

Contested Brands
How Antagonistic Market Actors Disrupt Brand Meanings

DISSERTATION
of the University of St.Gallen,
School of Management,
Economics, Law, Social Sciences
and International Affairs
to obtain the title of
Doctor of Philosophy in Management

submitted by

Daniel Dietrich

from
Germany

Approved on the application of

Prof. Ernst Mohr, Ph.D.
and
Prof. Dr. Torsten Tomczak

Dissertation no. 4942
Difo-Druck GmbH, Untersiemaun 2020

The University of St.Gallen, School of Management, Economics, Law, Social Sciences and International Affairs hereby consents to the printing of the present dissertation, without hereby expressing any opinion on the views herein expressed.

St.Gallen, October 25, 2019

The President:

Prof. Dr. Thomas Bieger

*To my grandfather,
Rudolf Dietrich.
Quidquid agis, prudenter agas et respice finem.*

Acknowledgments

Over the last three years, my dissertation journey has been full of intellectual challenges and enlightening experiences. Thanks to the great support and encouragement of many people, I was able to find my way and grow with the emerging tasks, both personally and academically. Particularly, I would like to acknowledge the following persons for their vital contribution to the present fruits of my scientific work:

First of all, I am deeply grateful to my supervisor Prof. Ernst Mohr, Ph.D. for his patient guidance, curious openness, and enriching thoughts. Long and profound debates with him formed the core of my research endeavour. Also, I would like to express my great appreciation to Prof. Dr. Torsten Tomczak, my co-supervisor, for his superb support, enthusiastic visions, and constructive recommendations on my research project. Both of them have certainly left a lasting mark on me and my future professional career.

I further wish to thank various persons for their valuable involvement: notably, all the participants of my research studies, the members of the Brand Excellence Circle, and my dear colleagues at the Institute for Customer Insight who unconditionally lend me their open ears and provided assist and advice whenever necessary.

My very special thanks go to Felicia, a unique and exceptional woman in my life – she brought beauty and inspiration to everything I did.

Finally, I would like to announce my deepest gratitude to both my friends and family, especially to my mother Gabriele, my father Bernhard, and my sister Vanessa. Without their emotional backing and unrelenting trust this work would not have been possible.

St. Gallen, 2019

Daniel Dietrich

Abstract

Who truly owns a brand? Conventional marketing practice commonly designates companies as legal brand owners with the potential to determine a brand's meaning exclusively. However, market reality demonstrates that consumers are increasingly making use of their technologically-mediated capability of appropriating brands for idiosyncratic purposes. These consumer-driven brand utilisations often trigger brand meaning disruptions outside of marketers' intention and control. Hence, the focal brand becomes subject to clashing interests of antagonistic market actors and, thus, contested. This can entail momentous and detrimental impacts for a brand's meaning and value. Yet, existing branding literature offers neither sufficient theoretical depth to explain such market dynamics thoroughly, nor practical advice on how to handle them purposefully. Therefore, the present research profoundly investigates the socio-cultural phenomenon of contested brands. More precisely, the research objective was to develop a fundamental theoretical understanding of how and why contingencies of contested brands emerge, and what marketers can do to countervail the spread of undesired brand meanings. For this purpose, three distinct studies were conducted by means of a mixed method research approach. Firstly, a conceptual analysis revealed both an overarching conceptualisation and an integrated typology of contested brands. Secondly, a qualitative exploration – enabled by a practice-theoretical research lens – resulted in a comprehensive process model of brand meaning contestations, which explains the interplay of antecedents, market practices, and outcomes of contested brand incidents. Thirdly, by combining qualitative expert insights with quantitative verifications, a set of effective brand protection measures was developed. These measures support marketers in their forecasting, prevention, and counteraction of contested brands. In sum, the research at hand emphasises that brand meanings are no longer under exclusive control of legal brand owners but alter continuously due to contestation practices by antagonistic market actors. This postmodern paradigm of contested brands facilitates both a seminal understanding and a purposeful handling of brands embedded in today's volatile, multilateral, and heterogeneous market structures.

