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Management and sustainability: Creating shared value in the digital era

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Emotions in users-brand co-creation of value. Evidence from a sentiment analysis on Twitter

MICHELA MINGIONE[*] MATTEO CRISTOFARO[•] DANIELE MONDI[♠]

Objectives. *This paper advances knowledge on user-brand co-creation by presenting an original and reliable measure of emotional co-creation (CCS) during Business to Customers online interactions. Through its implementation are given answers to related research questions on the emotional side of user-brand co-creation.*

The third millennium has been characterized by the advent of diverse disrupting phenomena, such as Internet, networking, on-line platforms and social media. These new means have largely enhanced interactive opportunities among people; in the marketing and brand management domain this can be recognized in the greater frequency and intensity of interactions between the brand and its stakeholders, and between stakeholders themselves (Payne et al., 2009; Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Kornum and Mühbacher, 2013; Ramaswany and Ozcan, 2016). Thereafter, companies must acknowledge the key role played by interactions, which help at achieving co-creation processes - the firm-user interaction that produces a mutually valued outcome (Prahald and Ramaswamy, 2004) - of: brand value (Hughes et al., 2016; Lee and Soon, 2017; Payne et al., 2009), brand meaning (Iglesias et al., 2013; Vallaster and von Wallpach, 2013), and brand identity (Black and Veloutsou, 2017; von Wallpach et al., 2017).

In this vein, as seminally recognized by Prahald and Ramaswamy (2004; p. 11), "direct interactions with consumers and consumer communities are critical. Consumer shifts are best understood by being there, co-creating with them".

Based on this scenario, scholars observed a shift toward a new brand paradigm that empowers consumers, becoming active contributors in the brand value co-creation process, especially when they interact in a digital environment, through brand communities (Cova and Pace, 2006; Merz et al., 2009; Asmussen et al., 2013; Kornum and Mühlbacher, 2013; Schau et al., 2009). Thus, managers aiming at developing brand co-creation should carefully design specific digital encounters, such as brand-owned platforms, the corporate website, and social media (Payne et al., 2009; Iglesias & Bonet, 2012).

Due to the increasing attention of scholars in this last decade, the field of brand co-creation is shifting to an intermediate level, with scholars beginning to introduce quantitative measures (Edmondson and McManus, 2007). In recent times, scholars recently provided more quantitative research, such as measurement scales (Merz et al., 2018; Ranjan and Read, 2016), and investigating antecedents and consequences of brand value co-creation (Kennedy and Guzmán, 2016, 2017; Kennedy, 2017). In particular, scholars observed that to participate in co-creation processes, consumers do not ask for monetary incentives (Füller, 2010), but call for social, enjoyable and fun interactions (Füller et al., 2009; Füller and Bilgram, 2017; Kennedy and Guzmán, 2016). However, the emotional value - i.e.,"the perceived utility acquired from an alternative's capacity to arouse feelings or affective states" (Sheth et al., 1991; p. 161; see also Bailey et al. 2001) - has not been specifically and quantitatively addressed, despite in the brand and, more in general, in the marketing domains, it has been considered pivotal for understanding the value of experiential user-brand interactions during co-creation processes (Smith & Colgate, 2007), which is the aim of the current work. From that, we address four research questions:

RQ1*: What is the co-created emotional value of brand-consumer interactions?*
RQ2*: What is the reaction of brands when consumers interact with extremely positive or negative sentiment?*
RQ3*: Is the co-created emotional value positively correlated with the frequency of occurrence of interaction and Likes?*
RQ4*: Do community-based brands co-create emotional value more than other brand typologies?*

By using sentiment analysis of 21 brands from diverse industries, this study investigates the value - in terms of sentiment - exchanged during co-creation processes between the brand and its consumers on Twitter brand-owned digital platforms.

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Methodology. *To this aim, we implement a netnographic sentiment analysis of 9,645 users-brands' interactions retrieved from 21 Twitter brand profiles. In particular, six sectorial clusters of three brands each selected from Global Industry Classification Standard have been identified: 1) food, beverage & tobacco (sub-industries: Soft Drinks (SD)); 2) Distillers and Vintners (DV); 3) information technology (sub-industry: Systems Software (SS)); 4) automobiles & components (sub-industry: Automotive Manufacturers, (AM)); 5) households & personal products (sub-industry: Personal Products, (PP)); and 6) consumer durables & apparel (sub-industry: Consumer Electronics, (CE)). To them has been added one other cluster composed of three renowned community-based (CB) brands, i.e., Patagonia, Lego, and La Roche-Posay. For each cluster three brands from the Interbrand Global Ranking have been selected. For each Twitter account has been detected the presence of UBI (user-brand interaction) - defined as the firm's responses to users - within our timeframe (April 1st 2018 to October 31th 2018). On the collected UBI it has been applied the sentiment analysis through the NRC Word-Emotion Association Lexicon (Mohammad and Turney, 2010). Then, it has been developed an original measure to identify the value of co-creation (RQ1), in terms of sentiment exchanged: the Co-Creation Score (CCS), developed according to the formula:*

$$\frac{(psBrand - nsBrand) + (psUser - nsUser)}{total\ daily\ UBI}\ x100$$

where ps corresponds to positive sentiment and ns to negative sentiment.

