft and hard selling practices. According to Mueller's (1987) definitions: a soft-sell appeal is implicit,

in which human emotions are emphasized to induce an affective (feeling) reaction from the viewer. These appeals tend to be subtle and indirect; an image or atmosphere may be conveyed through a beautiful scene or the development of an emotional story, or via some other indirect mechanism. A hard-sell appeal is direct and explicit, emphasizing a sales orientation, and often specifying the brand name and product recommendations. There is often explicit mention of factual information, such as comparisons with competing products or specific distinguishing features of the product that give it an advantage in performance or some other dimension relevant to consumers.

Companies have different tactics in promoting their brands, while customers also have different tactics in using brand images to attain attention from their followers. Although the customers' purposes are not selling products for the companies, they utilize the brand images to broadcast their love for the brands, show their customized use of brands, and ultimately, they want to use brand images as a tool to promote their own ideal personas. Brand images on Instagram can thus be used as props for Instagramers to promote themselves. We can therefore apply the soft and hard selling concepts to the customer-created images.

The author is thus interested in analyzing how companies and customers are promoting brands or themselves using a direct and aggressive tactic, or a subtle and indirect tactic in the brand images. To develop the research questions, the author conceptualizes the two different promotional tactics as explicit promotion and implicit promotion, borrowing the soft and hard selling definitions.

RQ3a. How are explicit and implicit images used in brand promotion by Nike and Starbucks on their official Instagram accounts?

RQ3b. How are explicit and implicit images used in self-promotion by customers who created Starbucks or Nike brand images on Instagram?

Social Media and Brand Control

There have been many debates on whether companies should utilize social media to promote their brands. For instance, some researchers believe social media provide a unique opportunity for brands to foster relationships with customers, while others believe the opposite. Pekka (2010) argues that there are always risks for companies to be on social media and the digital public makes corporate brand reputation vulnerable. The ability for customers to communicate with the companies and stakeholders ubiquitously forms a “complex narrative web” that “expands the spectrum of reputation risks and boosts risk dynamics. [...] The loss of reputation affects competitiveness, local positioning, the trust and loyalty of stakeholders, media relations, and the legitimacy of operations, even the license to exist” (p. 3-4). Some cases, like Apple Bee’s overnight public relations melt-down on Facebook (Stollar, 2013), and the backfired JPMorgan #AskJP Twitter campaign (Du, 2013), suggested that social media can be dangerous.

Past research focused more on the benefits of social media marketing and the online brand communities’ positive effect on brand loyalty and brand value (Kressman et al., 2006; Laroche, Habbi, & Ricahard, 2013) while focused less on the risks of losing brand control on social media. In order to provide managerial suggestions, this research thus focuses on problematic themes that might post threats to brands on Instagram. The previous research questions regard the brand value co-creation practices and strategies on Instagram without critically examining the threats that might come with these practices. In order to shed light on the big picture of brand value co-creation with a holistic

investigation, the last research question is formed as an over-arching question regarding the significant themes emerge from the data which might become problematic for future branding. The purpose of this question is to point out underlying risks that might be ignored by limiting the findings solely based on previously established theoretical categories. Doing this, the author is also able to keep an open mind when exploring new topics in mobile photo sharing.

RQ4. What are the significant themes emerge from the data that might be problematic for future branding?

Starbucks and Nike

To answer the research questions, the author selected Starbucks and Nike, two of the most followed brands on Instagram, as examples in order to analyze why and how these two brands are successfully utilizing Instagram as brand promoting tools and search for rising themes. A study by Track Maven (2013), a digital marketing research firm, investigated how Fortune 500s are using Instagram as a marketing tool. Among Fortune 500s, Starbucks and Nike are the top two players that have the largest following and number of interactions on Instagram. The two companies also consistently top Instagram rankings by Nitrogram, an analytics firm providing comprehensive statistics on how brands compare on the Facebook-owned social app. Nike is the most popular brand on Instagram with 3.8 million followers and a staggering 23 million posts using the hashtag #nike. Starbucks comes in at number two of the 150 top brands tracked by Nitrogram, with 21 million Instagram followers and 10 million #starbucks posts. “What the two retailers have in common is a deep understanding of the aims and mentality of Instagram’s users as well as the network’s unique aesthetic,” according to Thibaut

Davoult, the Director of Contents of Nitrogram (Forbes, 2014).

Starbucks: Customized Experience

The first Starbucks opened in 1971 in Seattle's historic Pike Place Market. From just a narrow storefront, Starbucks insisted on offering high quality whole bean coffees. Their brand name, Starbucks, was inspired by a minor character in Moby Dick who is a fearless and sincere sailor. In 1981, Howard Schultz, now Starbucks chairman, president and chief executive officer, had first walked into a Starbucks store. A year later, in 1983, Howard joined Starbucks as the director of operations and marketing. Howard traveled to Italy and became captivated with Italian coffee bars. He then envisions to bring the Italian coffeehouse tradition back to the United States. For Howard, a coffee shop is "a place for conversation and a sense of community. A third place between work and home" (Starbucks.com, 2014). Starbucks's mission statement says that "our mission to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time. And with every cup, we strive to bring both our heritage and an exceptional experience to life" (Starbucks.com, 2014). Today, with more than 18,000 stores in 62 countries, Starbucks is the premier retailer of coffee in the world.

Starbucks's major social media campaigns started in 2008, when the company was facing the first chain-wide store traffic and sales slowdown (Brennan & Schafer, 2010). The company thus tried to utilize new technology to engage their customers. Chris Buzzo, the vice president of Starbucks reckoned the importance of having conversation with their customers outside of the stores and on the digital platform. "We didn't build a social media marketing strategy, it was more about [creating] a social strategy. It is about hanging out with our customers on line," says Buzzo (Brennan & Schafer, 2010, p.58).

Starbucks thus initiated the *My Starbucks Ideas* campaign to invite customers to suggest improvements for Starbucks, answer questions and resolve problems on Facebook and Twitter, and developed the mobile myStarbucks application to promote the loyal rewards program.

Nike: Just Do It!

Nike was founded on January 25, 1964, as Blue Ribbon Sports, by Bill Bowerman and Phil Knight in Oregon. Started from selling just a few hundred pairs of special designed shoes, the company quickly grew and officially became Nike, Inc. on May 30, 1971. The company's name originated from the name of the Greek goddess of victory, Nike (Greek Νίκη, pronounced [nī:kɛ:]). With the highly recognizable slogan of "Just Do It" and the Swoosh logo, Nike soon becomes a larger enterprise Nike, Inc., in 1980s and 1990s. It extended its brand to Nike Golf, Nike Pro, Nike+, Air Jordan, Nike Skateboarding, and subsidiaries including Hurley International and Converse, selling and designing sports footwear, apparel, equipment, accessories around the world. Besides its growing multinational business, Nike sponsors many high-profile athletes and sports teams around the world, including the World Cup-winning Brazilian National Team and Tiger Woods (NikeInc.com, n.d.).

Nike's first global online marketing campaign was *The Secret Tournament* campaign which coinciding with the 2002 FIFA World Cup. Capitalizing on the global soccer fever, Nike staged a fictional tournament between eight teams of three top players from the world. Several commercials for this tournament were aired and directed its audience to a website where they can learn more about the tournament and play interactive soccer games (McCarthy, 2002). The campaign was a huge success and Nike

became one of the pioneers in integrated online marketing. In 2004, Nike made its first real move into the social media space, working with media company Gawker to launch "Art of Speed," a series of 15 speed-focused short films sourced from artists and filmmakers (Swallow, 2011). Nike's videos went incredibly popular on social media, granting its success on YouTube, MySpace, and creating the largest brand community online. Seeing the potential of online community, Nike created its own social media platform, Nike+, a website and application to connect runners with their friends and people who love to run.