Keywords: contested brands; consumer behaviour; brand meaning; practice theory; mixed method design; brand management

Zusammenfassung

Wem gehört eine Marke tatsächlich? Die herkömmliche Marketingpraxis betrachtet Unternehmen als rechtmäßige Markeninhaber und spricht ihnen somit das Potential zu, die Bedeutung einer Marke exklusiv zu bestimmen. Die Marktrealität zeigt jedoch, dass Konsumenten zunehmend ihre technologiegestützte Fähigkeit nutzen, um Marken für ihre eigenen Zwecke zu instrumentalisieren. Solche Markennutzungen lösen häufig eine von Markenverantwortlichen unbeabsichtigte und unkontrollierbare Disruption der Markenbedeutung aus. Dies kann erhebliche und nachteilige Auswirkungen auf die Wahrnehmung und den Wert einer Marke haben. Bislang bietet die Forschungsliteratur zur Markenführung jedoch weder eine ausreichende theoretische Tiefe, um derartige Marktdynamiken gründlich zu erklären, noch praxisorientierte Ratschläge, wie mit diesen sinnvoll umzugehen ist. Daher untersucht die vorliegende Forschungsarbeit das soziokulturelle Phänomen umkämpfter Marken, um ein fundiertes theoretisches Verständnis zu entwickeln, wie und warum diese entstehen und was Unternehmen tun können, um der Verbreitung unerwünschter Markenbedeutungen entgegenzuwirken. Zu diesem Zweck wurden drei wissenschaftliche Studien unter Kombination verschiedener Forschungsmethoden durchgeführt. Zunächst wurden durch eine konzeptionelle Analyse eine umfassende Definition und Typologie umkämpfter Marken entwickelt. Anschließend führte eine qualitative Untersuchung mittels eines praxistheoretischen Ansatzes zu einem detaillierten Prozessmodell der Umkämpfung von Marken, welches das Zusammenspiel von Auslösern, Marktpraktiken und Auswirkungen umkämpfter Marken erläutert. Abschließend wurde durch eine Kombination aus qualitativem Expertenwissen und quantitativer Verifikation ein Maßnahmenkatalog zum effektiven Schutz von Marken erarbeitet. Diese Maßnahmen sollen Markenverantwortliche darin unterstützen, der Umkämpfung von Marken vorzubeugen, diese frühzeitig zu erkennen und bei Eintritt entgegenzuwirken. Zusammenfassend zeigt die vorliegende Arbeit, dass Markenbedeutungen heutzutage nicht mehr ausschließlich von ihren rechtlichen Eigentümern kontrolliert werden, sondern sich aufgrund ihrer Umkämpfung durch antagonistische Marktakteure kontinuierlich verändern. Dieses postmoderne Paradigma umkämpfter Marken ermöglicht ein zukunftsweisendes Verständnis sowie einen zweckmäßigen Umgang mit der Integration von Marken in die volatilen, multilateralen und heterogenen Strukturen heutiger Märkte.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	V
Table of Contents.....	VII
List of Figures.....	X
List of Tables	XI
List of Appendices	XII
List of Abbreviations	XIII
1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Preface.....	1
1.2 Research Objective and Questions.....	4
1.3 Structure of the Thesis	6
2 Theoretical Foundations	7
2.1 Principles of Brand Meaning	7
2.1.1 Brand Meaning Conceptualisation	7
2.1.2 Brand Meaning Creation	11
2.1.2.1 Conventional Brand Management.....	11
2.1.2.2 Consumer (Co-)Creation	14
2.1.2.3 Cultural Branding.....	18
2.1.3 Brand Meaning Disruption	20
2.1.3.1 Brand Management Misconduct	20
2.1.3.2 Consumer Resistance and Brand Sabotage	23
2.1.3.3 Co-Optation.....	27
2.1.4 Brand Meaning Contestation	30
2.2 Signs and their Significance.....	36
2.2.1 Semiotics in Consumer Research	36
2.2.2 Reader-Response Theory.....	38

2.2.3	The Transfer of Meaning	41
2.3	Social Psychological and Sociological Principles	43
2.3.1	Social Identity Approach	43
2.3.2	Cognitive Process Systems	45
2.3.3	Self-Brand Connection and Reference Groups	46
2.4	Practice Theory	49
2.5	Excursus: Who owns a brand?	53
3	Empirical Research and Results	57
3.1	Research Paradigm, Approach, and Methodology.....	57
3.2	Explorative Pre-Study	60
3.3	Study 1: Concept and Typology of Contested Brands.....	63
3.3.1	Objectives and Design	63
3.3.1.1	Essentially Contested Concepts	63
3.3.1.2	Scientific Typology	64
3.3.1.3	Multi-Case Study Approach.....	66
3.3.2	Preliminary Notion of Contested Brands.....	67
3.3.3	Data Collection and Analysis	69
3.3.3.1	Theoretical Cross-Analysis	69
3.3.3.2	Contested Brands Multi-Case Analysis.....	71
3.3.4	Results: Concept and Typology of Contested Brands	73
3.3.4.1	Conceptualisation of Contested Brands	73
3.3.4.2	Contested Brands Typology	76
3.3.4.3	Typology Application and Case Clustering	79
3.4	Study 2: Process Model of Brand Meaning Contestation.....	85
3.4.1	Objectives and Design	85
3.4.2	Data Collection and Analysis	86
3.4.2.1	In-Depth Consumer Interviews	88

