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**Brand Value Co-Creation on Social Media:  
How and Why Consumers Engage in Co-Creation**

*A Netnographic Study Investigating a Consumer Perspective on Value Co-Creation*

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## Abstract

Social media has elevated consumers' role in the process of brand value creation, emphasizing the view that value is co-created. Previous research has provided conceptualizations and broad descriptions, leaving a lack of empirical research. This study uses Netnography to investigate brand value co-creation on social media from a consumer perspective, to provide rich, descriptive empirical data on *how* and *why* consumers engage in these processes. Through the use of the Customer Co-Creation Value (Merz et al., 2018) framework of consumers skills and motivations as well as Kozinets (1999) customer categorization for involvement, our qualitative data provides an increased understanding of consumers actual practices during brand value co-creation in brand communities on social media. This study contributes with the addition of curiosity, dissatisfaction and nostalgia to consumer motivations and by developing a model that summarizes how and why consumers co-create brand value on social media based on involvement and type of brand. Finally, it contributes to the literature by discussing the concept of value-in-use from a social media perspective.

**Keywords:** Brand Evolution, Brand Value, CCCV, Customer Categories, Online Brand Communities, Co-Creation on Social Media.

## Introduction

*“Co-creative environments can occur only if there are complementarities between the various parties”* (Rosenthal & Brito, 2017, p.924).

Branding research focused historically on managerial efforts in building brand image and identity, great emphasis was put on trying to understand consumers' thoughts and feelings to retain relevance while simultaneously preserving the culture (Keller, 2003). In traditional marketing, it can be assumed that the firm is the protagonist and most influential actor in the value-creation process (Grönroos & Voima, 2012; Quinton, 2013; Merrilees, 2016), as well as brand managers belief that customers can be "managed" and that brand strategy is an internally driven process (Quinton, 2013). Albeit in recent years, scholars have shifted perspective and investigated processes where multiple stakeholders co-create brand value (Chapman & Dilmeri, 2022; Hatch & Schultz, 2010; Merz, He, & Vargo, 2009). From this view, branding is no longer a monologue controlled by the manager, rather, networks of stakeholders and social interactions are what actually creates brand value. This development is quite natural since consumers no longer consume mass media to the same extent but turn to social media where they are active participants in the discussions, as opposed to passive receivers of branded messages (Rosenthal & Brito, 2017; Hajli et al, 2017). Louro and Cunha (2001, p.856) argue that “brand value and meaning is continuously co-created, co-sustained and co-transformed through organization-consumer interactions”.

Consumers' participation in the creation of brand's meanings and identities has been under academics' scrutiny from a number of perspectives, for instance consumer culture theory research providing extensive contributions on lifestyle, experience and web community-based collectives (Schau, Muniz & Arnould, 2009). Similarly, the social exchange theory shows how customer's develop a positive feeling or behavior towards a brand upon receiving perceived benefit from the relationship with a brand (Hollebeek, 2011). Social media's inherent participatory characteristics has made them essential in the branding process, and thus receiving attention from scholars of co-creation, since they serve both the brand's will to engage consumers in sharing their insights as well as consumers urge to contribute (Hajli et al., 2017; Wallace et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the concept of value co-creation from a branding perspective, lacks a clear and coherent definition (Merz et al, 2018; Grönroos & Voima, 2012; Bilińska, Dewalska, & Hofman, 2020). France, Merriles and Miller (2015) claim that the discussion often is broad and avoids any thorough reflections of the core meaning as well as practices involved.

In correspondence with marketing in general, brands and branding are evolving into what an increasing number of researchers argue is more of a collaborative process, where a service-dominant view of value and its creation is considered suitable (Merz et al., 2009; Grönroos & Voima, 2012; Kamboj et al.,

2018). These scholars argue that value is always co-created between multiple actors and uniquely determined by the beneficiary of each service exchange through perceived use value (Vargo & Lusch, 2008, Merz et al., 2009; Payne et al., 2009). Nonetheless, despite the close attention to this domain, it has been noted in recent literature that there remains a lack of understanding regarding the concept of brand value, which may be linked to the extant literature being dominated by a metaphorical view of value co-creation, resulting in the roles of both service providers and customers remain analytically unspecified (Grönroos & Voima 2012).

Previous research on co-creation of brand value, is predominantly concentrating on the management perspective, leaving essential stones unturned regarding the consumer's part in the co-creation process (France et al., 2015). Moreover, there is a clear tilt towards quantitative assessments (Sarasvuo et al., 2022), a circumstance that encourages qualitative explorations of the interactions between consumers and brands. The deficiency of research on the co-creation process in social media communities make it an ideal setting in order to connect previous ideas and a room for expanding on the existing studies. Therefore, *the purpose of this study is to provide an increased understanding of the co-creation of brand value processes on social media from a consumer perspective.* This paper also answers the call by Kamboj et al. (2018) by focusing on specific brands, in the present case, Gymshark and Hard Rock. Brands that fit the traditional distinction between product brand and service brand as proposed by Merz et al. (2018) to study further. Conclusively, Rosenthal and Brito (2017) points specifically to the lack of research on *how* and *why* consumers engage in co-creation processes as well as the effects of the diversity of digital platforms, thereby inspiring this research to examine the selected brands communities on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter as well as the formulation of the following research questions:

1. *How* do consumers contribute during brand value co-creation on social media?
2. *Why* are consumers engaging in the co-creation of brand value on social media?

As stated, this study has a consumer perspective and aims to contribute to the branding literature, but due to the lack of a comprehensive definition of value and co-creation from a brand perspective, we follow the path of previous studies on brand value co-creation (Merz et al., 2018; France et al., 2015) and review selected work from the service literature. This, due to the discussion on the evolving brand logic (Merz et al., 2009) and in order to better understand the fundamentals of these concepts before studying how and why consumers participate in co-creating brand value.

### **Contributions of the Study**

This study contributes to the literature on brand value co-creation by providing a more in depth view of how consumers act in brand communities on social media and why they engage in these processes. These qualitative results add to the broad range of previous quantitative studies and bring the concept of value-in-use into the social media sphere. Furthermore, by taking a consumer perspective, this study expands the discussion from the extensive literature that focus on the firm's view.

### **Structure of the Thesis**

In order to answer the research questions and deliver a relevant contribution, this thesis begins with a comprehensive review of significant literature and formation of a theoretical framework. Subsequently, methodology will be presented with discussion on Netnography, the chosen method for this research, along with the research design, data collection and analysis as well as research quality and ethical considerations. Results and analysis present our empirical findings which thereafter are discussed in relation to the literature in order to reach a conclusion with answers to the research questions and the purpose of the study. Ultimately, this study outlines its contributions, it addresses managerial implications, reports its limitations, and suggests future research.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **The Changing Role of Brands**

Traditional marketing and brand management used to focus heavily on firm-controlled modes of communication, such as newspaper, television, and radio commercials, where customers had limited involvement and little or no influence on firm's decisions. A traditional approach on marketing and brand management also assumes that the company has complete control over the value creation process (Holt, 2002; Keller & Lehmann, 2003; Grönroos & Voima, 2012; Quinton, 2013; Heinonen et al., 2013). In other words, the construction of value was considered one-sided, where managers have total agency on value creation, and consumers are only "observers" with no direct influence or power in firm decisions. Nevertheless, brands are shifting away from single ownership to shared ownership (Swaminathan et al., 2020). In this current perspective, the role of consumers has completely evolved, from isolated to connected, from unaware to informed, from excluded to empowered and from passive to active (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Hence, companies only create the resources or means necessary for customers to create value for themselves (Grönroos, 2006), as "consumers no longer were willing to accept that the value of their brands could be created by marketing fiat" (Holt, 2002 p.82). Consumers' adoption of digital channels was one of the main factors that accelerated this development. Social media platforms brought in an era in which real-time conversations are taking place among consumers on a massive scale (Swaminathan et al., 2020), changing how consumers interact with brands and each other (Quinton, 2013). For instance, user-generated content has made it easier for consumers to be "listened" to, while enabling marketers to obtain valuable insights into consumer needs and wants, and thereby allowing them to replace costly traditional marketing research with low-cost, granular data available through social listening (Swaminathan et al., 2020 p.35). It has also made consumer-brand communication omni-directional, as the interaction process no longer has to be initiated by the business (Fournier & Avery 2011; Sarasvuo et al., 2022). Primarily, social media has created a seamless communication channel that enables direct and more meaningful interactions that has driven consumers to play a more active role in the value creation process (Grönroos, 2008) as consumers today, freely provide valuable, original, new, and feasible ideas that can foster product and service innovation (Filiari, 2013, p. 5).

The following discussion delves deeper into brand value co-creation, beginning with a background overview on brand value creation; touching on points like how it is created, by whom, to whom it benefits, the notion of value-in-use, and the way it operates in the digital environment. Closing with the description of a framework for studying brand value co-creation, specifically, the Customer Co-Creation Value (CCCV) scale by Merz et al. (2018), and Kozinets (1999) customer's categorization; both acting as an analysis tool for the empirical data.

### **Value Creation and Co-Creation**

The term co-creation was introduced to branding in 2005 (Sarasvuo et al., 2022) and since then, it has emerged as a prominent field of study in marketing (Kamboj et al 2018; Merrilees, 2016) and applied from different perspectives. In a recent study, Sarasvuo et al. (2022) seek a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding by critically reviewing 148 articles from 55 academic journals that acknowledge three different perspectives on co-creation theory. The first perspective refers to the marketer as the initiator of co-creation in an online and offline context (37% of the articles); the second implies the stakeholder as the initiator of co-creation in online and offline contexts, in this context consumers are the main generators of value (47% of the articles); and at last, the marketer is presented as a facilitator of co-creation, which argues that marketers are open to stakeholders' influences, where dialogue is facilitated as well as access to co-creation platforms (53% of the articles). In accordance with the study by Sarasvuo et al. (2022), this inquiry finds the third perspective (marketer-as-facilitator-of-co-creation), as the most appropriate; which naturally, has been discussed by other authors, and is discussed thoroughly in this theory section.