Nike's Global Digital Brand and Innovation Director Jesse Stollak explained the company's goal to engage their customers on social media, "social networks are tools that help build and leverage our relationship with the consumer. These networks serve as a platform to reach our athletes. However, the goal hasn't changed since the beginning of Nike — we want to connect with athletes to inspire and enable them to be better. [...] This intersection between the physical and the digital is where we see the future and that intersection will be game-changing" (Swallow, 2011).

Nike branding greatly involves inspiring and motivating their customers' sportsmanship and athletic lifestyle. "You'll never be LeBron James, and that's ok because if you buy enough Nike, you'll come as close as humanly possible. That's been the essence of Nike's highly effective branding for as long as I can remember. [...] Through campaigns like 'Find Your Greatness' and 'Endless Possibilities', Nike gives the impression that it has as much of a stake in your athletic performance as you do" (Kameir, 2014).

CHAPTER IV METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLING

Methods

Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis

This research used a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis to explore the relationship between brands, companies, and customers on Instagram. According to Krippendorff (2004), content analysis quantifies and analyzes the presence or absence of elements, based on a predetermined set of categories. The data in content analysis are texts, images, and expression that are created to be seen, read, interpreted, and acted on for their meanings and should be analyzed in the context of their uses (p. xiii). The variables in the content analysis come from past literature and theoretical concepts that are related to the research questions to provide systematic analysis. Thematic analysis on the other hand, does not rely on old theoretical concepts to establish codes but to form codes by immersive observing the emergent and recurring patterns of the data itself.

Qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis are, in fact, widely use in mass communication research, but many qualitative researchers use these two methods interchangeably (Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). Joffe and Yardley (2004) distinguish content analysis and thematic analysis by drawing the line between their different ways of forming the theme. Content analysis draws the theme (or coding category) from existing theoretical ideas (deductive coding) that researcher brings to the data while thematic analysis forms the theme from the observation on raw information (inductive coding). “Theoretically derived themes allow the researcher to replicate, extend or refute prior discoveries. [...] However, more inductive themes, drawn from the

data, are often useful in the new areas of research” (p. 57-58). According to Elo and Kyngas (2008), a deductive content analysis is useful to compare categories at different time periods, while inductive analysis is used in cases where there are no previous studies dealing with the phenomenon or when it is fragmented. Both approaches are applicable to the study of Instagram. While the study required two approaches, both inductive and deductive analysis was represented as three main phases: preparation, organizing, and reporting (Elo & Kyngas, 2008).

The first part of the research relied on Schau, Muñiz & Arnould (2009)’s illustration of brand value creation practices, Mueller’s (1987) definitions of explicit and implicit promotion tactics, and Aaker’s (1997) categorization of brand personalities to establish links between Instagram and pre-established theoretical concepts (QR1, QR2, & QR3). The second part of the research focused on the data itself and looking for clues and patterns that can be categorize, code, and provide meaningful themes to discuss (QR4).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006), there are six phases to conducting a thematic analysis: (a) familiarizing yourself with the data; (b) generating initial codes; (c) searching for themes; (d) reviewing themes; (e) defining and naming themes; and (f) producing the report (p. 87-93).

Data Collection

Two sets of data were collected for this research. The first set of data are the customer-created images hashtagged with #Nike or #Starbucks. The second set of data are the company-created images from the Nike and Starbucks’ official Instagram accounts. The Instagram images from Starbucks and Nike’s official accounts were gathered from Statigram, a web-based application to search and view Instagram images.

The customer-created #Nike and #Starbucks images, due to the high volume, were collected through Keyhole, an online social media tracking service that stored and downloaded hashtagged images from Instagram.

The author collected the customer-created hashtagged #Starbucks and #Nike images from March 10, 2014 to March 16, 2014. Using the social media tracker provided by Keyhole, the final results yielded 107,054 #Starbucks images and 189,975 #Nike images. The data for these posts were downloaded from Keyhole, showing the date and time, number of likes, and a URL link to each Instagram post. Regarding the large number of data and the qualitative nature of this research, the author chose to use top influential posts that had more than 45 likes. This yielded 350 #Nike images and 150 #Starbucks images. The author also deleted invalid links and images tagged with #Nike or #Starbucks but had no related content to these two brands. The author also deleted advertising posts that used #Starbucks or #Nike to promote retail events or give out gift cards. It is notable that although the volume of #Nike images was huge, there were many photos (181 out of 350) that were not posted by real customers but shoes and sports garment retailers who were simply posting information about their stores. After cleaning the data, 140 #Nike images and 98 #Starbucks were retained.

The second set of data, the company-created images, were collected through Statigram, a website that curated Instagram images. Starbucks and Nike posted on their official accounts averagely 3 times per week. Due to the light volume, the author did not need to rely on Keyhole to collect the second set of data. Statigram allowed the retrieving of complete information on every picture posted by Starbucks and Nike over the past year.

The high volume of images created by the customers (averagely 150,000 images per week), and the light volume produced by the companies (averagely 3 images per week) made the two data sets significantly disproportioned. If the author applied the same time range, March 10 to March 16, 2014, for both customer-created and company-created images, it would yield 297,029 customer-created images while only 8 company-created images. In order to ensure the representativeness of the data, the author extended the timeframe for collecting company-created images from a week to two months. In order to overlap the timeframe with the first set of data, the timeframe for collecting the second set of data thus became March 10-16 to January 16-March 16, 2014. In the two-month span, 43 Starbucks images and 19 Nike images were posted on the official accounts, making the total research data 238 customer-created images and 62 company-created images.

Application of Theories and Concepts

To answer the first research question, the author borrows Schau, Muñiz & Arnould's (2009) four thematic categories of value creating practices in brand communities, which are *social networking*, *impression management*, *community engagement*, and *brand use* and analyze the Instagram platform, images shared, and the relationship between customers, companies, and brands on a larger scale. The following further explains Schau, Muniz & Arnould's definition of these four thematic categories and the practices that follow each value creation theme.

Social networking practices focus on creating ties and reinforcing bonds with other individuals on social media. There are three practices that fulfill the social networking in brand communities. First, welcoming: Greeting new members, beckoning

them into the fold, and assisting in their brand learning and community socialization. Second, empathizing: Lending emotional and/or physical support to other members, including support for brand-related trials (e.g., product failure, customizing) and/or for non-brand-related life issues. Third, governing: Articulating the behavioral expectations within the brand community.

Impression management practices are those that focus on creating positive images for the brand, to evangelize and justify the brand. Two practices under this category are: first, evangelizing: Sharing the brand “good news,” inspiring others to use, and preaching from the mountaintop. Suggesting the virtue and success gained from using products. Second, justifying: Deploying rationales generally for devoting time and effort to the brand and collectively to outsiders and marginal members in the boundary. This type of behaviors may include debate and jokes about obsessive-compulsive brand-directed behavior.

Community engagement practices are those practices that reinforce members’ escalating engagement by staking, milestone, badging, and documenting things about brands. Staking: Recognizing variance within the brand community membership. Marking intragroup distinction and similarity. Milestoning: Milestoning refers to the practice of noting seminal events in brand ownership and consumption. Badging: Badging is the practice of translating milestones into symbols. Documenting: Detailing the brand relationship journey in a narrative way. The narrative is often anchored by and peppered with milestones. Documenting includes the Mini birth stories of the car assembly and distribution.