3.4.2.2	Focus Groups.....	89
3.4.2.3	Netnography	91
3.4.3	Results: Process Model of Brand Meaning Contestation	92
3.4.3.1	Antecedents of Brand Meaning Contestation.....	94
3.4.3.2	Brand Meaning Contestation Practices	98
3.4.3.3	Outcomes of Brand Meaning Contestation	106
3.5	Study 3: Brand Protection Measures.....	109
3.5.1	Objectives and Design	109
3.5.2	Data Collection and Analysis	110
3.5.2.1	Expert Interviews	110
3.5.2.2	Quantitative Follow-Up Investigation.....	112
3.5.3	Results: Brand Protection Measures.....	114
3.5.3.1	Forecasting	115
3.5.3.2	Prevention.....	118
3.5.3.3	Counteractions.....	121
4	General Discussion	127
4.1	Consolidated Research Findings.....	127
4.2	Theoretical Contributions	130
4.3	Practical Implications.....	133
4.4	Limitations	135
4.5	Future Research Opportunities.....	137
5	Conclusion	138
	References.....	140
	Appendices.....	166
	Curriculum Vitae	208

List of Figures

Figure 1: Structure of the Thesis.....	6
Figure 2: Multilayer Model of Meanings	8
Figure 3: Conventional Brand Functions.....	12
Figure 4: Brand Co-Creation Space.....	17
Figure 5: Brand Meaning Co-Optation Cycle.....	28
Figure 6: Conceptual Frame of Contested Brands.....	31
Figure 7: Examples of Doppelgänger Brand Images.....	34
Figure 8: Brand Meaning Negotiation Framework.....	35
Figure 9: De Saussure's Dyadic Concept of a Sign	36
Figure 10: Peirce's Triadic Semiosis.....	37
Figure 11: Movement of Meaning	41
Figure 12: Models of Influence	42
Figure 13: Typology of Goods.....	54
Figure 14: Sequential Mixed Method Research Approach.....	57
Figure 15: The Research Onion.....	59
Figure 16: Preliminary Contested Brands Framework	67
Figure 17: Degree of Signifier Control.....	68
Figure 18: Typology of Contested Brands.....	78
Figure 19: Application of the Contested Brands Typology.....	80
Figure 20: K-Means Clustering Variable Distribution	83
Figure 21: Contested Brands Case Clustering	84
Figure 22: Grounded Theory Coding Procedure	87
Figure 23: Focus Group Classification	90
Figure 24: Process Model of Brand Meaning Contestation.....	93
Figure 25: Brand Protection Strategy Tree	114

List of Tables

Table 1: Overview of Brand Meaning Paradigms	11
Table 2: Brand Gestalt Continuum	47
Table 3: Practice Theory for Consumer Research	52
Table 4: Methodological Study Approaches	58
Table 5: Consumer Practices of Brand Meaning Contestation.....	62
Table 6: Theoretical Cross-Analysis.....	70
Table 7: Overview of Contested Brand Cases	72
Table 8: Brand Meaning Contestability Evaluation Scheme.....	75