### *Background overview on value creation*

Much of the discussion on value creation and co-creation has been fueled by the work of Vargo and Lusch (2004; 2008), which has become central to the literature that discusses the concept of value from a service perspective (Merz et al., 2018; France et al. 2015; Kamboj et al 2018; Merrilees, 2016; Biraghi & Gambetti, 2017; Chapman & Dilmeri, 2022), from a branding perspective (Jones, 2005; Sarasvuo et al., 2022), and on research that questions their point of view (Grönroos, 2006; 2008; 2011; Grönroos & Voima 2012). The general discussion involves how value originates, by whom it is created, and to whom it benefits, which is the reason why it is relevant to begin by reviewing these viewpoints. Vargo and Lusch (2004) describe the transition of marketing from a *goods-dominant view* (where tangible manufacturing is central and value is determined by the producer), towards a *service-dominant view* (where intangibility, exchange processes and relationships are central, and value is determined by the consumer through “value-in-use.”). The authors referred to this transition and new service-centered logic with the term of Service-Dominant Logic, and developed 8 foundational premises (FPs), later updated to 10 FPs (Vargo & Lusch, 2008) that became key for research on value creation. From a different angle, Grönroos (2008; 2006) states that *a logic for consumption* (goods-logic) describes firms only as producers of goods, which are in turn presented to consumers, enabling them (the consumers) to produce value; and, from a value-in-use angle, consumers are the only producers of value. Alternatively, *a service logic* indicates that the company has direct interactions with customers so that value is emerged or created, meaning that the firm and customers are jointly co-producing and co-creating value. Yet, customers can act as the only creators of value as well.

It is clear that these authors have a different point of view as to who determines value and the way they interpret value in use, specifically; in terms of the consumer’s role in value creation and co-creation, Vargo and Lusch (2004; 2008) argue that “*the customer is always a co-creator of value*”, and according to Grönroos and Voima (2012) this implies that the firm is also always a value co-creator, thereby converting co-creation into a metaphor, i.e. “*everything is co-creation, and everyone can co-create*”, an angle that they refer to as an unstructured all-encompassing view, as it contradicts the notion of value-in-use by implying that everyone can create value. Hence, by defining value creation in the service logic as the value during usage by the customer, Grönroos (2011) as well as Grönroos and Voima (2012) conclude that instead of always being a co-creator of value, *the customer is a value creator*. On the other hand, regarding the firm’s role on value creation and co-creation Vargo and Lusch (2004; 2008) argue, “*the enterprise cannot deliver value but only offer value propositions*”, to which Grönroos and Voima (2012) respond by explaining that the firm is a facilitator of value for customers and during direct interactions the firm has the opportunity to co-create value jointly with customers. Hence, the firm is not restricted to making value propositions only but has an opportunity to directly and actively influence its customers’ value creation as well. Accordingly, the customer and firm are not always value co-creators, but only under certain circumstances. The user, however, is always a value creator (Grönroos, 2011).

### *Toward a better understanding of value and its creation*

Value is arguably one of the most challenging concepts to define in service marketing (Grönroos, 2006; 2008; 2011; Grönroos & Voima 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2004; 2008; Heinonen et al., 2010; Sarasvuo et al., 2022; Merz et al., 2018), extensive research has been conducted to understand it, leading to diverse perspectives, and thus clarity in this debate has been difficult to achieve. First, value can be recognized as a form of financial expression, e.g. in the form of monetary revenue (Gambetti & Graffigna, 2015; Grönroos & Voima 2012), however, beyond this economic dimension, the term *value* embodies a wide range of possible interpretations, for instance, someone might find value in a vacation, but for someone else, value pertains to the possibility of meeting friends while on vacation, others may experience value simply by organizing the vacation; or once it has happened, value can be found on memories, new friendships, new knowledge or cultural experiences (Grönroos & Voima, 2012), in this regard, it can be said that value is intrinsic.

In philosophy theory Zimmerman and Bradley (2019) explain that the concept of *intrinsic value* is characterized by the value that something has “by itself”, or “in virtue of which the thing in question is



good". Put differently, the value that a person assigns to the thing in question, is an individual judgment that results from personal experiences. Similar to this, Grönroos (2011) explained that it is difficult to understand when value is produced since it is an individualistic matter, for example, there is physical use (e.g., wearing a new outfit), mental use (e.g., considering purchasing a new outfit) and possession (e.g., the ownership of a luxurious gown). From an analytical point of view, one could argue that value is impossible to measure. Yet, Aristotle's theory of value addresses this matter, he describes that an "exchange" depends on "equality" on commodities, which is difficult to implement as not all "goods" are comparable (e.g., a house and a bed). He finds that they can be "commensurable" if measured by some unit of value, which he identifies as the "need" or the "demand" itself. Hence, a former point of view states that the *need* to "buy a bed", and the *demand* to "buy a house" is what creates value, instead of the "use" (Johnson, 1939). Adding to this, from a current point of view, Grönroos and Voima (2012) point out that demand is a function of value-in-use; and value-in exchange is derived from value-in-use; meaning that, the "demand", and "need" for goods depends on, and is intrinsically related to the value-in-use of the goods; which consequently recognizes value-in-exchange. The following is a more comprehensive explanation of these concepts.

### *Value-in-use*

In traditional literature, value is seen as *value-in-exchange*, a concept that simply put, it can be defined as the value embedded in a product that is exchanged (Grönroos, 2006). This comprises a value that already exists and is part of the product itself, i.e., a value that is delivered (Heinonen et al., 2010). In other words, value is not co-created, but rather exists already in the offerings that companies and marketers introduce to consumers and other stakeholders, thus, the value becomes available when an exchange is completed, for instance, by trading a product for a price. More recent studies present the notion of *value-in-use*, this view describes a value that is created when goods or services are used by consumers (Grönroos, 2006), which represents a value that emerges and not one that is assigned (Heinonen et al., 2010). Value originates only when goods and services do something for the consumers, and before this, only potential value exists (Grönroos, 2006). Therefore, this view holds that value-creation originates solely by the users during usage, and the role of the firm lies in acting as a facilitator of value for the customer (Grönroos, 2011). In line with this, *usage* can be a physical, virtual, or mental process, as it can also be mere possession. Furthermore, value-in-use suggests that value is created during consumer's daily activities (Grönroos, 2006). In this logic, value is accumulated throughout the development of the process and is not only determined at the end. Hence, value-creation-process becomes an ongoing practice that highlights the customer's experiences, logic, and ability to extract value out of products and services. Within this frame of reference, it can be said that use is the underlying notion in the analysis of value and value creation, confirming that it is through use and during usage that value emerges or is created (Grönroos & Voima, 2012).

### **Brand Value Co-Creation on Social Media**

Based on Gambetti and Graffigna (2015), this paper defines *brand value* as a set of intangible elements, such as expectations, meanings, symbols, and rituals that consumers associate as distinctive features of products and services, in other words, value is created from experiences (Chapman & Dilmperi, 2022). Value creation involves a process that can make consumers "better off" (Grönroos & Voima, 2012) and can improve the customer's well-being (Vargo et al., 2008). This implies that after the customer has experienced a particular service or product, they are in fact "better off" than before, for instance, happier or fulfilled. However, the value creation process can also cause the consumer to undergo a negative experience and be "worse off" (Grönroos & Voima, 2012), for instance, irritated, or disappointed. Our study focuses mainly on the positive aspect of the value creation process.

A systematic literature review by Sarasvou et al. (2022) suggests that interactions between customers and brand representatives, over time explain the procedure of brand value co-creation, however, there is also influence on the brand without interaction. The latter implies that multiple stakeholders engage in co-creation of brand value independently, for instance in social media with the result that some brands do not always gain value, but occasionally have the misfortune to be the subject of co-destruction of

value. With influence through interaction, the literature distinguishes between direct interactions between marketer and consumers, which could be dialogues regarding products and services, and indirect interaction when friends or other third-party individuals are introduced in the dialogue (Sarasvou et al., 2022). Similarly, Merz et al. (2018) build on service marketing literature (Vargo & Lusch, 2016) and state that co-creation of brand value can be defined as creating perceived use value (experiences) through interactions, both across networks and the whole ecosystem of stakeholders. Merz et al. (2018) provide an example of direct interaction when Dove urged customers to post positive content regarding their bodies on Twitter. Online contests launched by the brand, directed towards consumers with the aim of improving products and services is another example specified by France et al. (2015). These examples are instances where the firms at first glance seem to be the main actors in the process and the customers simply follow orders, but as Grönroos (2011) explains, production is merely creation of potential value while customers usage is the creation of real value.

Swaminathan et al. (2020) argue that the information asymmetry and higher search costs of the past that gave firms an edge, is no longer a barrier for consumers thanks to digitalization. Influencers and peer customers could in fact be more influential in the conversations that shape customer perceptions of the brand. Unlike traditional media marketing campaigns, social media content is open for interaction and adapted to inspire conversations (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2017). Furthermore, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) describe that the extent to which social media can be used to facilitate interactions depends on the openness and willingness of the company and its stakeholders to participate. Consumers from around the world are connected, and conversations can either damage or improve the brand's image and value in the blink of an eye, for example, like when Samsung quickly gained a bad reputation after a number of customers reported that their phones exploded or caught fire when overheated (The European Business Review, 2020). However, the positive experience that consumers receive from having access to social and technical features encourage them to engage in co-creation of the brand in social media (Schiaivone, Metallo & Agrifoglio, 2014). Brand communities add significant benefits to consumers as it gives them a chance to identify themselves in association with a particular brand and communicate to the whole world how they are to be identified (Laroche et al., 2012). This is partly related to what Gambetti and Graffigna (2015) meant when they were discussing the intangible aspects of a brand. Even though the concept of brand identity existed before the widespread use of social media and used to play a significant role in brand communities (Pongpaew et al., 2017), social media has made it easier to communicate and identify with the communities. There is an increased motivation to participate due to consumers eagerness to learn and display their knowledge regarding a product as well as helping others who need the information (Habibi et al., 2014).

Hollebeek (2011) studied the customer-brand engagement through the social exchange theory lens, and he concluded that customers are willing to put forward their own energy and resources to contribute to the brand and the community as long as they believe they get more out of the interaction than they are investing. In this case, what they get from the interaction is the entertainment and informational resources obtained from the online communities and the interaction process itself can be a motivation (Sarasvuo et al., 2022). The main idea behind this is that online communities bring together a pool of creativity from a brand's customers, which, if properly harnessed by the firm, can turn out to be a great source of innovation (Schiaivone et al., 2014). Marketers have begun to realize the importance of stakeholder interaction and so they are often seen to be involved in posting content in order to attempt to ignite consumer interaction (France et al., 2015). Stakeholders themselves in some cases are also seen to initiate the interaction process by asking for opinions and feedback as it adds value to their own experience or in "the stakeholder sphere as the locus" as described by Sarasvuo et al., (2022). The authors further state that, despite the direction or the parties involved in an interaction process regarding a brand, it ultimately always leads to some form of co-creation. And social media has made it easier than ever for stakeholders to interact, consequently resulting in a major impact on the world of branding.