And finally, *brand use practices* are those that improve or enhance the use of focal brands by grooming, customizing, and commoditizing. Grooming: Caring for the brand (washing your products) or systematizing optimal use patterns (clean skin before applying the product). Customizing: Modifying the brand to suit group-level or individual needs. This includes all efforts to change the factory specs of the product to enhance performance. Includes fan fiction/fan art in the case of intangible products. Commoditizing: Distancing/approaching the marketplace. A valenced behavior regarding marketplace. May be directed at other members (e.g., you should sell/should not sell that). May be directed at the firm through explicit link or through presumed monitoring of the site (e.g., you should fix this/do this/change this).

To answer the second research questions, the author borrows Aaker, Garolera, and Garolera's (2001) categorizations of brand personalities: *sincerity*, *excitement*, *competence*, *sophistication*, and *ruggedness*. The following explains how these personalities transfer to the images on Instagram. The first brand personality is *sincerity*, represented by attributes such as down-to-earth, real, sincere, and honest. In Instagram images, sincerity can be presented by showing a close-up shot of the product, showing the moments of drinking Starbucks with friends, or going to workout with Nike. The second personality trait is *excitement*, typified by attributes such as daring, exciting, imaginative, and contemporary. In Instagram brand images, these characteristics are shown when an artistic picture, a creative setting, or a modern environment. The third personality *competence* is represented by attributes such as intelligent, reliable, secure, and confident. This attribute is presented by the Instagramers showing a situation that is related to work, school, elitism, or competition. The fourth trait is *sophistication*,

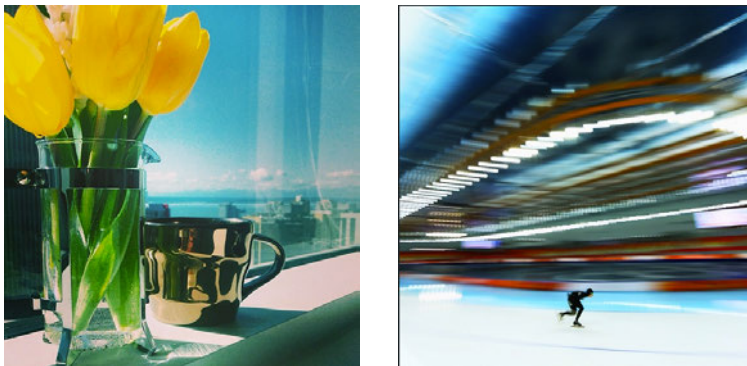
represented by attributes such as glamorous, upper class, good looking, charming, or feminine. Pictures showing physical beauty or luxurious goods present this trait. The last personality is *ruggedness*, typified by attributes such as tough, outdoorsy, masculine, and western. This dimension of brand personality will be presented by images that show toughness and preservation of human beings. These five brand personalities are not necessarily exclusive to each other (Aaker, Garolera, & Garolera, 2001). However, the author will assign the best-suited brand personality to each image for the purpose of analysis. Below are examples of images that each represents a best-suited brand personality.



Figure 4: Brand Personality
Source: Instagram

The purpose of the third research question is to find managerial suggestions for Instagram marketers and strategic answers for brand managers. According to borrowing Mueller's (1987) definitions on hard (explicit) and soft (implicit) selling, an explicit image will contain a straight forward message, a clear brand icon/name, and a direct presentation of a product, while an implicit promotion image utilizes indirect messages and creates an atmosphere to emotionally connect the viewers. An explicit brand image on Instagram clearly displays the brand icon or the physical appearances of the products. On the other hand, an implicit brand image is a picture with a great atmosphere but without direct representation of the brand icon or products. Below are examples of hard-selling and soft-selling Instagram brand images.

a. Implicit Brand Images



b. Explicit Brand Image

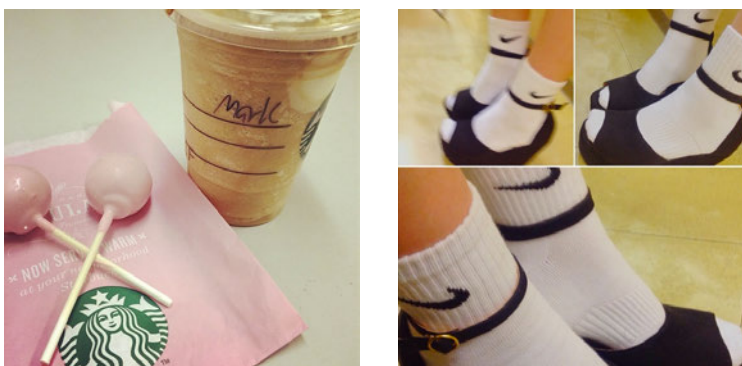


Figure 5: Explicit and Implicit Brand Images

Source: Instagram

Finally, to answer research question four, the researcher will look at the notes during analyzing data using the previous variables and figure out what are some noticeable themes and patterns that emerge from the research process. Then the author will go back and review these patterns, code them, and generate meaningful themes to add to the understanding of this research topic. Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) method to conducting a thematic analysis, the author went through the following steps to find the themes:

1. All the 238 customer-created images and 68 company-created images were examined with care and the goal to find meaningful patterns.
2. Recurring patterns and characteristics in the data were marked and recorded to generate initial codes.
3. Similar characters were put into categories using different colors. The author reviewed these categories several times and searched for themes.
4. After reviewing the data, the author defined and named the themes found in this study and started to analyze and relate the themes to the big picture.
5. Finally, the author sorted out the significant themes that present problematic topics for companies' branding on Instagram.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Different techniques were used to analyze the data gathered and to answer the four research questions. Deductive content analysis was used to evaluate the value creation practices on Instagram and the data gathered from Keyhole and Statigram. Inductive thematic analysis was applied to search for problematic themes which would give implications to brand value co-creation the control of brand meanings.

Finding 1: Less About Community, More About Me!

An investigation on the brand value creation practices (Schau, Muñiz & Arnould, 2009) on Instagram showed that the interaction between brand-sharing Instagramers focused more on impression management and brand use, and less on community engagement and social networking. The contacts made on Instagram were usually short and superficial, involving little conversation or exchange of information. While customers that shared brand images on Instagram showed a high level of brand love (Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012), they cared less about networking with other individuals on Instagram or building a brand community.

On Instagram, the primary networking method is through “liking” or “commenting.” However, the networking on Instagram is not quite as active as other social media platforms, for example, Facebook or Twitter. The comments on Instagram usually praise the images (e.g., “Cool!”, “Nice!”, “This is awesome!”), lacking the brand value creation practices of “social networking” or “community engagement.” Companies are also less engaged in social networking or community building on Instagram.