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Study 1 – Concept and Typology of Contested Brands	166
Appendix A1: Overview of Brand Meaning (Co-)Creation Theories.....	166
Appendix A2: Overview of Consumer Resistance and Brand Sabotage Theories	169
Appendix A3: Overview of Cultural Appropriation and Co-Optation Theories....	171
Appendix A4: Summary of Contested Brand Cases	172
Appendix A5: In-Depth Case Study – Birkenstock	175
Appendix A6: In-Depth Case Study – New Balance	176
Appendix A7: Contested Brand Case Evaluation	177
Appendix A8: Contested Brand Case Cluster Analysis	180
Appendix B: Study 2 – Process Model of Brand Meaning Contestation	185
Appendix B1: Overview of Consumer Interviews	185
Appendix B2: Consumer Interview Guide	186
Appendix B3: Consumer Interview Picture Stimulation.....	188
Appendix B4: Overview of Focus Groups	189
Appendix B5: Focus Group Guide.....	190
Appendix B6: Focus Group Questionnaire	192
Appendix B7: Participation Consent Form	193
Appendix B8: Grounded Theory Codebook	194
Appendix C: Study 3 – Brand Protection Measures	197
Appendix C1: Overview of Expert Interviews.....	197
Appendix C2: Expert Interview Guide.....	198
Appendix C3: Experimental Groups and Manipulations	200
Appendix C4: Experimental Core Constructs	202
Appendix C5: Statistical Analysis of Experimental Data	203

List of Abbreviations

AMA	American Marketing Association
ANCOVA	Analysis of covariance
ANOVA	Analysis of variance
ANT	Actor-network theory
A&F	Abercrombie & Fitch
bn.	Billion
BRIC	Brazil, Russia, India, and China
CCT	Consumer culture theory
CEE	Central and Eastern Europe
CEO	Chief executive officer
cf.	Confer (lat. for ‘compare’)
CI	Consumer interview
CSR	Corporate social responsibility
DACH	Germany, Austria, and Switzerland
ed.	Edition
Ed.	Editor
Eds.	Editors
e.g.	Exempli gratia (lat. for ‘for example’)
EI	Expert interview
EMEA	Europe, the Middle East, and Africa
etc.	Et cetera (lat. for ‘and the rest’)
et al.	Et alii (lat. for ‘and others’)
F	F-test value
FG	Focus group
h	Hour
H _x	Hypothesis x
HSG	University of St. Gallen
i.e.	Id est (lat. for ‘that is to say’)
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
M _x	Brand protection measure x
M _{Gx}	Mean of group x
MECE	Mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive
min.	Minutes
MPP	Market practice performance
MTurk	Amazon Mechanical Turk
n	Sample size
neg.	Negative
No.	Numero (lat. for ‘number’)

n/a	Not available
n.d.	No date
p	Probability value
p.	Page
PETA	People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals
pos.	Positive
pp.	Pages
P&G	Procter & Gamble
Q _x	Research question x
Rev.	Revised
SCT	Self-categorisation theory
SIT	Social identity theory
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
SSA	Signifier-significate association
TPP	Trans-Pacific Partnership
TV	Television
U.K.	United Kingdom
U.S.	United States
VP	Vice president
vs.	Versus (lat. for ‘against’)
WOM	Word of mouth
w/o	Without
yuppie	Young urban professional
α	Cronbach’s alpha
#	Hashtag
\$	United States Dollar

1 Introduction

1.1 Preface

“A brand is no longer what we tell the consumer it is – it is what consumers tell each other it is” (Scott Cook, Board Member of P&G).

Given a rapidly changing sphere of consumption, with accelerating technological advancements, Scott Cook is hinting at the shift of power relations in today’s branding world. Communication is becoming more interactive, more dynamic, but also more ambiguous and uncertain. Brands are no longer under the exclusive control of marketers. Indeed, their socio-cultural dependency and complexity is greater than ever before. Beyond their well-established functionalities (e.g. product recognition, differentiation, or risk-reduction), brands provide an increasing source for consumers’ identity work, socio-cultural integration, and non-verbal exchange (Kapferer, 2012).

The driving force behind this development is the continuous improvement of connection and communication technologies. Building upon the Internet, innovations such as smart mobile devices, social media platforms, or artificial intelligence have substantially increased the speed and immediacy of interpersonal exchange (Achrol & Kotler, 1999, Lipschultz, 2017). Multiple actors with varied interests are roaming the digital space to broadcast their individual opinions, tastes, and consumption practices. Moreover, in recent years these highly connected market participants have developed the capability to create and distribute high-quality content on their own (Daugherty, Eastin, & Bright, 2008). This has resulted in a vast information overload and growing competition for consumers’ attention. So, companies are currently faced with the need to radically revise their marketing activities. While in the last century a limited number of communication channels allowed for a one-directional spread of controlled information, nowadays marketers have to orchestrate a broad range of multilateral communication channels with unpredictable interpretations of transmitted messages (Houle & Shapiro, 2014).