## Summary

To summarize this theoretical chapter, *brand value* refers to non-tangible elements, such as expectations, meanings, symbols and rituals, that consumers attribute to a product or service (Gambetti



& Graffigna, 2015). This leads us to the notion of *value-in-use*, a value that is created when goods or services are *used* by consumers (Grönroos, 2006), therefore, it can be said that value is created during consumer experiences (Merz et al., 2018; Chapman & Dilmeri, 2022; Grönroos 2006; 2008; 2011; Grönroos & Voima, 2012) and *value co-creation* is the process of creating value through interactions between the firm and its stakeholders, primarily consumers (Merz et al., 2018), as interaction is a “generator of service experience and value-in-use” (Grönroos, 2008). Furthermore, *the customer is a value creator*, and the *firm acts as a facilitator of value*, and during direct interactions the firm has the opportunity to co-create value jointly with customers, hence, the firm can influence consumers decisions as well. Accordingly, the customer and firm are not always value co-creators, but only under certain circumstances, however the customer is always a value creator (Grönroos, 2011). Last but not least, the Internet and social media have become essential tools in the process of co-creating brand value, as they enable direct interactions and more effective communication between consumers and companies (Quinton, 2013), which constitutes an essential aspect of this research.

In addition to the understanding of what value is, and the conceptualizations of its creation, a relevant framework is needed as a guide for the examination of consumers’ competences, as well as their drivers to engage during co-creation, therefore, we present the Customer Co-Creation Value framework and its seven dimensions below, a tool that aids to better unravel how and why consumers contribute and engage in the brand value co-creation process on social media, which is used qualitatively in this study. Finally, a second framework that aids in the categorization of data is, Kozinets (1999) customer categories, which are discussed due to the need to include an assessment of the involvement among studied consumers.

## **Framework for Studying Brand Value Co-Creation**

### *1) Customer Co-Creation Value*

This section introduces the Customer Co-Creation Value scale (CCCV), developed by Merz et al. (2018) as a tool to give clarity and direction to the study. Among the decisive factors for including this framework in this study, we can mention that to our understanding this is the first and only model used to assess and estimate consumers *value* in the brand value co-creation process, making it key to our research, as it acts as one of the main pillars in the data categorization of this analysis, and functions as a tool for qualitative research. This study has no ambitions of any measurements of value but rather uses the scale as a framework for how and why consumers co-create brand value. Moreover, we argue that this framework still lacks rich and descriptive empirical data as well as a more practical description of usage. More specifically regarding the daily processes of brand value co-creation from a consumer perspective, a circumstance that calls for complementary qualitative data and acts as motivation for this study. In agreement with Merz et al. (2018) we find the CCCV framework valuable as a systematic view of the value that consumers bring to the equation. This framework is a multidimensional construct consisting of 7 dimensions divided under customer-owned resources and customer motivation (see table 2 in appendix), in our opinion, a fitting structure in studying *how* and *why* consumers engage in brand value co-creation.

### *CCCV - Customer-Owned Resources*

Voluntary contributions from customers to a firm's brand-building activities are known as customer-owned resources, which include knowledge, persuasion skills, creativity and network-assets connectedness (Harmeling et al., 2017), tangible and intangible assets firms use to design and implement its strategies (Merz et al., 2018).

- *Brand Knowledge* includes the accumulation of knowledge a customer has about the brand (Harmeling et al., 2017). First-hand customer experience results in valuable sources of brand knowledge that helps firms with marketing communications, new product and brand developments and customer-to-customer support (Merz et al., 2018).

- *Brand skills* relate to the level of persuasion or influence a client has over other existing or potential clients (Merz et al., 2018). Information that originates from another customer is perceived as more

authentic and reliable due to being first-hand sources. When customers share their feedback and opinions about a brand, they tend to start the conversation with those closest to them (Olson & Ahluwalia, 2021), a resource for firms by gaining access to the consumer's network and, in the long run, increasing the brand's reach (Brown & Reingen, 1987).

- *Brand creativity* entails customer conceptualization or development of novel and useful ideas, processes, or solutions to problems. Customer creativity represents competitive advantage as it provides firms with understanding and valuable data that can inspire new product development, along with being the source of creative (customer-generated) marketing communication content (Merz et al., 2018).

- *Brand Connectedness* refers to customers' interpersonal ties within their social network. Online communication platforms have dramatically increased customer-to-brand and customer-to-customer connections in record time, providing companies with access to influential individuals or to unique subgroups (Merz et al., 2018), such as, online brand communities and social media groups.

### *CCCV - Customer Motivation*

As reported by Merz et al. (2018), customer motivation involves the customer willingness and drive to actively participate in brand value co-creation. It is directly related to the strength of the customer-brand relationship and consists of affective and socio-motive attachments (love/passion), behavioral ties (commitment), and supportive cognitive beliefs (trust).

- *Brand passion* is the positive feelings that a customer has regarding the brand, such as admiration and love (Merz et al., 2018), feelings of craving, desiring, wanting and longing to use a brand (Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016) and in the absence of the brand, consumers may feel as though something is missing from their lives (Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2013). Hence, passion is at the core of all strong brand relationships (Fournier, 1998), as it leads to emotional attachments and influences relevant behavioral factors (Merz et al., 2018). Moreover, nostalgia is found to be an important element in the development of passion for the brand (Koetz & Tankersley, 2016). Certain products lead to nostalgic emotions that in turn strengthen the bonds to the community and ties participants together while increasing purchase intentions (Marchegiani & Phau, 2011).

- *Brand trust* refers to the extent to which a stakeholder is confident about the brand and its promises (Merz et al., 2018). It exists when one party has confidence in an exchange partner's reliability and integrity (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), therefore, trust is key to any business-customer relationship. Furthermore, in online communities where customers actively participate in co-creation processes, it was found that engagement leads to greater trust in a brand, and customer participation in co-creation generates customer trust in the brand (Iglesias et al., 2018)

- *Brand commitment* represents the extent to which stakeholders are willing to work for the brand and its success. Committed stakeholders take on committed roles in developing new products co-creatively with a firm and participate more actively in brand communities, thereby helping build a loyal following and positive brand judgments (Merz et al., 2018).

### *2) Customer categories*

A second framework utilized in this study is the research by Kozinets (1999), who discusses the necessity to consider consumers' level of involvement and segmentation based on interaction (see table 3 in Appendix). Four categories were proposed, starting with the consumers whose interest in the consumption activity is merely superficial and where social ties to the community are frail (Tourists). Minglers have characteristically stronger ties to the community, but the consumption interest remains trivial. The two categories that are deemed strategically important for marketers are devotees and insiders. The former show deep interest in the consumption activity, although community ties are weak. Insiders on the other hand, are both highly engaged in both the social exchanges with the community and consumption of products and services. How and why consumers interact online varies and in general the consumers sorted as tourists and devotees often use an informational mode of interaction with short term goals, for example asking for knowledge on products and services. Minglers and insiders consider social interactions to be a means in itself and exhibit a more long-term focus. However, consumers are by no means permanently stuck in these categories, according to Kozinets (1999), they tend to progress from tourists to insiders over time as knowledge of the consumption activity builds up and social ties to the community strengthen. As the framework of Merz et al (2018) is built from a clear

firm, or brand, perspective, Kozinets (1999) customer categories framework expands the foundation of our study and represents a tool that assist in the data categorization and the data analysis, being the reason for the following section to provide a more comprehensive description of this framework.

## **Methodology**

The aim of providing a qualitative, descriptive theoretical contribution on the co-creation of brand value processes from a consumer perspective, requires a method that captures consumers actions. Preferably without giving the individuals an opportunity to reflect too much over the practices they participate in. Thus, the preferred method was netnography early on, due to the easy access to consumers in an arena where they are in more control over the discussion on the brand and its products. Moreover, since we aim to study co-creation from a consumer's point of view, netnography proved to be the most meaningful method for our data collection and analysis, on the grounds that netnography has always focused on quality over quantity (Kozinets et al., 2018), as well as netnography tends to dive deeper into the context behind the individual conversations, posting interactions and experiences, meaning that it is more focused on meaning than on precision (Kozinets, 2018). To study consumer behavior on social media enables us to indirectly study the intentions and drivers behind our target group. For these reasons, we consider this qualitative research method to be the most optimal for this study.

## **Netnography**

Building on the established qualitative method of ethnography, *Netnography* emerged along with the rise of internet and online communities, thereby suitably defined by Kozinets (2002, p.62) as "...ethnography on the Internet". By participation and observation in distinctive settings, ethnographic researchers are the instruments used to understand human, and even non-human, behavior (Kozinets, 2002), and as a method derived from ethnography, netnography aids researchers to explore, learn and understand how consumers behave in an online environment, since most consumer activities and conversations are happening partially or entirely in an online environment. Nowadays, consumer narratives that occur online are not mere conversations, instead, these narratives became powerful cultural and social tales, allegorical myths about the true things in life, about our collective human experience (Kozinets et al., 2018). Furthermore, when conducting (n)ethnographic research online further aspects, such as technology, affect the empirical material, a notion that Lugosi and Quinton (2018) argue, need further consideration. The behavior of consumers online is carefully analyzed by various software for commercial purposes and sorted as well as presented in ways that could affect the researcher's interpretation of it. Other forms of non-human agency online are artificial intelligence that communicate with consumers or by producing and distributing content, thus presenting supplementary challenges in conducting the study. Furthermore, temporality is an aspect worthy of contemplation due to ways that the internet and social media blur our experiences of space and time. As exemplified by Lugosi and Quinton (2018), consumers' perceptions of a brand stretch over more dimensions today when store interactions are followed up with posts or comments in social media. The easy access to vast amounts of data is also an area relevant for skepticism and the researcher ought to recognize its perishability.

## **Research Context**

Most previous research (Merz et al. 2018; Sarasvou et al. 2022) involved quantitative methods, resulting in useful frameworks to further study brand value co-creation but did in our opinion a poor job of describing how the processes actually are performed in reality. Thus, pointing towards a need for qualitative work.