Official images posted by Starbucks and Nike were used to delight and inspire

customers rather than start conversations with the customers or provide solutions. The brand communities on Instagram were thus less networked than the brand communities on other social media platforms. For example, the most popular Starbucks images in the data shared by Sami Slimani (@samislimani), a German fashion blogger, generated 34,708 likes after he posted a photo of two Starbucks drinks and a cake captioned “YUMMERS! #Starbucks.” Despite the large amount of likes and attention generated by this photo, only 14 comments were left. Among the 14 comments, none of the comment was an initiative of a conversation. Most of them are expressions like “Yum!” “LECKER,” “Love Starbucks!” or simply “♥”. After seeing the visual contents, Instagramers tend to leave their impressions (likes, short praises), rather than comments that ask for information or initiate discussion. The same situation applies to brands’ official Instagram feeds. A Nike image posted on March 13 featuring a black runner getting ready for his run at a lake generated 153450 likes; however, only 401 comments were left and most of the comments were one-word, the others lacking engagement and deeper conversation. The interaction seen on Instagram did not provide the base for a cohesive brand community where people network, exchange brand experiences, share rituals, and create a hierarchy for a more organizational administration.

Brand image sharing on Instagram; however, does involve the other two brand value creation practices, “brand use” and “impression management.” Customers sharing brand images usually show a customized, personal experience with the brand (brand use) and come up with glorified justification for the product consumption (impression management). An example is an image featured by a customer in new Nike apparel and shoes, captioned with inspiring speech, using Nike products to express her positive

attitude and healthy lifestyle. The caption says, “staying fit is a life. #You #CAN do it. #Believe in yourself, even when no one else does. If your #dreams don't scare you, they are not high enough. Don't look at yourself on how you look now, look at yourself on how you wanna look. #Motivate #YOURSELF. #nike”.

An example from Starbucks showing the self-management practice is a customer justifying her choice to go to Starbucks by saying that it boosts her working productivity. The caption says, “I loveee working from home. But sometimes being at home can get distracting. We've started coming to Starbucks for a few hours a day to knock out a good portion of the workload!” She goes on to justify her choice of drink and suggests that the drinks she has at Starbucks help her to maintain a positive body image. She states that “since I know many of you will ask- I'm drinking a "refresh" green & mint hot tea. No sugar, no nothing. Just green tea! #onlinetraining #starbucks #greentea #katyhearnfit #workflow.” These two examples of brand images show the self-management practice which justifies the consumption of brands and shows personalized brand use. They exemplified the brand value creation practices on Instagram that focus on individuals rather than social networking with other brand users and brand community members.

Finding 2: Different Levels of Brand Congruency on Instagram

The results showed that the brand personalities shared by Starbucks’ customers and the company was similar. While the personalities shared by Nike’s customers and company was different, they shared the most dominant personality, ruggedness. The two dominant personality traits for Starbucks images, both user-generated and official, are sincerity (32% for customers and 34% for official) and sophistication (28% for customers and 23% for official) (see Table 1). The top two traits for Nike’s official images are

ruggedness (85%) and sophistication (10%) (see Table 2). While the customer-created Nike images share the same top two traits, ruggedness (35%) and sophistication(32%); the percentages were very different than the official images (85% ruggedness and 10% sophistication). The results show that Nike and Starbucks carry different levels of brand personality congruency between customers and companies. Starbucks official images and customer-created images share a higher degree of consistency while Nike’s customers share different personalities than Nike’s official account, leading to less brand personality congruency. The brand personalities shared by Starbucks’ official account and customers follow the same trend, where sincerity is the most dominant trait, following by sophistication, excitement and imagination, and finally ruggedness. Nike’s official account shares a high percentage of Ruggedness, a dominant brand personality strongly advertised by Nike, however, the customers are sharing less Ruggedness and more Sophistication, represented by attributes such as glamorous, upper class, good looking, charming, or feminine. The two different levels of brand congruency provide great marketing and brand management implications that will be further discussed.

Table 1. Starbucks Images Brand Personality Traits

Persnality	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness
Starbucks Official	34%	18%	23%	23%	2%
Starbucks Customer	32%	20%	14%	28%	6%

Table 2. Nike Images Brand Personality Traits

Persnality	Sincerity	Excitement	Competence	Sophistication	Ruggedness
Nike Official	5%	0%	0%	10%	85%
Nike Customer	20%	11%	2%	32%	35%

Finding 3: Companies are Using Implicit Promotion Strategies, While Customers are Using Explicit Self-Promotion on Instagram

The third finding showed the opposite approaches companies and customers used to present the brand images. Companies tended to utilize more indirect techniques to promote their products while the customers tended to apply a more direct and straightforward message to showcase brand icons and products. 85% of Starbucks customers and 79% of Nike customers shared images in which they directly showed the brand, products, and promote themselves. On the other hand, 77% of Starbucks' official images and 89% of Nike's official images promoted the brands implicitly and indirectly. The roles of traditional marketers and consumers seem to be reversed. Customer-created images always displayed a clear brand icon and played the role of showcasing new products, for example, the Starbucks Vanilla Macchiato or Nike's new Jordan shoes. The companies' attempted to use more associative rather than positional images to persuade the viewers while the customers are using brand images in a direct and even aggressive

way to promote themselves. This finding has great implications for branding on Instagram and also for the understanding of the self-promoting and attention-seeking Instagram users. The following tables show the different appeals seen in customer and company created brand images on Instagram.

Table 3: Promotion Appeal in Starbucks Brand Images

Appeal	Starbucks Customer	Starbucks Official
Implicit Promotion	16%	77%
Explicit Promotion	84%	23%

Table 4: Promotion Appeal in Nike Brand Images

Appeal	Nike Customer	Nike Official
Implicit Promotion	21%	89%
Explicit Promotion	79%	11%

Finding 4: Problematic Themes Emerged from Data: Strong Self-Promotion and Self-Sarcasm Using Brand Images

After the data was familiarized, initial codes were generated, and themes were reviewed, two problematic themes that have implication for branding strategy were identified: strong self-promotion and self-directed sarcasm. These two distinctive yet

related themes are crucial to the overall understanding of how customers are utilizing brand images to express themselves. They also present some threats for companies' brand managing efforts on Instagram and the possibility of generating negative associations with the brands.

Strong Self-Promotion

The personal portrait of the picture taker, dubbed "selfies," is the most common theme throughout the data examination. First coined in 2002, "selfie" is selected by the Oxford Dictionary as the Word of 2013 with its official definition as "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or a webcam and uploaded to a social media website"(Oxford Dictionary.com). Selfie is no doubt a recognizable product of the narcissist Millennials generation. According to Selficity (2014), a new research project that looks at Instagram data from five cities around the world. Right now, there are more than 79 million photos on Instagram that fall under #selfie. This is not counting #selfies (7 million photos), #selfienation (1 million photos), #selfiesfordays (400,000 photos) or the countless number of photos with no hashtag at all. Solis (2014) considered the self-photography part vanity, part communication, part fun, and part absurdity that represents a new generation of self-expression. There are many selfies across the original data of this research. Some of these selfies hashtagged #Nike or #Starbucks are tagged with many other popular hashtags, sometimes forty or fifty hashtags at once. The reason for creating a large amount of hashtags is to gain as much attention as possible on Instagram.