Conventional brand management theories nevertheless assume that the legal owner of a brand (e.g. the corresponding organisation) defines and controls a brand’s associations (Keller, 2013). In addition, all market participants (e.g. consumers, retailers, or public institutions) are supposed to behave in accordance with marketers’ intended brand meanings (Heding, Knudtzen, & Bjerre, 2008), including how branded products are

acquired, consumed, exchanged, discussed or even disposed of. In contrast to this idealised view, contemporary market experiences indicate that for most brands manifold brand meanings prevail in the public discourse. *Birkenstock*, for example, a brand that originally denoted orthopaedic health-sandals for elderly people and practitioners, became an identification symbol for both the hippie and the hipster movement, and is today worn by fashionistas all around the world (Jervell, 2015).

This tendency of consumers shaping a brand's public appearance is often triggered by their desire for social engagement in order to gain recognition and status (Martineau & Arsel, 2017). Moreover, the ongoing merger of different cultures is creating a strong need for personal distinction and self-fulfilment, which is becoming evident in the emergence of multifarious subcultures wanting to differentiate themselves from the growing mainstream population (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The rise of heterogeneous brand meanings is also linked to consumers' progressive public expression of dissatisfaction, negative brand experiences, and hostile brand cognitions (Kähr, Nyffenegger, Krohmer, & Hoyer, 2016). For instance, after the former CEO of *Abercrombie & Fitch* declared the brand to be exclusively for cool kids who are not plus-size, an individual market actor created a viral social media campaign around the hashtag *#FitchTheHomeless*. His intention was to associate *Abercrombie & Fitch* with detrimental meanings by donating branded clothes to homeless people (Glazek, 2013).

As revealed by Houle and Shapiro (2014), the entire market for consumer goods and services is currently confronted with a major shift from institutional to individual power. Hereto, the authors identified mobile communication and online connectivity as the major drivers transferring brand control towards consumers. In addition, the aggregation of like-minded individuals in social collectives (e.g. online brand communities) is provoking a further loss of authority for legal brand owners (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011). Consumers' use of social media is particularly a key lever in establishing social alliances, sharing polarising thoughts, and initiating public movements (Schembri & Latimer, 2016). As far as the marketing world is concerned, this results in a multitude of created and disseminated content that increases the ambiguity of brand meanings. Clancy and Trout (2002) thus revealed that consumers' confusion about brands has grown significantly in recent years, since it is becoming progressively difficult to distinguish between specific brand meanings (e.g. between the meaning of *Visa*- and *Mastercard*). Thompson, Rindfleisch, and Arsel (2006) have also revealed that various

market actors (e.g. bloggers, opinion leaders, or consumer collectives) are increasingly spreading derogative brand images within popular media culture. The authors characterise these as *doppelgänger* brand images and emphasise their harmful potential, both for companies' emotional branding strategies and brands' intended meanings.

This controversy is further grounded in market actors' heterogeneous brand perception. The interpretation of a brand depends on distinct interests, value systems, and the socio-cultural environment (Puntoni, Schroeder, & Ritson, 2010). Market actors may thus interpret a brand in diverging ways due to different personal backgrounds. This holds especially true for the globalised online environment where anyone can observe, share, and manipulate brand-related content (Kucuk, 2015). Since brand meanings are often transferred from online to offline marketplaces, such ambiguities can provoke profound changes in consumer behaviour. From a brand management perspective, this implies both the risk of brand dilution and the threat of deteriorating brand meanings. Consumers' public behaviour can attach associations to a brand that are not only unintended but also undesired by the legal brand owner. This may, as a result, endanger a brand's general recognition and its reputation among its customers. If a brand is burdened with unattractive associations or related to unpleasant market actors, target customers might lose interest and trust in the brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). In all, this can result in severe reductions in both market shares and brand equity.

Emerging marketing literature is therefore arguing for a more participative branding approach rather than the prevalent organisation-centric conceptions (Ind, 2014). The traditional understanding of one-directional, product-oriented brand communications has to be transferred into more collective, multilateral, dynamic, and consumer-centric considerations. Brands need to be adapted to volatile markets with multiple, interfering market actors and continuously changing socio-cultural circumstances. Legal owners have to accept their loss of unrestricted brand control and be prepared for any kind of undesired alterations in brand meanings. Moreover, the new market reality demands that marketers are capable of reacting immediately after unexpected consumer behaviours have been detected. Such capabilities require a systematic and holistic understanding of how antagonistic market actors create, disrupt, and negotiate brand meanings. However, since up to now such a comprehensive understanding is unavailable in the current consumer research landscape, the present thesis intends to contribute to its development by investigating the phenomenon of contested brands.