### *Brand selection*

In order to increase the prospect of obtaining valuable data for the study, we commenced on a pursuit of a brand or brands suitable in accordance with Kozinets (2002) exhortations on choosing communities that, first of all, are dedicated to a topic of significance to the research questions. Further, this study

requires brands with a large online community where consumers are engaged enough to participate in social interactions with other consumers as well as with the brand, and a community where we can get a multitude of posts and a high activity of users who deliver rich and descriptive content, leading us to the brands Gymshark and Hard Rock, as they both cover these characteristics. For the selection of the first brand, gym clothing proved to be a suitable choice because of the significance of clothing brands in relation to consumers identity. In addition to this, research says that with an estimated 3 billion social media users worldwide, adolescents and young adults are the most active users of social media (Schønning, 2020), and the selected brand “*Gymshark*” has as its target consumers, teenagers and young adults, both male and female (Shastri, 2021). In the case of “*Hard Rock*”, most of its customers are between 20 and 35 years old, either traveling on business or tourists and families traveling for pleasure (Bhasin, 2018). In addition, international hotel and restaurant industries tend to present their services as unique and memorable experiences, which we saw as an ideal ambiance for data collection, as it signifies online communities with an environment rich in meanings.

As mentioned by Kamboj et al. (2018), there are different perceptions on value creation and whether there actually is a distinction between product brands and service brands. Due to these discussions as well as the urge from Merz et al. (2018) to study co-creation of brand value by examining both product and service brands, our study chose one brand from each category. This in order to increase the possibility of achieving a deeper understanding of value co-creation processes and the relevance of the proposed customer-owned resources as well as motivations. This directed us to select two brands for this study; the first representing a product and the second a service, —namely, Gymshark and Hard Rock—, so that we can analyze and compare the differences and similarities between these two categories according to our data classification. Both chosen brands account for high engagement and active communication between the brands and the customers in their respective online communities. Moreover, the global reach of both brands gave us a broader picture of how and why consumers, despite differences in nationality, engage with the brands and co-create brand value.

### *Brand descriptions*

#### *Gymshark*

Founded in 2012 Birmingham U.K. by Ben Francis whose age today is 28, with nothing but a sewing machine, a screen-printer and a lot of ambition (Gymshark, 2022). Francis shared that, originally, they only made clothes that they really wanted to wear themselves as they enjoyed creating and fulfilling the orders they received (Cook, 2020), and —as the brand describes— “*today, we create the tools that help everyone become their personal best: the clothing you’ll sweat in, the content you’ll find inspiration in and the community you’ll become your best in*” (Gymshark, 2022). Gymshark’s community or as they like to call it “family”, involves employees, athletes and followers with a total social media following of over 18 million and customers in over 230 countries across their 14 online stores (Gymshark, 2022), demonstrating the strong involvement of the brand in its extensive community, and its active role in its further development.

#### *Hard Rock*

Founded in London by two Americans, when the first Hard Rock Café opened in 1971, the now global brand is present in over 74 countries and hosts more than 15.000 live music events every year. In 1995 the first Hard Rock Hotel & Casino opened in Las Vegas on the famous strip, and to this day the brand has a business area that encompasses 23 hotels and 11 casinos in locations such as Cancun, Orlando, Hollywood (Florida) and much more. The famous walls of memorabilia across all of their venues started out with Eric Clapton hanging his guitar on the wall at Hard Rock Café in London. Just after that, Pete Townsend gave away one of his guitars and today the world's largest private collection of rock and roll memorabilia exceeds 80.000 items (Hard Rock, 2022). Since 2007 the company is owned by the Seminole tribe of Florida who has continued the international expansion with new cafés as well as hotels and casinos. Notable venues include Sao Paulo, Brasil, Bogota, Colombia and the acquisition of the famous Mirage in Las Vegas from MGM Resorts, which will be fully renovated and rebuilt into the shape of a guitar similar to the hotel in Hollywood, Florida (Hard Rock Café, 2022).



## **Data Collection**

According to Kozinets (2002) when selecting online communities for data collection, a researcher must ensure that there's enough interaction between the members and that the interactions touch upon the research question and the objective the researcher has in mind. Our purpose for this study is to achieve a deeper understanding of the brand value co-creation process, specifically related to social media, so we decided to focus on the official social media channels of the chosen brands. During the data collection process, we examined posts, interactions and their communication language made by the brands and their customers in the official online communities in Facebook, Instagram and Twitter accounts. All of the studied communities are public, which is important due to the ongoing debate among researchers using netnography, whether or not the researcher ought to reveal their presence in the community as well as the purpose of study (Lugosi & Quinton, 2018; Costello, McDermott & Wallace, 2017). Kozinets (2002) states that, for netnographic research to be considered ethical, four principles should be followed: full disclosure of the researcher's presence, assurance of anonymity, allowing for feedback from community participants and consideration of public versus private data.

Some argue that Kozinets (2002) approach of making a public entrée is necessary (Scaraboto & Fischer, 2013) while assorted studies pursue a non-disclosure approach (Rageh, Melewar & Woodside, 2013; Bettany & Kerrane, 2016). However, one problem in making users aware that a researcher is collecting their data is that they start to feel uncomfortable to have “eyes watching”. In situations like this, the consumers are more likely to give the researchers a false impression and thereby the data might lose its authenticity (Langer & Beckman, 2005). Mancosu and Vegetti (2020) discuss the legal concerns and compliance issues of collecting data from social media and conclude that; as long as any personal information such as a personal name, date of birth, or other sensitive data is not disclosed, it is okay to use the data. According to Frankel and Siang's (1999) study, online users always have a choice of whether they want to make anything private or public, so if they decide to make information public, they themselves allow for the information to be circulated. Therefore, in our study, since we mainly study official brand communities, which are meant to be public, we decided not to disclose our presence but follow up on the second of Kozinets (2002) principles by anonymization of names and faces of consumers, as well as only using pseudonyms when mentioning names throughout the analysis.

During the data collection process we observed, studied, and examined posts up to 2018, resulting in a study spanning roughly over four years, and because of the possibility of going back as far as 2018, we were able to study and gather enough information for this study, which we believe for the most part is what is actually happening in these communities. Furthermore, this study collected data from multiple online communities, where approximately 800 posts were viewed, from which a total of 185 posts were collected and sorted into two separate documents for each brand, with the majority of posts originating from Facebook, followed by Instagram and Twitter. The fact that three different social media platforms were examined, drives us to conclude that the collected data constitutes a reliable source for describing interactions that lead to consumers' value creation. Lastly, we determined that the data obtained up to a particular point was sufficient, for the reason that we were able to successfully reach saturation, meaning that, we decided to stop collecting data when we detected that the posts were not generating additional information (Kozinets, 2002).

## **Data Analysis**

What data to collect is an important issue due to the often abundance of content and the mentioned ease of compilation. Kozinets (2002) explains that, in principle, it is the research questions, available time for the study as well as the competence of researchers that control the choice of posts. Moreover, how members express themselves is also essential for the value of the data later in the analysis. The researchers could interact with the consumers and choose an active approach or simply observe and collect while reflecting on the exchanges (Costello et al., 2017).

As a procedure for identifying individuals as well as facilitating the sorting and analysis of the data, this study follows the four categories based on consumption activity suggested by Kozinets (1999; 2002).



1. **Tourists:** These consumers are the least involved, they present a lack of strong social ties to other community members and lack deep interest in the consumption activity.
2. **Minglers:** Social ties are strong in this group, but they are not attracted to consume.
3. **Devotees:** In contrast to minglers, devotees are highly interested in consumption but show little interest in interacting with other members.
4. **Insiders:** These are the most involved and active consumers, with strong social ties to the group and a high interest in consumption, and they are often cited by other members.  
Devotees and insiders represent the most extensive source of data as they embody dedicated, enthusiastic and actively involved members in the community.

By categorizing consumers according to Kozinets (1999) proposed categories, we examined consumers behavior during the process of brand value co-creation while differentiating between their level of involvement, both in the consumption activity and their social ties to the community. This, in conjunction with Merz et al. (2018) customer co-creation value framework, were brought together to meet the purpose of this study. The dimensions of *customer-owned resources* acted as a framework for categorizing the empirical material on *how* consumers participate in brand value creation, while the dimensions of *customer motivation* constituted the basis for *why* they contributed. Once the brands, the sites and the people were identified, we decided on our relationship as researchers with the target communities, and settled that the best option was to take distance and objectivity, in other words, we conducted the netnography by observing the interactions rather than directly interacting with the members of the communities. Another of the reasons we decided not to disclose our presence was the time constraint for this study, as well as our strong belief that people may not be their true selves if they know there is a researcher present, which would affect both, our ability to analyze their behavior and our results as the information would no longer be genuine.

Collected data was sorted into one document for each brand, where a very detailed classification was performed, specifically, using the CCCV as a framework for consumers competences (how they participate) and incentives (why they participate). Due to the limitations of qualitative methods in regard to studying motivations, we recognize that our observations and analysis is more of an indirect study. The data was divided into seven dimensions, i.e., (1) knowledge, (2) skill, (3) creativity, (4) connectedness, (5) passion, (6) trustworthiness and (7) commitment; and within each dimension, the data was also sorted according Kozinets (1999) customer categories i.e., Tourists, Minglers, Devotees and Insiders, representing their involvement; where each of these steps represents the coding of our data. Moreover, the reasons for selecting the posts for this analysis was motivated by their characteristics matching our purpose and research questions, in particular, due to the rich descriptive content of both images and texts, as well as the meaningful comments and reactions of both consumers and brands, all of which reveals much of the ongoing processes of brand value co-creation.

### *Research Quality*

One of the most important aims of qualitative research is to be able to demonstrate trustworthiness in the study and consequently in the findings and contributions of the study (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008). First, the study demonstrates consistency in the coding of the information, meaning that constant patterns and even new relevant themes could be found; and second, during the data analysis phase, the two conductors of this study independently analyzed the gathered data, and then compared the results, revealing that both authors obtained the same interpretations, thereby demonstrating a significant level of trustworthiness in the study. Furthermore, during netnographic research it is possible to study a phenomenon or a behavior from the inside without the need to notify the target audience, thus avoiding biased data (Morais, Santos & Gonçalves, 2020), which in turn indicates authenticity and trustworthiness.