Pamela Rutledge (2013), director of the Media Psychology Research Center in Boston, calls selfies a significant psychological shift in self-portraiture and in our

relationships with ourselves. With full control of the camera angle and the moment to snap the photo, selfies allow the photo taker to be the producer, director, curator and actor in his own story. The selfies in the data of this research are not only used to showcase the brands or the products but also to communicate the mood and feeling of the photo taker at the moment (Yadegaran, 2013). Some examples of selfies:



Figure 6: Examples of Selfies from the Data

Self-directed Sarcasm: #TypicalWhiteGirl

Another interesting theme is the self-directed sarcasm of the Instagramers. While coding the data, the author repeatedly encountered female Starbucks lovers who applied self-directed sarcasm. They dubbed Starbucks drinks “the white girl’s drinks,” ridiculing but at the same time justifying their vanity in spending money on expensive drinks. After showing their selfies with Starbucks drinks, they captioned their photos as “white girl status” and called themselves “typical white girls.” According to Ducharme (1994), self-directed sarcasm can be used to show a person’s allegiance with a group by showing the

knowledge of knowing where the “line” is. “Sarcasm may be used as a control mechanism through which groups negotiate and reaffirm the boundaries of normative behavior” (p.53). In this case, by showing sarcastic attitudes towards their own Starbucks drinking habits, the Instagramers are reconciling themselves with the group that might find showing off the privileges of consuming Starbucks as annoying or socially unacceptable. The following example illustrates the use of self-directed sarcasm:

This again shows the absurdity and contradictory self-identities and the intention to amuse and reconcile with the viewers after showing off their material consumption. Some examples for this #whitegirl sarcasm:

- Morning starbucks #**typicalwhitegirl** #coffee #starbucks
- But first let me take a selfie#**commonwhitegirls** #starbucks #noshame #judgeus #yolo (you only live once) #tb(too bad)
- Loving this STARBUCKS!#**whitegirl** #status #cottoncandy #Starbucks #sucking #heaven #through #a #straw
- 2 this week/ 3 last week #**whitegirlstatus**#starbucks

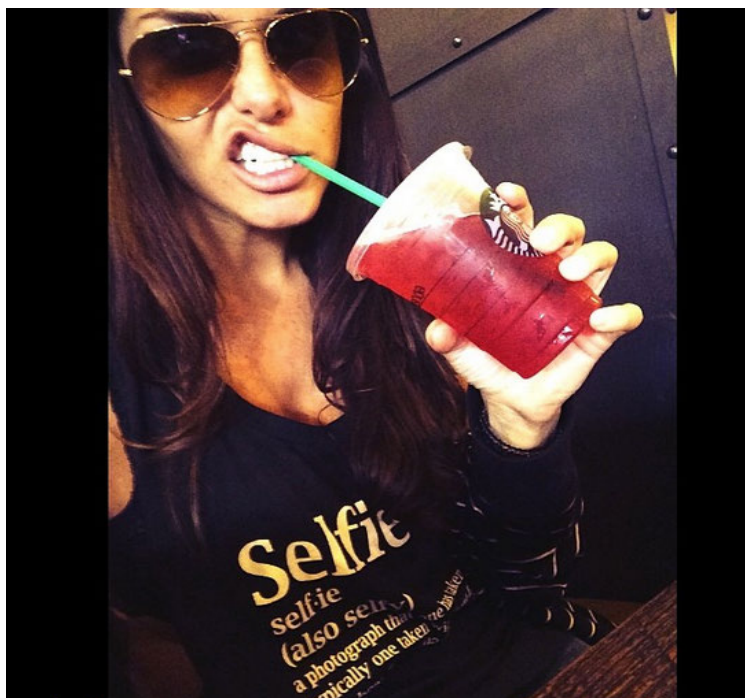


Figure 7: The Self-Directed Sarcastic Selfie

Self-directed sarcasm was also used in some of the images that featured selfies. In the above picture, the customer is drinking the “white girl drink,” Starbucks, and wearing a shirt with the definition of selfie printed on, sarcastic yet affirmative.

Self-presentation on Instagram seems to represent the absurd feeling of human existence and an inconsistent and fragmented self-identity in today’s digital world. Instagramers on the one hand desire a famous and glamorous self, but on the other hand use self-directed sarcasm to humor their audiences.

Both of these themes showed a new trend of self-representation on social media. However, these selfies and sarcastic images involving brands may pose risks to companies’ brand management. They also provide implications for marketers who seek new meaning for brands, which will be discussed below.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSION

An Overview

Since there is no single theory that can be applied directly to this emerging topic of mobile photo sharing and brand value co-creation, many theoretical frameworks were combined to shape this research. The general purpose of this research is to add to the existing literature of brand value co-creation and visual communication by exploring how corporations and consumers are sharing brand images on Instagram. In addition, the research aims to provide managerial suggestions to the industry on how to utilize Instagram. The overall findings showed that the customers' brand value creation practices on Instagram focused more on impression management and brand use rather than on social networking or community engagement. Nike's customers are sharing very different brand personalities than Nike's official account, suggesting less brand congruency than Starbucks. The research also found that Nike and Starbucks were using indirect and implicit techniques to promote their brand image while customers shared brand icons and products in an expressive and explicit manner. From the thematic analysis, two problematic themes emerged from the customer-created images, customers' strong self-promotion using selfies and the self-directed sarcasm, giving new implications to brand management on Instagram.

Brand Community on Instagram

We see a less networked brand community on Instagram where Instagramers tend to focus more on impression management and brand use rather than social networking and community engagement. In an image-based social networking platform like

Instagram, users are less engaged in conversation or building up relationships, and more interested in gaining good impressions (the “likes”) and a celebrity-fan like relationship with others (the “followers”). Compared to Facebook, where users “friend” each other and tend to engage in deeper conversations, Instagram is a platform to showcase the little glorious moments of everyday life, but is not a place to share deeper information or knowledge. The relationships based on the sharing of images are usually less engaged and transient. Therefore, the brand co-creation practices that require more time and effort to develop are less prominent on Instagram; on the other hand, the brand value co-creation practices that relate to more immediate use and the showcasing of brand products are the most dominant.

With less brand community engagement and networking in Instagram brand communities, the customers connect with the brand through more brand use and impression management practices. This finding on Instagram suggested that while image-based social media creates a less networked and less informative brand community, it is still important. The brand community loosely connected by the sharing of brand images shows a new form of sociality and customer empowerment. This new form of brand community is not based on interactions between brand users, but more on customers’ personal self-promotion in front of their followers through the personality traits and associations linked to the brand. Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) defined brand community as the group of people that possess a common interest in a specific brand and create a parallel social universe (subculture) with its own myths, values, rituals, vocabulary and hierarchy. The brand community on Instagram shows that brand lovers still share the brands’ myths and value, but they share these with their own social networks rather than

with a closed group of brand lovers. Without the rituals and hierarchy of a networked brand community, customers gain more power to share the brands

This new type of brand community on Instagram gives brand managers more challenges in the control and management of brand value. Without a networked brand community, it is harder for brand managers to monitor and engage in the conversations about brands. On Instagram, the company should play the role of a non-intrusive observant and facilitator of these personal expressions instead of increasing control over the brand's meanings and value. Companies should thus shift their attention from monitoring and searching for brand communities, to observing individual Instagramers' sharing about their brands. These brand endorsers might not be actively engaging in all the networking events happen around Starbucks or Nike, but the sharing of personalized experiences with brand products also contribute to brand value and brand equity online.

Nike and Starbucks' Instagram Brand Strategies

An investigation on the brand personalities shared by customers and companies showed that customers and companies are not necessarily sharing the same brand personalities on Instagram. Nike, for example, is shared very differently by customers and the company and shows a lower level of brand congruency on Instagram than Starbucks. The images on Nike's official account heavily focused on presenting ruggedness; while customers focused more on presenting photos showing the personality trait of sophistication. While Nike focused on presenting humans exceeding their limits performing sports in extreme situations, the customers tended to focus on presenting the material satisfaction and short-term pleasure fulfilled by purchasing Nike shoes and apparel. The customers illuminate another aspect of the Nike brand value; however, this

might distract the main brand personality Nike originally wants to push forward.