1.2 Research Objective and Questions

Building on the large degree of heterogeneity in today's consumption environment, Allen, Fournier and Miller (2008) recap the four major types of brand meaning makers: (1) individual consumers, (2) consumer collectives, (3) companies, and (4) cultural mechanisms. In conclusion, they state that global markets are characterised by “co-creation, collaboration, complexity, ambiguity, dynamism, loss of control, [and] multivocality” (Allen et al., 2008, p. 814). However, these market attributes are not thoroughly reflected in prevalent marketing theories on the emergence, transfer, and alteration of brand meanings. To resolve this shortfall, the present research integrates different theoretical perspectives in order to explore the public negotiation and contestation of brand meanings among antagonistic market participants. In addition to existing branding and marketing theories, scientific insights are therefore also drawn from sociological and social psychological conceptions, anthropological ideas, and semiotic notions, as well as from economic property right theories.

The research objective is thus to develop an in-depth theoretical understanding of how and why contingencies of contested brand meanings emerge, and what marketers can do to prevent and counteract the spread of undesired brand meanings. In order to achieve this objective, it is broken down into three research questions. The first endeavour is to provide both an explicit conceptualisation and a typology of contested brands, which pave the way for further investigations. Their integration into current consumer research and their intended practicability require a substantial understanding of related branding theories and a profound analysis of selected contested brand cases. Moreover, appropriate classification criteria need to be identified to be able to differentiate between different types of contested brands. Thus, the first research question reads as follows:

Q1: How are contested brands defined and what determines a comprehensive typology?

Secondly, a holistic, theoretical understanding of the complex process of brand meaning contestation is necessary. Since to the author's best knowledge such an understanding does not yet exist in the existing literature, the present research aims to contribute to its emergence through an exploratory qualitative study of the phenomenon of contested brands. Enabled by a practice-theoretical view, an in-depth analysis of the antecedents, market practices, context factors, and outcomes of contested brands is intended. This analysis should allow for the framing of an overall process model of brand meaning

contestation and in doing so place particular importance on the dynamic interplay of antagonistic market actors. Especially this is essential, as those actors with common interests merge together into larger social units with increased market power. An examination of the behavioural patterns of heterogeneous market actors' is therefore crucial for developing a substantial understanding of the emergence and negotiation of brand meanings. This gives rise to the second research question:

Q₂: What theoretical model, grounded in qualitative data, can explain the emergence and negotiation of contested brand meanings by antagonistic market actors?

Thirdly, the present research seeks to reveal some practical implications for marketers on how to handle contingencies of contested brand meanings purposefully. This implies forecasting threatening brand events, preventing brands from becoming contested, and preparing legal owners to counteract the spread of undesired brand meanings effectively. In general, marketers have to understand and accept the growing occurrence of contested brands, and be capable of making the right strategic and operative branding decisions. To this end, the views and opinions of renowned marketing experts should be collected qualitatively and aggregated into purposeful measures that allow for the countervailing of contested brands. Besides, to verify the effectiveness of these measures it is necessary to test them quantitatively. Overall, this refers to the third research question:

Q₃: How can marketers effectively forecast, prevent, and counteract the public spread and negative consequences of undesired brand meanings?

Together, these three questions form the core of the present research work. Their focus is linked to the market phenomenon of contested brands and yet each question is investigated within a distinct research study. It is worth noticing here that the specific relevance of each question and the precise research gaps they address are based on a joint literature review and discussed within the individual studies. In summary, based on shared theoretical foundations the three subsequent research studies provide the thread for the present thesis. First, a conceptual study intends to reveal a definition and a classification of contested brands (study 1). Second, a grounded theory analysis proposes to decode the process of brand meaning contestation (study 2). Third, to offset the threat of contested brands, a qualitative exploration and quantitative verification aim to identify effective brand protection measures (study 3). In line with this sequence, next the detailed structure of the research work will be outlined.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