## Results and Analysis

Our theoretical framework suggests that brand value is generated in use, a circumstance that makes consumers' involvement interesting. In order to understand how and why brand value is co-created, one must recognize the differences between categories of consumer. Kozinets (2002) categories were deemed relevant as a distinction between involvement regarding products and services as well as social interaction. In addition, this analysis follows the CCCV framework of Merz et al. (2018) as a guideline to access significant insights into the various ways consumers contribute during brand value co-creation on social media and the reasons why they engage.

### Tourists - The Curious Consumers

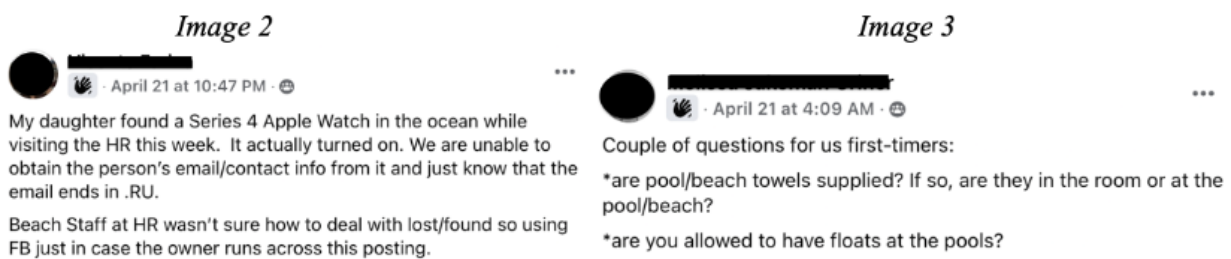
According to Kozinets (1999) the category of customers labeled as tourists are individuals whose social ties are weak, along with lacking a deep interest in the consumption activity, therefore, tourists are more scarce compared to the other consumer categories. When tourists do decide to interact with the community, it is usually in the form of casual questions, suggesting that they only interact when seeking advice from other more enthusiastic customers. In other less common cases, tourists can be observed expressing opinions, feedback or criticism about the company's product or service. However, it was detected that a tourist only posts a message when their emotions are so intense that there is no other choice but to connect with the community, for instance, when their doubts, satisfaction or dissatisfaction are so strong that they decide to share it.

Following the CCCV framework, the tourists among the Gymshark community show a particular level of *knowledge*, for example Johana wrote, *“what are people opinions of the training leggings? I love this color but have never bought from this range”*, demonstrating that she has bought before from the brand but her interest is not so profound, that she needs to ask the opinion of other more enthusiastic customers. Further, we found that when tourists decide to interact with the community, they often *connect* with other members, image 1 describes this example. This tourist exhibits a lack of product expertise, which shows that she is not an active customer, and, when we investigated more thoroughly, we found that this was the only post in the form of a question she had made in this community, indicating that she is also not deeply interested in forming connections in the group. In this respect, tourists interact with devotees or insiders inside the community. Lastly, it was identified that tourists also have passion for the brand, as for example, Daniela tagged Gymshark and wrote *“new year, new gym wear”*, revealing that even when she is not deeply interested in consuming and sharing about it, during a special occasion she decided to do so, indicating strong positive feelings towards the brand. Briefly, tourists from a product brand comprises Knowledge and Connectedness (acting as the how), and Passion (acting as the why).

Image 1



Similarly, in the case of Hard Rock, as a service brand, it was found that when tourists share something, they have some degree of familiarity (*knowledge*) with the service, they can connect, and they feel passionate about the brand. For instance, David wrote “*First time poster. Writing to provide a mini-trip report & update for our first family trip since the pandemic...*”, for the first and only time, this tourist provided a very detailed review about his trip, thus illustrating that his experience was so meaningful that it had to be shared in a place where it will be appreciated. In terms of connectedness, image 2 illustrates a tourist's only post, where he found a valuable item in the ocean and used the online community in his attempt for helping somebody, almost like if this experience pushed him to interact with the community. As a second example, image 3 illustrates the type of posts that tourists most often tend to produce, a one-time post where advice is sought. Hence, when tourists post concerns or opinions, they *connect* with other more experienced customers. At last, when tourists interact, on occasions they also show strong feelings (*passion*) towards the brand, for instance, Karen wrote, “*Left yesterday and meant to ask what the smell was in the lobby. It was delicious. Anyone know?*” This one-time customer felt strongly attracted to the smell and couldn't avoid interacting with others in the community.



Overall, the findings from our collected data showed that tourists do not exhibit many characteristics of the CCCV framework, however, from the results explained above, an overlapping theme emerged in both the product and service brand, viz, *Curiosity*. This selection of data revealed that consumer curiosity can act as a strong motivation for consumers to interact in online communities with other members of the groups as well as with the brand, thus, co-creating value. Accordingly, we have added curiosity, as a new section of the CCCV framework, within the subsection on customer motivation, acting as the *why* these customers engage in the co-creation process.

## Minglers - The Connected Consumers

Social media brand communities are not only composed of individuals with a durable interest in the consumption of products and services. On the contrary, “minglers” are consumers that primarily interact due to their strong social ties to the brand and its communities. The typical customer-owned resources used among minglers during co-creation of brand value are *creativity* and *connectedness*, where the former is demonstrated through the invested effort in creating online content, inspired by interactions with the brand and fellow community members. In Gymshark's communities, humoristic images, videos and texts that describe emblematic issues facing individuals in the gym or working out in general. For instance, one post where a father works out at home while watching his baby and even uses the baby as extra weight for certain exercises. The creativity consumers display in these posts help to inspire the community and create a sense of belonging, thus an important resource brought to the value creation process. Image 4 below, is a nice example of consumer creativity that highlights a commonly known issue with a humoristic approach, which is followed by reactions from consumers that the author of the post probably did not know anything about initially.

*Connectedness* is another description of how consumers create value in the Gymshark community. As illustrated in the example above, creativity and connectedness are occasionally intertwined since the original ideas generated from stimulation by the brand also seem to be produced with the intention of engaging others and socializing. Further, by sharing workout ideas and tips, consumers can connect with interested individuals through the use of the brand as a platform. “*Hey ladies and gents! If you're*

looking for some workout ideas, or even just willing to follow a starter page - go find @Be\*\*\*\*fitt on Instagram. I'd appreciate all the likes, comments, ideas and follows as I can. Any questions I'll also be glad to answer and help in any way”.

#### Image 4

Teaching my kids the importance of not skipping #legday with #legos - told them he was sad because he skipped leg day and only trained arms... Today I felt like I really taught them something as a dad 😂 •



If creativity and connectedness acts as the *how* this particular customer co-creates value, the *why* is not that clear. Passion and commitment in some form could arguably fit in the description of motivation but it is not necessarily towards the specific brand but perhaps passion for working out in general. The CCCV dimension devoted to consumers' motivation encompasses motivation to purposely co-create brand value while posts like the above, rather seem to be about social interaction focusing on a common interest, thereby making the brand an arena as opposed to a topic of discussion. A post that exemplifies this ambiguity regarding a consumer that indeed shows signs of passion after another member started the interaction follows below (image 5).

#### Image 5

4 am wake up, 6 am in the gym is my favorite. I get more done before noon than most people do in their entire day! No crowds 😎 AND...it takes about 6 hours + to ramp my metabolism down after anything cardio. Great way to start the day and inspiring to SO many younger people. I'm nearing 63.

The fact that the conversation occurs at Gymshark's community and not in a general workout community hints of the involved consumers' admiration of the brand but the common thread of the discussion is that it revolves around the activity of working out.

In the case of Hard Rock, minglers tend to discuss music and artists that have performed at the various venues as well as the brand culture with regards to values but also iconic buildings and locations. One member urged consumers to: *“Tune in to Hard Rock Hotels & Casinos Instagram this Sunday at 3pm for a 20 minute worldwide drumalong...”* a sign of *connectedness* through the brand. *Knowledge* is another clear resource of community participants, sharing their experiences of meals, staff service, accommodations but also discussing various Hard Rock locations with nostalgic elements. *“Every meal was delicious. You can choose from authentic Mexican, Italian, Asian or simple every day. Our morning routine had to involve a fresh omelette made by their chef at the egg station and a vanilla latte from their café. The cleanliness and friendly staff impressed us. Housekeepers are ninjas there”*, said one

customer of a Hard Rock Hotel, consequently delivering customer-to-customer support while providing the company with insights of customers' perception of value (Harmeling et al., 2017).

Image 6



Occasionally, the brand has succeeded in engaging a conversation among consumers, for instance when they posted a picture of their new guitar shaped hotel in the Seminole reservation in Hollywood Florida. The building was covered in red light to honor the late Charlie Watts of Rolling Stones. This resulted in consumers discussing both the mentioned artist but also the building itself while incorporating the brand into the mix, which indicates produced positive associations (see image 6). These consumers use the brand Hard Rock in their interactions concerning an artist and are thereby involved in the creation of its value and identity that is so closely linked with rock music and musicians. In similarity with the cases from Gymshark above, it is not necessarily their intention to do so but it is a byproduct of involving the brand into their shared interest. Passion and commitment are the plausible answers to why they engage, even if it concerns the activity (music), as displayed in the first example below, or the brand, as in the second example.

*“Tune in to Hard Rock Hotels & Casinos Instagram this Sunday at 3pm for a 20 minute worldwide drum-along with Drum Cafe USA! Beast and I are excited to be a part of this remote shoot and edit using footage from Drum Café’s musicians around the globe”.* (Hard Rock Hotels & Casinos Facebook community).

*“Love all, serve all! - Hard Rock Café. A special tribute video to Hard Rock Café, Kota Kinabalu Sabah”* (Hard Rock Hotels & Casinos Facebook community).

### Devotees - The Knowledgeable Consumers

As we have discussed before, social media gives people a chance to express themselves and their interests as well as connecting with like-minded people. In some cases, however, consumers engage with a community without having any actual social ties with the brands or the community, but rather due to their interest in the particular consumption activity. Kozinets (2002) described these groups of stakeholders as “devotees”. From our collected data we have identified a number of customers within brand communities, who’s engagement shows signs that they are part of the community only because of their interest in the product and they don’t have much social ties with the other members. For example, in one of the posts in a Hard Rock community, a customer posted: *“We are here now and I would highly recommend upgrading to rock royalty which includes many upgrades including a couples massage, good location of room and personal assistant! Our assistant has made all dinner reservations, secured beach chairs, covid tests and anything else we would need. It has been fantastic”* (see below image 9). From looking at the customer’s post here it is clear that the main thing that attracted her from her experience staying at Hard Rock hotels was based on the service she received, and it doesn’t necessarily have to do anything with the brand’s image or her familiarity with the brand community.