Starbucks, on the other hand, has a higher level of brand congruency on Instagram.

The different degrees of brand personality congruency of Nike and Starbucks does not determine the successfulness of Instagram branding, but rather show different Instagram strategies that can both be effective. Nike and Starbucks are two of the top Instagram marketers, but they utilize very different visual marketing strategies on Instagram. On Instagram, both companies and customers are seeking attention, using the same medium. While companies hope to build brand equity through image sharing, the customers are competing for attention at the same time to build their personal brands. With the new power granted with social media, Instagramers (Prosumers) seek a more power-equal relationship with authorities, celebrities, and commercial brands. The results of the research suggest that the companies should see customers as both competitors and collaborators on Instagram. (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Starbucks successfully utilizes the collaborating strategies to connect with their customers on Instagram. Understanding what the customers like to share and want to see, many of the subjects in Starbucks' official images contain coffee cups, coffee tables, and coffee shops, resonating with customer-created brand images. It seems like Starbucks knows their customers well and knows that presenting a delightful image of daily routine is a way to connect dearly with their customers. Starbucks also crowd-sources and "regrams" (meaning re-Instagram) their customers' photos. The opportunity to be selected as an official Starbucks image appeals to the attention-seeking customers, encouraging more positive brand image sharing on Instagram. The collaborating strategy is consistent with Starbucks original brand statement in which Starbucks was positioned

as a community and social space. In the Starbucks mission statement on its official website, Starbucks is “a place for conversation and a sense of community. A third place between work and home. [...] Our mission to inspire and nurture the human spirit – one person, one cup, and one neighborhood at a time. And with every cup, we strive to bring both our heritage and an exceptional experience to life.”

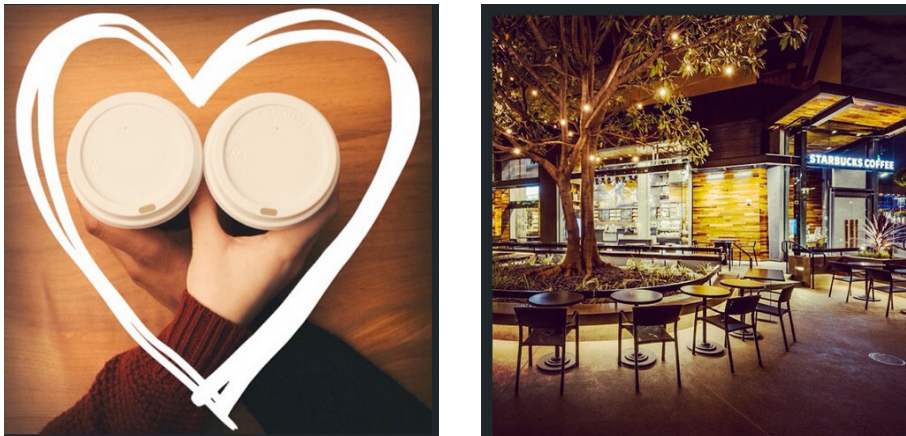


Figure 8: Starbuck Collaborating with Customers

On the other hand, Nike utilizes a strategy in which the company sees the customers on Instagram as competitors that are trying to compete for attention. Unlike Starbucks, Nike insists on producing highly professional images that are less possible for amateurs to produce using camera phones. Finding the niche, Nike is sharing photos that are different from what their customers are sharing, which are mostly showcasing shoes, clothes, or selfies. Nike is targeting their audience's need for ruggedness, outdoor excitement, and the pursuit of mental and physical excellence, and conveying these

messages with high-scale photography. Different from Starbucks' brand identification, which emphasized neighborhood and community building, Nike builds its brand on emphasizing the excellence-seeking and outstanding individual that is distinct from the usual. "You'll never be LeBron James, and that's ok because if you buy enough Nike, you'll come as close as humanly possible" (Kameir, 2014). Other Nike marketing campaigns like "Find Your Greatness" and "Endless Possibilities" also emphasized the distinctiveness of oneself. It is thus understandable that the strategy of differentiating their official account from the customer-created brand images is a more effective approach to promote the Nike brand than the Starbucks' approach to assimilate their Instagram images with the customers'.

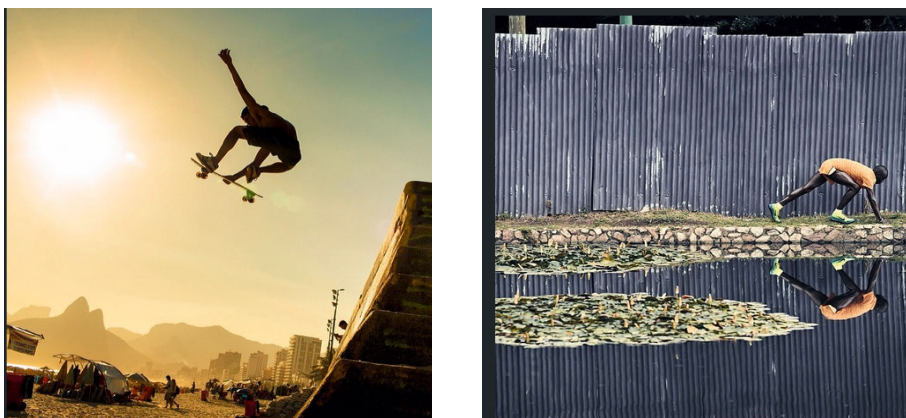


Figure 9: Nike Competing with the Customers

Explicit Self-Promotion and Implicit Official Brand Promotion

Although the two brands are using different Instagram strategies, both of them are utilizing implicit images that can be associated with their brands. In most of the images shared by Nike and Starbucks' official accounts, the brand icons and products are shown in implicit ways, with associative objects and atmospheres. Instead of positioning the products and brand icons directly, the top Instagram marketers like Nike and Starbucks utilize brand associations, a set of thoughts, feelings, and perceptions that link to a brand, to create positive images to their products and services. Brand association can determine a brand's equity, which is defined as a set of assets (and liabilities) linked to a brand's name and symbol that adds to (or subtracts from) the value provided by a product or service to a firm and/or that firm's customers (Aaker, 1991). Connecting with customers using subtle images that bring out alluring imagination and positive associations, Starbucks and Nike have successfully add value to their brands and become two of the top Instagram marketers in the challenging digital environment.

While the marketers are utilizing implicit promotional images to elicit positive brand associations among the customers, the customers who shared brand images as ways to promote themselves are showing the brand products and icons in direct and explicit manners. In most of the customer-shared brand images, products and brand icons were displayed explicitly. These brand images can be seen as WOM promotion for brand products; however, the customers who shared these images had less intention to help sell products but more intention in promoting themselves through the sharing of brand images. The customer-shared images below can be used to illustrate this concept. In the Nike image, the Nike products are displayed; however, the woman in the picture obviously

wants the attention not only on the Nike products, but her athletic and attractive body figure. With her head leaning down, she wanted to promote herself also as a Nike product, which represents ruggedness and excellence. In the Starbucks image, four teenage girls are drinking Starbucks, giving discerning looks, and pretending to be talking on the phone at the same time. They are imitating the imagined “successful business women” who drink Starbucks on a daily basis. Here, Starbucks is used as a symbol of high-class social status and successfulness, and these girls are using brands to promote themselves and express their ideal identities.