Altogether, the thesis at hand consists of five chapters (see figure 1). To begin with, chapter 1 introduces the general research subject of contested brands, shows its relevance in today's marketing environment, and outlines the research objective and questions. Chapter 2 discusses the essential theoretical foundations and exposes the underlying research gap. The literature review therefore includes relevant theories on brand meanings, semiotic principles of signs and symbols, social psychological basics, and insights about the enabling practice theory. Moreover, chapter 2 contains a brief excursus on economic property right theories and brand ownership. Building on this, chapter 3 reveals the design, implementation, and results of the three conducted research studies. As mentioned above, the first study focuses on the concept and typology of contested brands, the second study on a process model of brand meaning contestation, and the third study on brand protection measures. Chapter 4 then provides a general discussion of the research findings, offers theoretical contributions, and highlights practical implications. Besides, result limitations and opportunities for future research are presented. In conclusion, chapter 5 complements the research work by recapitulating the fundamental takeaways as well as the essence of contested brands.

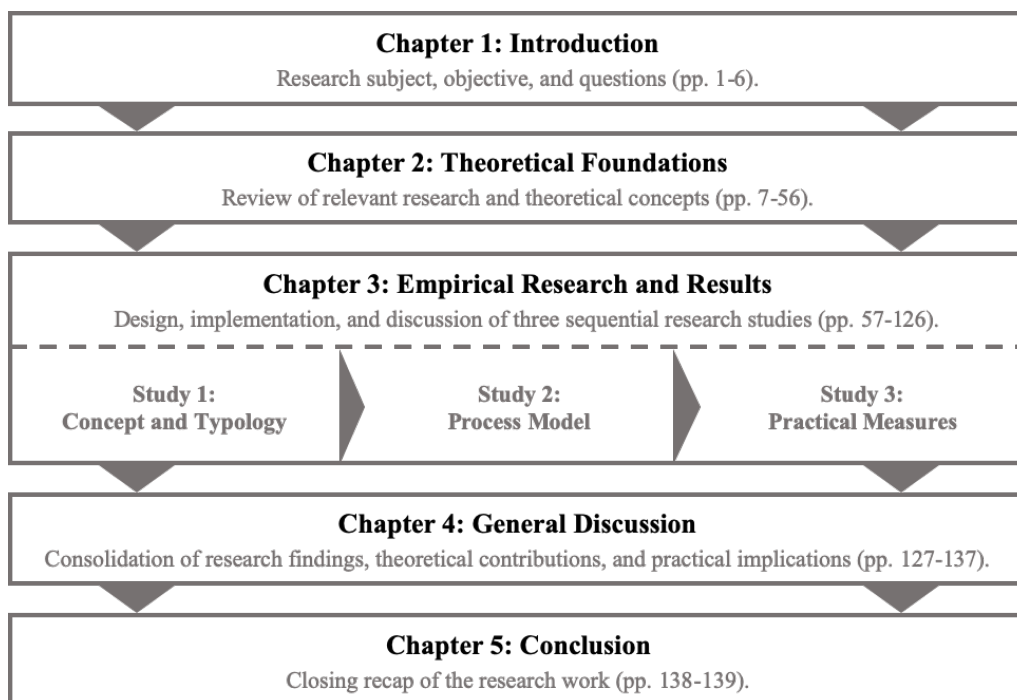


Figure 1: Structure of the Thesis (own illustration).

2 Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Principles of Brand Meaning

A consistent understanding of what brand meanings are in the sense of the present research work ought to be established at the outset. Indeed, according to Sidney Levy, one of the founding fathers of modern consumer research, “people buy things not only for what they can do, but also for what they mean” (Levy, 1959, p. 118). The subsequent chapters thus give a theoretical overview of the applied conceptualisation as well as the creation, disruption, and contestation of brand meanings. Therefore, both conventional brand management perspectives and emerging branding paradigms are integrated.

2.1.1 Brand Meaning Conceptualisation

Communication theorists locate meaning within individuals’ perceptions, cognitive actions, and verbal expressions (Craig, 1999; Osgood, 1952). Likewise, in consumer research, symbolic objects and brands in particular are conceptualised as carriers of meaning (Gardner & Levy, 1955). Richins (1994) differentiates between the public and private meanings of possessions. Whereas public meanings are attributed to an object by outside observers, private meanings are constituted by individuals’ subjective experiences with a particular object. Hence, in contrast to public meanings, private meanings are rather idiosyncratic and commonly not shared. The author additionally distinguishes four sources of meanings: (1) *utilitarian value* – the functional utility of a possession, (2) *enjoyment* – the ability of an object to give pleasure, (3) *representation of interpersonal ties* – an object’s value for shaping social relationships, and (4) *identity and self-expression* – the capacity of possessions to express one’s own self. Although all these sources influence both types of meanings, private meanings are rather shaped by utilitarian values and enjoyments, while public meanings usually originate from individuals’ intent to express their self and form interpersonal ties (Richins, 1994).