Moreover, this is her first post in the Hard Rock community, which indicates that she had not been extensively connected with the brand.

The customer-owned resource deployed in the case above resonates with *knowledge* even though this consumer is primarily informed and knowledgeable with regards to the service as opposed to the brand itself. Surprisingly though, one could argue that *connectedness* is forming here despite seemingly lack of strong social ties. What this could mean is that this is a customer that has primary interest in the service, which positive experience leads to a connection with other consumers and possibly future social ties to the brand. Knowledge and connectedness is also deployed by a consumer calling out for help: “Ladies!!! Help me out. Where are my girls at?! What are your favorite pieces from Gymshark? I'm looking for a new set for motivation, but the butt scrunch aint it for me. The girls that get it, get it and the girls that don't, don't”. Sure she is seeking knowledge from others but she is knowledgeable enough to identify Gymshark as the fitting brand for her needs. Thus, why she interacts can be explained by passion for the products and trust for the brand to deliver her motivation.

Image 7

My problem is I want [Gymshark](#) in every color and style 😭

👍 3

The customer from the image above (image 7) is another example of a devotee in GymShark’s community, after going through the profile we found out that the individual is a fitness enthusiast but not an active member in the GymShark brand community. Just like in our previous example she is also more interested in the product than GymShark offers. *How* value is created in this case is arguably connected to the *why*, meaning that the consumer is so passionate about the products that there is an urge to spread the word of its superiority.

The images below show examples of devotees for Hard Rock services. What we can see is that in similarity with the previous individuals, these consumers are passionate and knowledgeable of the services, and they are spreading this knowledge to the community. Moreover, a common theme between most of these customers is that they are the initiators of value creation, where the knowledge they pass on, helps create value in terms of the information that the other potential customers who view the post receive. Passion constitutes the main motivation for devotees participation in the value creation processes in Hard Rock communities, but there are also clear signs of trustworthiness for the brand. These consumers trust Hard Rock to deliver experiences that resonate with their desires and a combination of these aspects motivates them to interact with the community despite lacking strong social ties.

Image 8

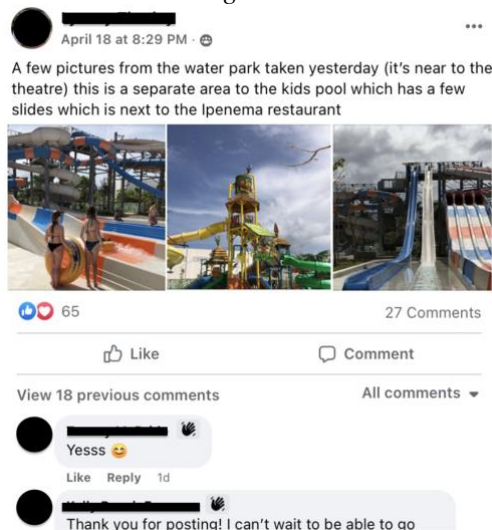
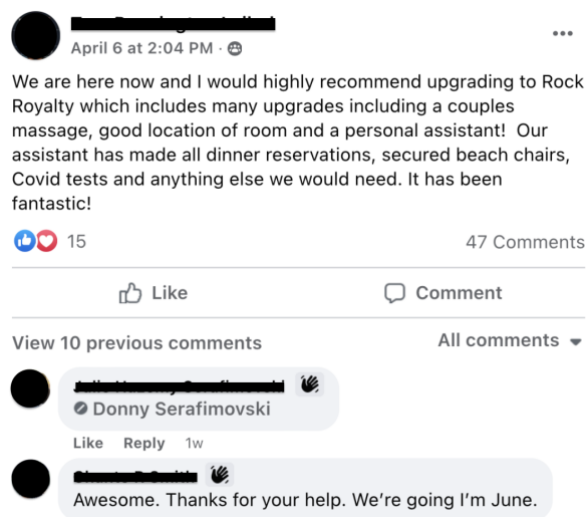


Image 9



## Insiders - The Passionate Consumers

As a reminder, Kozinets (2002) refers to insiders as those customers that have strong ties to the online group and to the consumption activity, and along with devotees, insiders represent one of the most important data sources. Regarding the Customer-Owned-Resources in Gymshark, it can be said that insiders are usually very *knowledgeable* about the brand, in terms of quality of the items, sizes, drops, events, i.a., and they love to be recognized by other enthusiasts of the brand, such is the case of Janeth, who decided to share her experience with her online community, where she describes how one day she was waiting to cross the street and heard a family behind her talking about her jumper and how nice it looked, to which she heard the youngest daughter respond “*yes! It's Gymshark - have you never heard of them? They are very well known. Their leggings are amazing*”, a happening that made her very proud that she had to share it and rewarding enough to strengthen her relationship with the brand. Insiders also show a level of *creativity*, for instance, when Emily received her Gymshark purchase, she expressed her excitement with a post that said “*ITS HEREEE AHHH, Review coming this weekend*”, meaning that her enthusiasm for the new items inspired her to create content reviewing the brand, information that is very valuable for other customers and for the brand itself. This in turn, opened an opportunity for value co-creation, with the brand, in this case, acting as value facilitator (Grönroos & Voima, 2012) and the customer as value creator (Grönroos, 2011), where the value is information (reviews in this case). Furthermore, we can state that insiders have a high level of *connectedness* among other customers on the online communities, for instance image 10 (below) demonstrates a good example of how brand co-creation with customers can occur. Gymshark realized that it could meet the needs of a specific customer group by offering an alternative designed only for them, resulting in greater connectivity between customers in the community, and by demonstrating this inclusion, it also developed customers' trust. In short, it can be said that among the insiders on Gymshark, the dimensions of knowledge, creativity and connectedness can explain *how* insiders contribute to the value co-creation process.

Image 10



Image 11



In terms to the customer motivation section on the CCCV framework, we observed that insiders in Gymshark often *trust* that the brand will address their concerns honestly, as well as they rely on the brand when they have a problem (Merz et al., 2018), for instance, in a post by Camila, she said “*when your gymshark wear makes you work just as hard*” while performing a routine with high difficulty for which a lot of experience is required. This demonstrates *trustworthiness* towards the brand, meaning that, no matter how hard the training, the set will withstand it (i.e., it will not break or be uncomfortable). A second example of this dimension is shown above in image 11 where it is clear that Emily is confident that the brand will not only satisfy her needs, but also to make her better-off, in this case, her purchase served to make her feel fulfilled and happy, during difficult times. Making it a case of value creation (Grönroos & Voima, 2012). We also observed that insiders are keen to be *committed* to making the brand a success., for example, Emily wrote, “*let me tell you that when I saw Lucy in the yellow, I was SOOLLDD and I sent it to almost everyone I know on insta*”, displaying the level of commitment she feels in advertising the products she loves from the brand she admires. Last but not least, insiders possess extremely positive feelings towards the brand, i.e., *passion*, (Merz et al., 2018), for instance Emily, —the same enthusiastic customer—, posted “*Who accepted a Night Shift to shop the Gymshark drop this week? YOU ARE RIGHT ITS MEEE*”, proving that she is willing to accommodate her daily routine and responsibilities, such as her work, around the brand’s limited release of merchandise

announcements. Simply put, trustworthiness, commitment and passion can function as the *why* insiders engage in the value co-creation process.

Concerning a service, Hard Rock serves as example, and as expected, insiders tend to have a high degree of *knowledge* about the brand and they tend to express in detail their personal experiences and knowledge of the various services and activities offered by the brand, helping companies improve the quality and relevance of shared content (Merz et al., 2018). Our data collection included both positive and negative reviews about the service, providing valuable information to firms about their offerings as well as customers' wants and needs, which helps companies to optimize their services, an example of this is shown below in Image 12, with an insider showing his deep knowledge about the brand. Furthermore, in distinction to gymshark, our data collection revealed that in regards of a service, insiders possess *skills* of persuasion over other customers (Merz et al. 2018), this can be illustrated by Nadia, when she posted a photo of the hotel where she stayed, with the description, “*One of the beautifullest Hard Rock Hotels I have been too. I really LOVE the mix of OLD, new and pimped up with the spirit of Hard Rock...*”, words that can easily encourage other guests to visit such a hotel, thus creating value among the community. In service, insiders also showed *creativity*, for example, Lidia turned her visit and personal experience into creative content, in which she shares her impressions while highlighting key features to her, she wrote: “*My two-night stay at the Hard Rock Hotel at Universal Orlando Resort is NOW UP on my YouTube channel! ...Of course I share some fun facts and some of Hard Rock's cool rock n roll memorabilia that they're famous for!*”, delivering free creative marketing communication content. As with products, our Hard Rock data collection revealed that insiders take pride in belonging to a community, with a high degree of *connectedness* with other customers in online groups, demonstrating that it is common for enthusiastic and brand-savvy customers, with both positive and negative experiences, to interact frequently in communities. A common theme among Hard Rock insiders was nostalgia, for instance, Marco wrote “*Memories from Hard Rock Hotels & Casinos*” along with a photo of the site, indicating that nostalgia plays an important role among customers in initiating and engaging in conversation, while at the same time increasing positive feelings towards the brand. Concisely, Hard Rock insiders possess knowledge, skill, creativity and connectedness, the four dimensions of the customer-owned-resources from the CCCV scale, as well as contributing to our understanding of *how* consumers contribute during brand value co-creation on social media.

Image 12

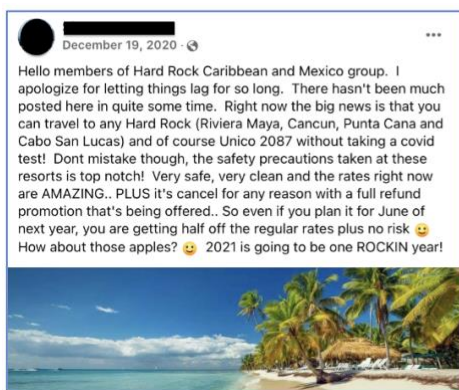


Image 13



Image 14



In relation to the "why" of our research question, our data reveal that Hard Rock insiders co-create through commitment and passion. Concerning *commitment*, image 13 shows a knowledgeable and enthusiastic insider committed to make the brand a success, with her strong emotions as the driving force, and as mentioned in theory, committed stakeholders help firms co-create brand value, since they take committed roles in developing new products co-creatively with firm, and participate more actively in brand communities, hence, helping to build a loyal following and positive brand judgments (Merz, et al., 2018). Referring to *passion*, Hard Rock insiders exhibit extremely positive feelings towards the brand, for example in image 14 John tweeted "*living the Hard Rock experience from home*" with a photo



that represents how proud they are to be part of the community, even when they are not physically at the resort, reflecting enthusiasm and love for the brand.