Customers’ explicit self-promotion using brand images may add value to the brands; but it may also subtract value. For example, Nike may not want to be associated with the obsession over thinness or the unhealthy pursue of physical perfection; and that Starbucks may not necessarily want to be associated with the arrogance of high-class career women. Similar concerns should also be address on the themes of customers’ use of selfies and self-directed sarcasm.

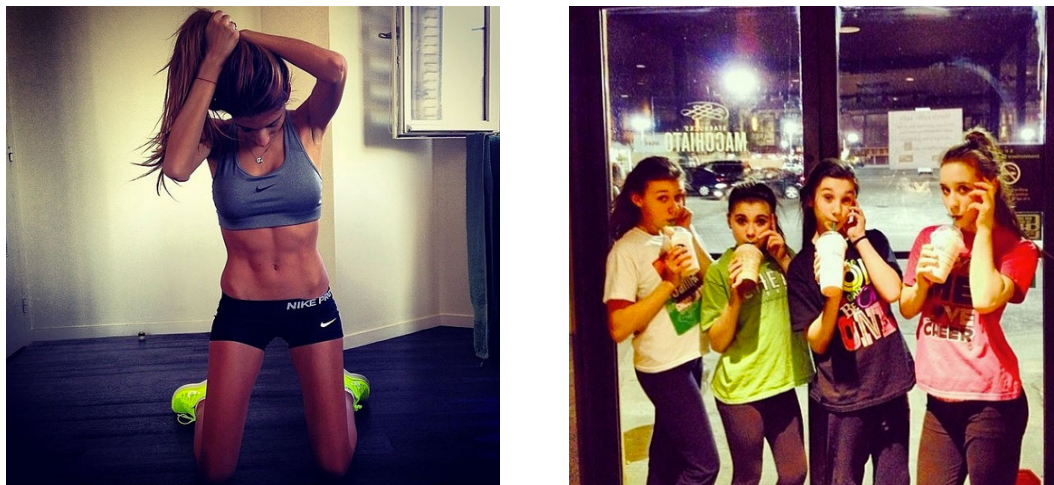


Figure 10. Explicit Self-Promotion

Selfies and Self-Directed Sarcasm

This research presents two problematic themes for brand value management on Instagram, self-promotion and self-directed sarcasm, both related to the empowerment of consumers and their ability to create, disseminate brand meanings. While these customer-created images can be seen as “free promotion” for brand products, there is always risk that customers associate the brands with negative values that the companies do not want to promote. For example, Starbucks might not want itself to be associated with the vanity and arrogance of a “typical white girl” given that it has a global and diversified customer base that includes different races and ethnicities. A new term, “brand hijack” or “brandjacking,” is coined to describe the situation in which a corporate brand is appropriated by the customers for themselves and given new meanings to the brand without the supervision of marketing professionals (Hesseldahl, 2007). Brandjacking becomes an increasingly common phenomenon in today’s market place with social media and innovative mobile technology. While brandjacking puts company into dangerous situation, some marketers like Wipperfurth (2005) suggests that the best way to market a brand today is to allow your brand to be hijacked. In his book *Brand Hijack: Marketing Without Marketing*, Wipperfurth (2005) claims the consumer’s act of commandeering a brand from the marketing professionals can in fact drives the brand’s evolution. When a brand hijack happens, traditional marketers would immediately think of terminating the grassroots effort with legal challenges and taking back the control of brand meaning. In a subversive manner, Wipperfurth (2005) suggests the marketers to act on nothing but quietly observe the new meanings given to the brand and the new position the brand is situated in the societal shift. Marketers should later build on the new collaborated brand

meaning and extend it. In the cases of Nike and Starbucks, the author would suggest that Nike, considering its customers' focus on showing off the products as high-end fashion, should put more effort in the design and appearance of their products rather than only emphasizing product functions. For Starbucks, the company should not prohibit the trend of calling Starbucks a symbol of white girl, but put more effort in promoting its products to the subcultures in Starbucks community and feature a more diversified customer base in their advertisements or commercials.

The themes of strong self-promotion using selfies and the self-directed sarcasm not only provide great implications to future marketing but show us the new trends in digital communication. The phenomena of taking selfies gradually become a form of daily communication among the current generation. Ross and Stein (2013) dubbed today's millennial generation the "Me, Me, Me Generation" who increasingly indulged themselves in narcissism. They summarized past research related to narcissism from the National Institute of Health and found that the incidence of narcissistic personality disorder is nearly three times as high for people in their 20s as for the generation that's now 65 or older; and that 58% more college students scored higher on a narcissism scale in 2009 than in 1982. The growing need for attention and self-expression can be attributed to an overly interactive and open technology environment where every single person is competing for attention. This theme of using brand personalities and products to secure one's positive image and to establish one's personal brand suggests a bolder and self-centered expression on Instagram. The finding echoes Solis' (2013) belief that "we live in a time where brands are people and people are brands." Indeed, the self-representation of

the Instagramers shows a general desire in the digital world where people constantly want to be seen, to be liked, and to be their own brands.

The finding of self-directed sarcasm gives another look at the assertive yet absurd self-identity of the Instagramers. This indicates that the understanding of self-expression on Instagram should not be one-dimensional. The justification and sarcasm towards the classism and racism captured by the use of “white girl status” echos Deuze’s (2007) idea of the “liquid” life and individualization of a person in the information age that encompasses “the fragility, transformation, and even disintegration of traditional social institutions – such as class, gender roles, family, and community” (p. 4). The use of selfies and self-directed sarcasm can be seen as a way for individuals to reconcile and survive the absurdity and the paradoxical distant-closeness in the digital age where people are physically distanced but brought close through sharing intimate images and information online.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

Managerial Implications for Instagram Marketers

There have been many debates on whether companies should utilize social media to promote their brands or not. This research addresses some new phenomenon and risks on the brand value co-creation between companies and the customers on Instagram. However, the research does not deny the importance of companies' official presence on Instagram. Although some companies are hesitant to join Instagram, the truth is that customers are sharing brand images with or without the existence of a brand's official account. For example, the popular toothpaste brand Colgate does not have an official Instagram account but there are more than 10,000 user-generated photos hashtagged Colgate showing customers' tooth-brushing experiences with Colgate. Without an official presence on Instagram, Colgate is losing their opportunities to connect with these customers who share positive images about their brands and also neglecting the risks that some of these customers may share negative images on Instagram.

There is no doubt that a company's Instagram presence is indispensable today. Based on the findings of this research, the author provides some key managerial suggestions for potential or current Instagram marketers:

(1) Recognize that brand value is co-created on Instagram, and that you will not have absolute control over brand equity. (2) To monitor what customers are sharing about your brand, focus on tracing individual users who are tagging your brand name. A networked brand community can hardly be found on Instagram. (3) The customer-created images can add value to your brand while they can also subtract the focal brand value by

attaching unwanted brand personality traits or negative associations to brand images. (4) In order to sustain a positive brand image on Instagram, companies need to see customers who share brand images as both collaborators and competitors. According to your brand identity, pick one strategy to focus on. If your brand is friendly and community-oriented, apply a more collaborative strategy; if the brand emphasizes personal achievement and self-improvement, then the competitive approach is more suitable. (5) An investigation on Starbucks and Nike's successful Instagram strategies suggests that implicit promotion techniques which featuring alluring atmosphere, beautiful photography, unclear brand icons, and associative objects to the brands are used more on Instagram than images explicitly display products and brand icons. The takeaway for future marketers is to creatively connect viewers through inspiring and delightful images rather than presenting brand icons or employing direct messages to promote. The marketing on Instagram is meant to be subtle and free for imagination. (6) Finally, recognize your customers on Instagram as self-promoted, self-interested, and narcissistic individuals who are seeking attention from the crowd as you are. When thinking about Instagram strategy, not only consider how these customers can add value to your brand, but how your brand and brand personality traits can add value to customers' self-promotion Instagram.