To investigate how brands react to consumers' extreme positive and extreme negative emotions (RQ2), a series of t-tests has been applied to the user's impulses (in terms of quantity of sentiment expressed) included in the lowest (i.e., first) and highest (i.e., fourth) quartiles of the distribution. In particular, three t-tests have been conducted: i) between the users' extreme negative expressed sentiment and brand's answers, ii) between the users' extreme positive expressed sentiment and brand's answers, and iii) between the CCS in extreme negative situations and CCS in extreme positive situations. To verify whether Likes and/or the frequency of UBI over time influence the CCS (RQ3), Pearson's correlations have been calculated between the CCS, Likes and frequency of UBI. Finally, to identify differences, if any, in co-creation among the clusters (RQ4), an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) has been applied, with Tukey's HSD post hoc tests between significant comparisons.

Findings. *Results for Research Question 1: table 1 shows an overview of the resulting dataset. Only Sprite showed a negative CCS score (-55.94), resulting from both consumers' (M= -46.00, Std.= 25.80) and brand's (M= -9.81, Std.= 34.07) negative scores.*

Tab. 1: descriptive statistics

		Brand				**Users**				
Clusters	**Company Name**	**Mean**	**Std**	**Min**	**Max**	**Mean**	**Std**	**Min**	**Max**	**CCS**
Soft Drinks (SD)	PepsiCo	23.78	25,00	-7	106	8.67	32.2	-100	108	32.45
	Nescafé	19.06	34.83	-100	167	12.11	25.62	-100	100	44.68
	Sprite	-9.81	34.07	-113	200	-46.12	25.8	-200	67	-55.94
Distillers and Vintners (DV)	The Distillers Company	6.97	23.9	-67	133	5.56	28.09	-100	200	12.53
	Hennessy	3.19	15.68	0	150	3.79	20.42	-50	200	6.98
	Heineken	1.49	14.73	-100	100	1.44	18.99	-100	150	2.93
Systems Software (SS)	Salesforce	10.95	27.07	-50	167	19.16	42.02	-67	200	30.11
	Cisco	5.58	20.49	0	200	10.36	41.55	-100	200	15.94
	Sap	8.71	27.58	-100	200	-4.93	38.05	-150	200	3.78
Automotive Manufacturers (AM)	Ford	40.24	27.5	-25	175	20.06	30.02	-33	200	60.3
	Audi	31.84	33.73	-100	200	15.85	33.59	-65	200	47.69
	Volkswagen	17.85	22.38	-33	100	6.04	31.22	-142	125	23.89
Personal Products (PP)	Gillette	41.17	45.77	-50	300	16.97	43.85	-200	300	58.14
	Colgate	21.32	33.21	-28	250	9.87	44.27	-133	300	31.19
	L'Oréal	11.68	42.81	-100	350	9.13	46.18	-100	450	20.81
Consumer Electronics (CE)	Siemens	18.01	41.97	-100	167	29.16	40.94	-200	167	47.16
	Philips	13.96	32.34	-50	200	8.12	42.89	-33	300	22.08
	IBM	4.19	25.9	-75	300	4.6	31.43	-50	300	8.79
Community-based (CB)	Patagonia	31,00	44,00	-83	170	14,00	46,00	-100	200	45,00
	Lego	15.23	21.63	-25	108	17.89	27.57	-83	133	33.13
	La Roche-Posay	0.22	6.02	-50	50	0.82	8.25	0	100	1.04

Source: own elaboration

Although the remaining CCS scores were positive (range: Ford= 60.30, La Roche-Posay= 1.04), Sap showed a positive CCS score (3.78) resulting from a negative mean for users (M= -4.93, Std.= 38.05) and a positive mean for brand (M= 8.71, Std.= 27.58), thus confirming the counterbalance effect of the CCS score.

Significant differences emerged for all the Soft Drinks (Pepsi: t(364)= 5.08, p <0.0001; Nescafé: t(364)= 2.15, p= 0.03; Sprite: t(364)= 10.04, p <0.0001) and Automotive Manufacturers (Ford: t(364)= 3.39, <0.0001; Audi: t(364)= 4.55, p <0.0001; Volkswagen: t(364)= 4.38, p <0.0001) brands, for two of the Systems Software (Salesforce: t(364)=-2.22, p <0.0001; Sap: t(364)= 3.44, p <0.0001) and Personal Products (Gillette: t(364)= 5.18, p <0.0001; Colgate: t(364)= 2.82, p <0.0001) brands, and for only one of the Consumer Electronics (IBM: t(364)= 3.64, p <0.0001), and

Community-based (Patagonia: t(364)= -2.30, p= 0.02) brands.