### Protestors - The Disappointed Consumers

A common theme in both brands' social media communities that spans across all dimensions of customers' resources and motivations, as well as level of involvement, is customer dissatisfaction. As discussed in the theoretical section, brand value can be created through customer experiences (Chapman & Dilmeri, 2022), leaving the consumer better off after the interaction (Grönroos & Voima, 2012; Vargo & Lusch, 2008). Several instances during this study did however illustrate dissatisfied consumers that expressed their angst. Posts about received products from Gymshark that disappoint quality wise or shipments that vastly exceed expected delivery times is a recurring phenomenon. Similarly, Hard Rock customers share experiences in restaurants and hotels where services have not managed to live up to the preconceived expectations. Furthermore, customers and potential customers post comments on the perceived inability of the brand's work with regard to sustainability issues.

Image 15



Image 16



Image 17

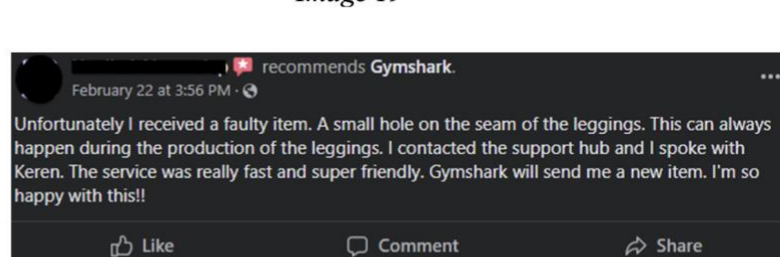


How the brand has responded to complaints also seems to play a crucial part since multiple customers state their problems followed by discontent over how customer service staff handled the issue. Replies that acknowledge the problem with promises of betterment are seemingly effective in recovery of the situation while ignored customer complaints often result in statements that the individual in question will avoid the brand in the future.

Image 18



Image 19



The motivation for engaging in social media in these cases is clearly dissatisfaction, customers want to share their negative experiences with other consumers thereby using connections and knowledge to possibly achieve some kind of revenge on the company or simply helping others to avoid the same dissatisfaction. It could also be a last desperate attempt to actually connect with the brand in the cases

where staff has ignored or otherwise failed to respond to email and telephone. As exemplified in the two posts above, there is a striking difference in tone between the customer who feels noticed and helped by customer service and those whose issues have not been addressed. One could argue that this phenomenon is not at all co-creation of brand value but rather co-destruction. On the other hand, these consumers use their skills and knowledge about the products as well as what could be expected from them to highlight deficiencies that in turn help the brand with improving their products and, thus, increase the likelihood of more positive customer experiences in the future.

## Concluding Discussion

The purpose of this study was to *provide an increased understanding of the co-creation of brand value processes on social media from a consumer perspective*, by providing rich, descriptive empirical data on *how* and *why* consumers engage. First off, our data suggest that the level of involvement influences which resources consumers deploy and what their motivations are. To illustrate this distinction, we used Kozinets (1999) proposed categories of consumers.

*Tourists* are those that have no strong social ties to the community or deep interest in the activity (Kozinets, 2002). They tend to use social media brand communities to ask questions about products or services and thereby, to some degree use their connectedness (Merz et al., 2018) to gain knowledge and, in that process, initiate a value co-creation process by starting a public discussion. In many instances consumers' questions were answered by other consumers, an example of influence over the brand without interaction as discussed by Sarasvou et al. (2022). The commonality of consumers' questions as initiation of co-creation, calls attention to the need of expanding the CCCV framework with the customer-motivation *curiosity*. In unison with previous research (Biraghi & Gambetti, 2017; Swaminathan et al., 2020), this suggests that consumers and other stakeholders have gained more control over the brands identity and values through the public discussions that span across the quality and features of products and services, to managers actions. Further, it illustrates how value emerges in-use after being experienced by the consumer as opposed to a pre-packaged value decided by the manager (Grönroos, 2006; Heinonen et al., 2010).

*Minglers* have strong social ties to the brand and its community but no convincing interest in the consumption activity (Kozinets, 2002). *How* they co-create value is mainly about creativity and connectedness, sharing often humorous content where the brand is involved, which helps to paint a positive picture of the brand that spreads across other potential customers connected with the initiator. The actual products tend to play a smaller part in posts by these consumers who focus on the main activity, for instance, in the case of Gymshark, the passion displayed when posting creative content, circles around the activity of working out and its daily challenges. Consumers recognize themselves in these situations, interacting with emojis and discussions, all while the brand follows in the background and probably gains positive associations in the minds of involved individuals. Similarly in the case of Hard Rock, minglers use their connectedness to create value by sharing knowledge and experiences from staying at hotels or visiting café's. The passion that motivates these interactions is indeed connected to the brand but even more so, to certain of its locations. These observations are in line with previous research (Hollebeek, 2011; Schiavone et al., 2014; Sarasvou et al., 2022) arguing that the actual social interactions are valuable for certain consumers who find it worth investing their own resources to create entertaining and innovating content, constituting a pool of possibilities for the brand capable of harnessing it correctly. Moreover, our results show *nostalgia* emerging as an important answer to why some of these consumers initiate and engage in social interactions.

*Devotees* are those customers that have strong consumption interests but few attachments to the online group (Kozinets, 2002). In most cases, such clients are associated with large data sources, but in the communities examined for this research, devotees were not as prevalent. Our findings mainly indicate that devotees tend to co-create value through knowledge and connectedness in both a product and a service brand, and assists in answering the question *how* they co-create value. Hence, it can be said that devotees' deep awareness and expertise about the brand creates connections with other members of the communities, despite the fact that they are not as invested in creating them. One aspect to note is that



these connections are created less frequently in comparison to customers who by nature tend to have strong social ties, i.e., minglers or insiders. Moreover, these customers demonstrated a high degree of passion and trust in the brands, thereby responding to the question of *why* they interact in this value co-creation process. The trust devotees establish throughout their brand product and service experience is largely determined by the extremely positive feelings they have towards both the brand product and the brand's service. In other words, devotees closely link their feelings of passion and trust on the brands to co-create value.

*Insiders* have strong ties to the online group and to the consumption activity and tend to be long-standing and frequently referenced members (Kozinets, 2002). Considering that they are the leading engagers in online communities as well as in consumer affairs, this indicates that these individuals are the most active players in the creation and co-creation of value. The *how* can be answered by the four dimensions knowledge, skill, creativity and connectivity, which, according to our data collected, the ability to persuade other customers, was very scarce in the Gymshark communities, and mostly present in the Hard Rock communities, meaning that the consumer's co-creation value through skills differs between products and services. Nevertheless, similarities regarding knowledge, creativity and connectedness were found in both product and service brands. Insiders showed to have deep interest in the brand and therefore the knowledge they have tend to be at a fairly high level; as well as their creativity to generate valuable content for the brand and the strong connections they create in these communities. Furthermore, our findings indicate that the reason *why* insiders co-create is closely linked to trustworthiness, commitment and passion; something that was expected during the study, however, our results indicate that the degree of trust that customers have in a brand and its promises is often more difficult to build in a service brand than in a product brand. Moreover, outside of the CCCV framework, our findings indicate that *nostalgia* plays an important role for consumers' motivation to co-create value in the Hard Rock online communities. In brand literature nostalgia is found to be an important element in the development of passion for the brand (Koetz & Tankersley, 2016), however this analysis indicate that this phenomenon is present in Hard Rock and not in Gymshark, suggesting that a service brand differs from a product brand in terms of customers nostalgia. This in turn, evidence differences between customers co-creation value between product and service brands, a strong reason for introducing two scales of customers value co-creation, one representing product brands and the other service brands (see table 1 below).

### *Protestors*

It was apparent quite early during the data collection phase that a new customer category was necessary due to the high number of posts containing dissatisfied customers. Kozinets (2002) acknowledged that the proposed categories were novel and since that article was published before Facebook and other social media platforms primarily used today, it is not surprising that additional categories emerge. Thus, emphasizing the need for a new customer category, which we refer to as "Protestors". In the early stages of the analysis, this phenomenon seemed to be more of a transition from one customer category to another, for example, dissatisfied or angry Insiders seemed to become Tourists, however, we soon recognized that this meant something beyond that. Customers that endured a negative and overwhelming experience with a brand they feel passionate about, can create a sense of emptiness in their lives (Merunka & Valette-Florence, 2013), while also being left "worse off" (Grönroos & Voima, 2012), such as upset or disappointed, a meaningful theme in our database, that was recognized as a new category of customers. *Protestors* engage because of their negative experiences of products or services, explaining that they expected high quality goods, attentive customer service or a brand that lives up to their culture and values. Sarasvou et al. (2022) address these interactions and explain that negative content can be created with the intention of harming the brand, but it could also work as feedback for improvements, which thereby can be viewed as an aspect of value co-creation even if at first hand, the phenomenon seems destructive. The motivational dimensions of the CCCV framework suggests that the consumers are intentionally creating value or are passionate about and trust the brand. Our study, however, shows that consumer motivation sometimes emerges strictly from the product or the activity it is used for, and perhaps even more so, from the service itself in the case of Hard Rock. A multitude of posts are clearly initiated with curiosity as the main motivator and as discussed above, protestors

engage influenced by dissatisfaction, a notion that argues for an expansion of dimensions regarding customer motivations.