Implications for Future Communication

Mobile photo sharing on Instagram represents a new form of visual communication. The combination of digital photography, camera phones, and social media revolutionized the way people use images and value photography. This research has extensive implications for future research on visual communication and digital self-expression through mobile photo sharing. Observing the high volume and transitory

nature of Instagram photos, the author argues that we should see Instagram images more as objects of daily communication than objects that are meant to be archived. Past research has focused on the use of personal photography as a way to document memorable events or for building family history, but with camera phones and the mass-production of digital images, personal photography is becoming more transient and impermanent. Instagram technology allows the users to view, share, alter, delete, and add the pictures at any moment in life. With the camera phone that is always at hand and the convenience of snapping, filtering, and sharing via Instagram, mobile photo sharing becomes a frequent, even daily, activity. Visual communication via photography evolved from the sharing of analogue photos in the “Kodak culture” (Chalfen, 1998), to web-based digital photo archiving in the “Snapr culture” (Miller & Edwards, 2007), to today’s mobile-based communicative photo sharing in the “Instagramer culture.”

The use of images as a form of communication is growing with newer inventions like Snapchat. Snapchat, as its name suggests, is a trendy mobile application that allows the users to “chat” with “shapshots.” Any picture sent will only last a few seconds on the receiver’s screen and becomes irretrievable. In this case, the pictures are more transient than the ones on Instagram and less likely to be archived. Snapchat users use this application to connect with friends, and some even use it as a new way for “sex-texting.” However, it is important to note that even digital snapshots are not meant to be archived, the digital nature, paradoxically, makes them easily archivable. As Hand (2012) pointed out, the ubiquitous digital snapshots may be archived in a manner of unintentional routine that leads to unforeseen consequences.

Limitations

The first limitation of this research regards the immense and hard-to-attain data on Instagram. According to Keyhole, the online Instagram tracker used for this study, there were 25,000 #Nike images and 15,600 #Starbucks images being uploaded every day. For a qualitative research, the numbers are beyond manageable. The author needed to rely on a paid online service (Keyhole) in order to access the complete database for customer-shared images. With a limited budget, features that the author could access were restricted in the choice of timeframe and the volume of data that could be collected. The limited timeframe (seven days) this research applied to sample the customer-created images may cause the author to miss some key data that need more time to develop. For example, the social networking and community engagement practices. A suggestion for future researchers is to conduct case analysis on less popular brands that will yield a manageable amount of data in a longer timeframe or to choose a sampling scheme that can produce a smaller number of data.

A second limitation of the research regards the multi-methodology. Combining content analysis and thematic analysis, the thesis is able to explore the multi-faceted topic and addresses issues from different perspectives. However, the author risks an overlap of data analysis or an over-generalized conclusion. Some scholars criticize content analysis for its unclear boundary between qualitative and quantitative approaches and the use of un-tested codes (Creswell, 2011). Morgan (1993) argued that the method of qualitative content analysis could find its critics in both the quantitative and qualitative fields. Quantitative researchers considered it to be a simplistic technique that did not lend itself to detailed statistical analysis, while qualitative researchers considered that content

analysis was not sufficiently qualitative in nature (as cited in Elo & Knygas, 2007, p.107). While the purpose of this research is to describe the brand images shared on Instagram in a more open attitude, the author suggests future researchers use this thesis as a foundation to explore a more specific facet of the topic using a single method.

Thirdly, due to the limited scope of this research and the author's difficulty in attaining the data, there were several sets of data that might be significant to this topic left unanalyzed. This research pointed out the risks of losing brand control due to customers' sharing of brand images; however, none of the data analyzed in this research was proved to be showing obvious negative images of brands. The author tried to search for these negative images by tracking the images shared by customers that were tagged with #Nikesucks or #Starbuckssucks, but the results yield very small number of images that should be consider significant. In the same seven-day timeframe applied to sample the customer-shared #Starbucks and #Nike images, only 13 #Starbuckssucks and 21 #Nikesucks images were present. At the same time, 107,054 #Starbucks images and 189,975 #Nike images that contained mostly positive brand images were produced.

Some other negative images about Starbucks and Nike might have been taken down by the requests of the companies. Instagram does provide a mechanism for companies to report trademark infringement caused by contents posted by other people even that Instagram prefers the trademark owner reached out to the individual posting the content and resolve the issue simply by bringing it to their attention without contacting Instagram. There is therefore no way to confirm whether there have been any negative Starbucks or Nike images taken down under the companies' request, leading to a hidden

set of data which might contribute greatly to the understanding of brand value co-creation on Instagram.

Future Research

From a marketing perspective, the real effects of brand images on Instagram might need to be further researched with quantitative tools and larger scale data analysis on the customers' attitudinal or behavioral changes after being exposed to the images. Also, more in-depth investigation should be carried out to explore businesses' Instagram photos sharing behaviors, focusing not only on Starbucks and Nike, but smaller and different types of businesses. From the communication studies' perspective, in-depth interviews and ethnographic observation about Instagramers should be conducted to further understand the motivation and the differences between gender, age, and social groups behind the sharing of selfies and private lives on mobile applications. Future research can also consider the link between Instagram and international communication, given that more than 60% of Instagram users are now from outside of the United States (Malik, 2013). Finally, considering the fast-changing digital environment and the growing mobile technologies, future researchers interested in this topic should also lay their eyes on emerging visual communication mobile applications developed after Instagram. Some examples are Snapchat, the Chive, and the Vine, all of which provide more intimate and instant ways to communicate with visual elements.

Conclusion

Brand images on Instagram form a unique brand presence in the digital world. First, it is mobile, instantaneous, and ubiquitous; second, unlike word-of-mouth communications, brand images are shared not in an attempt to review the products but as

a visual element to enhance Instagramers' ideal selves; third, the companies and the customers' roles seem to be reversed on Instagram, suggesting the over-arching concept of this master thesis, "we live in a time where brands are people and people are brands" (Solis, 2013). Taking a multi-method and qualitative approach to look at mobile photo sharing and brand value co-creation on Instagram has contributed academically to the literature of visual communication, prosumerism, brand value co-creation, and marketing communications. Potts (2008) has already predicted that "the creative production through the creation and public dissemination of cultural artifacts is now increasingly part of the logics of everyday-life, as in blogging, video-blogging, or photo-sharing" (p.8). The co-creating practices of brand images and brand value will continue to be incorporated into the branding strategies of companies and will become routine. This master's thesis is part of an on-going study on the fast-changing digital life and revolutionizing ways of communication in the 21st century. The author hopes this research provides new insights and inspiration for whoever interested in taking on the adventure to explore the new world of visual communication and future marketing. We are going to see a more image-based world where visual contents becomes the universal language to communicate emotions, experiences, knowledge, and values. On Instagram, marketers need to know how to grab customers' attention with images and be a non-intrusive facilitator for customers' self-expressions. Companies should recognize the customers' power to co-create brand value and take a customer-centric perspective by consistently observing what their digital customers are sharing, learning the new meanings added to original brands identities, and figuring out the best marketing strategy by seeing customers as collaborators and competitors in sharing brand content.

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