Results for Research Question 2: independent sample t-tests applied to determine whether differences exist in brands sentiment exchanges when answering to extreme users' emotions, showed significant results with respect to very negative (t(452)= -21.34, p< 0.0001) and very positive (t(700)= 16.38, p= 0.005) impulses. The letters NC at the end of the item tested stands for 'negative comments', while PC stands for 'positive comments'.

Tab. 2: t-test on users' extreme sentiments and firms' answers

Comparisons	**Equal Variances**	**Levene's Test for Equality of Variances**		**t test for the Equality of Means**	**df**	**Sig. (2-tailed)**	**Mean Difference**	**Std. Error Difference**	**95% Confidence Interval of the Difference**	
		F	**Sig.**	**t**					**Lower**	**Upper**
UserNC - BrandNC	Assumed	6.45	0.01	-24.120	904	0.000	-5.50	0.23	-5.95	-5.05
	Not Assumed			-24.120	893.09	0.000	-5.50	0.23	-5.94	-5.02
UserPC - BrandPC	Assumed	8.43	0.00	15.294	1400	0.000	3.58	0.23	3.12	4.04
	Not Assumed			15.294	1320.60	0.000	3.58	0.23	3.11	4.01
CCSNC - CCSPC	Assumed	1.932	0.01	-28.609	1.152	0.000	-10.61	0.37	-11.41	-9.94
	Not Assumed			-29.642	107.17	0.000	-10.61	0.37	-11.38	-9.97

Source: own elaboration

Results for Research Question 3: for CCS, no significant correlation emerged with respect to Likes, whereas a low (r= 0.14) correlation was found with respect to UBI frequency, with a statistical significance attributable to the large sample size. A low (r= 0.26) significant correlation was also found between UBI frequency and Likes.

Results for Research Question 4: the univariate ANOVA showed a significant difference (F(6, 3836)= 183.194, p< 0.0001) among the seven clusters in co-creation.

Tab. 3. Tukey's HSD test

Clusters (A)	**Comparisons between Clusters (B)**	**Mean difference (A-B)**	**Std. Error**	**Sig.**	**Confidence interval 95%**	
					Lower bound	**Upper bound**
Soft Drinks (SD)	DV	-4.9319	3.97370	0.878	-16.664	6.027
	AM	0.0026	3.97370	1.000	-17.320	17.371
	SS	0.0435	3.97370	1.000	-17.071	17.942
	PP	0.0026	3.97370	1.000	-17.320	17.371
	CE	0.0026	3.97370	1.000	-17.320	17.371
	CB	-7.65493*	3.97370	0.000	-82.839	-68.148
Distillers and Vintners (DV)	SD	4.9319	3.97370	0.878	-6.027	16.664
	AM	4.9344	3.97370	0.878	-6.001	16.690
	SS	4.9754	3.97370	0.878	-6.753	17.260
	PP	4.9344	3.97370	0.878	-6.001	16.690
	CE	4.9344	3.97370	0.878	-6.001	16.690
	CB	-7.16175*	3.97370	0.000	-83.520	-58.829
Automotive Manufacturers (AM)	SD	-0.0026	3.97370	1.000	-17.371	17.320
	DV	-4-9344	3.97370	0.878	-16.690	6.001
	SS	0.0410	3.97370	1.000	-17.097	17.916
	PP	0.0000	3.97370	1.000	-17.345	17.345
	CE	0.0000	3.97370	1.000	-17.345	17.345
	CB	-7.65519*	3.97370	0.000	-82.865	-68.174
Systems Software (SS)	SD	-0.0435	3.97370	1.000	-17.942	17.071
	DV	-4.9754	3.97370	0.878	-17.260	6.753
	AM	-0.0410	3.97370	1.000	-17.916	17.097
	PP	-0.0410	3.97370	1.000	-17.916	17.097
	CE	-0.0410	3.97370	1.000	-17.916	17.097
	CB	-7.65929*	3.97370	0.000	-83.435	-68.422
Personal Products (PP)	SD	-0.0026	3.97370	1.000	-17.371	17.320
	DV	-4-9344	3.97370	0.878	-16.690	6.001
	AM	0.0000	3.97370	1.000	-17.345	17.345
	SS	0.0410	3.97370	1.000	-17.097	17.916
	CE	0.0000	3.97370	1.000	-17.345	17.345
	CB	-7.65519*	3.97370	0.000	-82.865	-68.174
Consumer Electronics (CE)	DV	-0.0026	3.97370	1.000	-17.371	11.320
	SD	-4.9344	3.97370	0.878	-16.690	6.001
	AM	0.0000	3.97370	1.000	-17.345	17.345
	SS	0.0410	3.97370	1.000	-17.097	17.916
	PP	0.0000	3.97370	1.000	-17.345	17.345
	CB	-7.65519*	3.97370	0.000	-82.865	-648.174
Community-based (CB)	SD	7.65493*	3.97370	0.000	64.148	82.839
	DV	7.16175*	3.97370	0.000	59.829	83.520
	AM	7.65519*	3.97370	0.000	64.174	82.865
	SS	7.65929*	3.97370	0.000	64.422	83.435
	PP	7.65519*	3.97370	0.000	64.174	82.865
	CE	7.65519*	3.97370	0.000	64.174	82.865