Overall, table 1 shown below, summarizes our findings indicating that *knowledge* and *connectedness* are key attributes among the four customer categories (tourists, minglers, devotees and insiders) to address “how” do consumers contribute during brand value co-creation on social media. As Merz et al. (2018) mentions, customers' first-hand experience with the brand and knowledge of their own needs makes them valuable sources of brand knowledge, which helps companies improve the quality and relevance of shared content, that in turn helps firms with marketing communications, creation of new product, brand developments and customer-to-customer support. Consequently, these knowledgeable customers tend to interact either passively or actively in the online communities where they are members, meaning that brand knowledge triggers customers to initiate meaningful conversations online, which eventually creates connections. These connections are essential to value co-creation, since they allow companies to access influential individuals or unique subgroups that companies would otherwise not be able to reach (Merz et al., 2018). Furthermore, our findings highlighted *passion* as another key attribute that spanned across the four customer categories (tourists, minglers, devotees and insiders), that contributed to better understand “why” consumers engage in the brand value co-creation on social media. In brand literature, brand passion has been in the spotlight of much research, as it equals the extremely positive feelings that a customer has regarding the brand, such as admiration, love (Merz et al., 2018), craving, desiring, wanting and longing to use a brand (Hemsley-Brown & Alnawas, 2016), characteristics that were present in the members of the communities observed. Our analysis confirms that passion is at the heart of customers' motivation for why they engage in the co-creation of brand value on social media.

<i>Gymshark</i>				<i>Hard Rock</i>			
<i>TOURISTS</i>							
<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why	<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why
<i>Connectedness</i>		<b><i>Curiosity (new)</i></b>		<i>Connectedness</i>		<b><i>Curiosity (new)</i></b>	
<i>MINGLERS</i>							
<i>Creativity</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why	<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why
<i>Connectedness</i>		<i>Commitment</i>		<i>Connectedness</i>		<i>Commitment</i>	
						<b><i>Nostalgia (new)</i></b>	
<i>DEVOTEES</i>							
<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why	<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why
<i>Connectedness</i>		<i>Trustworthiness</i>		<i>Connectedness</i>		<i>Trustworthiness</i>	
<i>INSIDERS</i>							
<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why	<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why
<i>Creativity</i>		<i>Trustworthiness</i>		<i>Skills</i>		<i>Commitment</i>	
<i>Connectedness</i>		<i>Commitment</i>		<i>Creativity</i>		<b><i>Nostalgia (new)</i></b>	
				<i>Connectedness</i>			
<b><i>PROTESTORS (NEW)</i></b>							
<i>Knowledge</i>	→ How	<b><i>Dissatisfaction</i></b>	→ Why	<i>Knowledge</i>	→ How	<b><i>Dissatisfaction</i></b>	→ Why
<i>Connectedness</i>				<i>Connectedness</i>			

Table 1. Summary of how and why customers co-create value with brands on social media

In essence, regarding the new dimensions, we found that customer dissatisfaction can either inspire companies to enhance and improve their products and services, or it can also motivate protestors to engage in the co-destruction of brand value. Respecting curiosity and nostalgia, they were found to be key new incentives for customers to co-create value. Moreover, customers' feelings of passion towards the brand are closely related to their knowledge about the brand, and the connections created with other members of the online community, however, it has to be considered that these extreme feelings can easily turn off and transform into dissatisfaction, if brands disappoint or fail to satisfy the customers' wants and needs. Nevertheless, the dimensions of skill and creativity (responding the how) as well as trustworthiness and commitment (responding the why) demonstrated to also play a significant role in customers co-creation value. In short, it is clear that customers' own resources are closely interrelated with their motivations to co-create or co-destruct value with brands.

## Theoretical Contributions

This study contributes by addressing gaps in the literature on how and why consumers engage in the co-creation of brand value in online communities through social media and does so by focusing on two specific brands that represent one from each category in the distinction between product brands and service brands. Building on a comprehensive review of the service literature's view of value and co-creation of value as well as the branding literature's conceptualizations, this paper qualitatively discusses the daily activities in social media that are part of the value co-creation process, thereby adding empirical knowledge that bring nuances to the existing research. Table 1 summarizes the typical *how* and *why* consumers engage in co-creation of brand value with consideration of involvement. The findings of this study argue for the addition of curiosity, nostalgia and dissatisfaction as motivators to the CCCV framework (Merz et al., 2018), as well as the customer category of protestors in addition to the categories proposed by Kozinets (2002). The category *protestors* is the result of Merz et al.'s (2018) suggestions for more in-depth examination on additional consequences, such as *satisfaction*, whereupon closer investigation of this potential new dimension, we discovered instead that *customer dissatisfaction* was so significant that it was necessary to address it, by creating this new customer category, and therefore, contributing to this theoretical gap in the literature. Recognizing the probable circumstance of certain customer-owned resources and motivations that are exclusively associated with the particular brands and industries of this study, we propose a model (Model 1) inspired by table 1 that can act as a foundation for a more general illustration of the processes.

Model 1, shown below, represents a more general overview of how and why value is co-created when consumers interact with different companies through social media in different online communities. The model reveals the dimensions that were most strongly present in the different customer categories, that is, *knowledge and connectedness*, which respond how consumers contribute during brand value co-creation on social media, and *passion* which answers why consumers engage in the co-creation of brand value on social media. Furthermore, our results showed that *curiosity* is a strong motivator among tourists, as well as dissatisfaction for the new customer category *Protestors*, being the reason for their addition to model 1. Finally, the dimension *nostalgia* was not included in the model for the reason that it cannot be generalized as a motivator to co-create value on all brand services, for instance, we assume that nostalgia is not as strong of a motivator for value co-creation in a beauty salon service or a startup as it is in a hotel or restaurant service with a long famous history. Following up on the contributions of the study, the idea of value-in-use is discussed in the service literature where scholars argue for value as a phenomenon emerging in the moment of usage (Grönroos, 2006; Heinonen et al., 2010). Often, this is exemplified through traditional service businesses such as restaurants and hotels, in this study we expand on this concept by discussing how value-in-use takes on new meaning in social media. Not only is value emerging when the consumer checks in and stays at the hotel, but the practice of sharing the experience with friends and other consumers through online communities on social media, exposes additional layers of the value creation process.

<i>Product</i>		<i>Service</i>					
<i>TOURISTS</i>							
<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why	<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why
<i>Connectedness</i>		<b><i>Curiosity (new)</i></b>		<i>Connectedness</i>		<b><i>Curiosity (new)</i></b>	
<i>MINGLERS</i>							
<i>Connectedness</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why	<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why
				<i>Connectedness</i>			
<i>DEVOTEES</i>							
<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why	<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why
<i>Connectedness</i>				<i>Connectedness</i>			
<i>INSIDERS</i>							
<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why	<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<i>Passion</i>	→Why
<i>Connectedness</i>				<i>Connectedness</i>			
<b><i>PROTESTORS (NEW)</i></b>							
<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<b><i>Dissatisfaction</i></b>	→Why	<i>Knowledge</i>	→How	<b><i>Dissatisfaction</i></b>	→Why
<i>Connectedness</i>				<i>Connectedness</i>			

Model 1. A general overview of how and why customers co-create value with brands on social media, divided by product and service.

## Managerial implications

This paper continues to highlight the shift of power dynamics in favor of the consumer and help managers to better understand the tools and motivations behind consumers' interaction in the co-creation processes. The increased understanding of value-in-use with regards to the sharing of experiences in social media could prove helpful in both product development and service design. Brands that are aware of the importance for many consumers to produce appealing content, can access new potential customers through the networks of existing customers by making the experience a bit more appealing to share. Further, our discussion on dissatisfied customers and how their attitude towards the brand were greatly affected depending on whether a representative of the brand responded or not, highlighted the need for taking customer service seriously in the age of social media. Not only is there a clear necessity to answer the consumer, but also to make them feel seen and heard by taking some kind of action that infuses a sense of improvement after the complaint. Conclusively, by segmenting consumers based on their interaction, marketing managers get a better understanding of consumers' needs and can act with better precision while interacting in social media communities.

## Limitations and Future Research

First, this study is limited by its focus on only two cases in certain industries, namely gym clothing, restaurants, hotels and casinos. Additionally, we have chosen to study two specific brands and to take an inactive approach, meaning that we ourselves do not engage in the conversations but merely observe and reflect on the content that consumers generate. Another evident limitation of this research is the scope and the inherent limits of the studied online communities, although this research studied communities with very active and dynamic members that provided rich data, we cannot disregard that other communities and groups could offer valuable data and additional findings.

We suggest that future research use netnography to study other brands and industries to provide additional insights on how and why consumers engage in co-creation of brand value on social media. Additionally, more qualitative and quantitative research is needed to better understand *Protestors* and

their contribution to brand value creation. Further, the CCCV framework assumes that consumers' motivations stem from an intention of creating value for the brand while the empirical material suggests that this is not always the case. From studying Gymshark, we discovered that *curiosity* plays an important role in driving the consumers to participate in the brand value co-creation, and in the case of Hard Rock, we identified *nostalgia* as an important motivation for consumers to participate, which is why we recommend that future studies should further examine these themes. In particular, this analysis confirms that nostalgia is found to be an important element in the development of passion for the brand (Koetz & Tankersley, 2016), however, this phenomenon was only present in Hard Rock and not in Gymshark, suggesting that a service brand differs from a product brand in terms of customer nostalgia. Furthermore, our analysis showed that nostalgia is a strong motivator for customers to co-create value with brand services, however we believe that the level of significance differs depending on the industry, therefore we suggest that further research should investigate this dimension more thoroughly on different brand services.

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## Appendix

### Framework for studying brand value co-creation:

Factors	Dimensions	Definitions
Customer-owned resources	Knowledge	The extent to which the stakeholder is informed and experienced with a brand
	Skill	The extent to which stakeholders are stimulated by the brand in terms of their capabilities
	Creativity	The extent to which the stakeholder is stimulated by the brand in terms of their use of imagination and development of original ideas
	Connectedness	The extent to which the stakeholder is associated, bonded, or linked with others because of the brand
Customer motivation	Passion	The extent to which the stakeholder has extremely positive feelings toward the brand
	Trustworthiness	The extent to which the stakeholder is confident about the brand
	Commitment	The extent to which the stakeholder is willing to work for the brand and its success

**Table 2:** The CCCV framework: Dimensions and definitions (Merz et al., 2018)



Customer categories	Description
<i>Tourists</i>	They lack strong social ties and deep interest in the activity (they often post casual questions).
<i>Minglers</i>	They have strong social ties but minimal interest in the consumption activity.
<i>Devotees</i>	They have strong consumption interests but few attachments to the online group.
<i>Insiders</i>	They have strong ties to the online group and to the consumption activity and tend to be long-standing and frequently referenced members.

**Table 3:** *Customer categories (Kozinets, 1999; 2002)*