*The mean difference is signficant at 0.05 level

Source: own elaboration

The Tukey's HSD Test maintained significant differences (p< 0.0001) between community-based brands with respect to the other clusters, with mean differences ranging from 7.2 (DV) to 7.7 (SD, AM, SS, PP, and CE), whereas the other six clusters tend to co-create in an equal manner.

Research limits. *Some limits affect this work. First, it included a partial list of brands (i.e., n=21) across seven sectorial clusters and only Twitter was considered amongst social media platforms, thus undermining the generalizability of findings. Second, it disregarded the role of cognitive and behavioral brand value co-creation, focusing - in line with the present study's aim - on the emotional value of digital-based interactions. Finally, further studies on this topic can benefit from the consideration of the word-of-mouth literature as to explain the effects on sales of the emotional value.*

Practical implications. *This study offers major practical contributions. First, by operationalising co-creation processes, through the CCS, of Twitter-owned platforms, it offers managers a measure to monitor the value generated over time during brand-consumers interactions. The present paper invites marketing managers to acknowledge that brand co-creation value cannot be manipulated by using artificial intelligence-based tools, such as ChatBot - software designed to simulate a human conversation - because bots are not (yet!) conscious and able to exchange authentic emotions.*

This study demonstrates that co-creation should not only be harmonious, but also balanced in terms of sentiment exchange. Thus, managers are urged to pay careful attention to consumers' extreme emotions to avoid relational collapses. This study demonstrates that brand value co-creation is not related to likes and frequency of interactions. Thus, managers should pay attention to the quality of the relationship and not measure their brand performance on the basis of these "quantity-based" measures. To reiterate, the human side is still needed to trigger value co-creation processes.

Theoretical implications. *This study makes several contributions to the extant literature on brand co-creation. First, it provides an original measure of brand value co-creation. In particular, the CCS, is a valuable mean to operationalize the emotional value of interactions on the basis of the sentiment exchanged. Second, and linked to the above, the paper contributes to improve current understanding on the emotional value of interactions, which originates from the sharing of both brands and consumers' emotions. Third, extending previous findings, it is suggested here that not all the brand-consumer relationships are balanced in terms of sentiment exchanged. Indeed, this study demonstrates that brands tend to give more sentiment in comparison to consumers. It is important to note, that this does not imply co-creating more than other brands, because the CCS stems from the encounter of both actors. Fourth, the paper highlights that brands show different emotional reactions when consumers interact with extreme negative or positive emotions. Not surprisingly, when consumers display extremely negative sentiment, brands reply with positive sentiment. However, when consumers interact by offering to the brand extremely positive sentiment, the brand answers by giving them back positive sentiment but less than that received. Fifth, this paper suggests that community-based brands co-create more than the others. This interesting result can be explained by the brand's willingness to maintain a balanced relationship in terms of exchanged sentiment, in order to avoid a potential collapse of the brand-consumer relationship. Consequently, this study suggests that, in order to maintain co-creation processes over time, interactions must be not only harmonious (Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013; Aspara et al., 2014; Black and Veloutsou, 2017), but also balanced in terms of sentiment exchanged.*

These findings support prior studies on brand co-creation, suggesting that harmonious interactions are key to successfully co-create (Aspara et al., 2014; Black and Veloutsou, 2017; Gyrd-Jones and Kornum, 2013) and that when brands have engaged brand communities they activate a virtuous circle of co-creation (Hatch and Schultz, 2010; Huges et al, 2016; Iglesias et al., 2013; Ind et al., 2013).

Originality of the study. *This work provides an original measure of emotional value co-creation. In particular, the CCS, is a valuable mean to operationalize the emotional value of interactions on the basis of the emotions exchanged. Extending previous findings, it is suggested here that not all the brand-consumer relationships are balanced in terms of emotions exchanged. Indeed, this study demonstrates that brands tend to give more emotions in comparison to consumers.*

Key words: *brand; co-creation; sentiment; emotions; brand measure; marketing management*

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