Escalas and Bettman (2005) have similarly identified brands as central sources for individuals to construct their selves and structure consumption practices. They revealed that consumers form emotional self-brand connections by adopting brand associations from socially approved reference groups. Brand meanings are thus designated as prevalent brand perceptions composed of consumers’ impressions, experiences, emotional relations, and associations with branded goods (Berry, 2000). In particular,

consumers' brand associations and aspirations constitute essential building blocks of a brand's meaning. According to Krishnan (1996), such associations can be understood as cognitive links between nodes in consumers' minds. For instance, the brand node of *Coca-Cola* may be associated with the product node of carbonated soft drinks, the experiential node of thirst-quenching, and the attributive node of being sweet or unhealthy. In order to measure such immediate brand associations, free association tests require consumers to quickly name the first phrases that come to their mind after being exposed to a brand's name or logo (Chen, 2001; Keller, 2013).

To that end, Aaker (1991) developed eleven clusters of overarching brand associations: product attributes, intangibles, customer benefits, relative price, use/application, user/customer, celebrity/person, life-style/personality, product class, competitors, and country/geographic area. These clusters can be related to different dimensions of a brand's meaning. As shown in figure 2, Hirschman (1980, 1998a) specified a multilayer model of meanings with four dimensions contingent upon the degree of meaning-related socialisation. The core layer encompasses direct sensory impressions of a product (e.g. its size, colour, or sound). These are generally perceived consistently across consumers. The second layer focuses on cultural meanings, which are composed of the thoughts and images shared by the majority of individuals within a particular society. The third layer includes subcultural meanings, which are derived from thoughts and images that prevail within distinct social groups. Finally, the outer layer contains idiosyncratic meanings, which follow individuals' personal experiences with objects and are highly subjective.

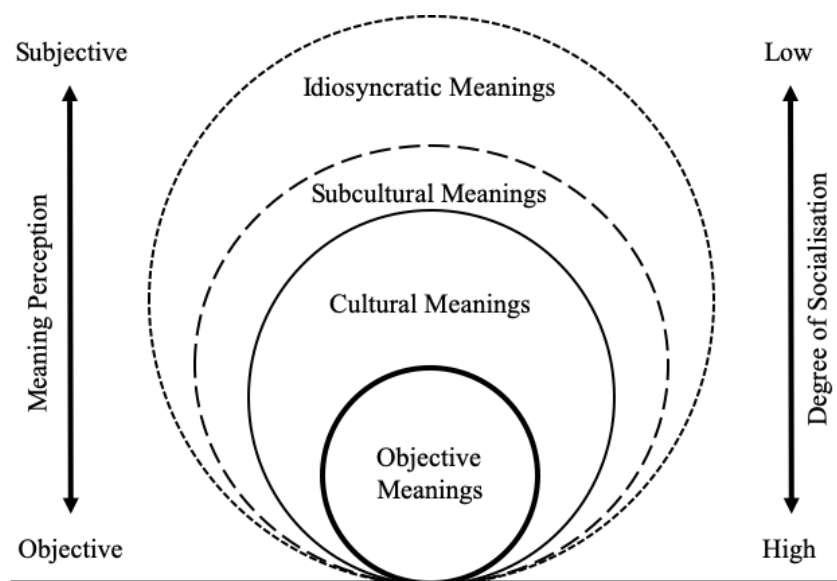


Figure 2: Multilayer Model of Meanings (adapted from Hirschman, 1980, 1998a).

This multilayer model of meanings suggests that, although some parts of a brand's meaning are commonly shared, most parts vary across (sub-)cultures and market actors. In addition, Kapferer (2012) identified a serious gap between marketers' intended perception of a brand (i.e. the brand identity) and consumers' perceived brand meanings (i.e. the brand image). This gap mainly results from communicative ambiguities, market noise, and behavioural biases. However, Aaker (1996) states that a brand's identity inevitably extends beyond prevalent brand images, as it reflects both a brand's existing soul and its future vision. Overall, the notion of brands being heterogeneously perceived by different market actors marks a cornerstone of postmodern branding literature.

In this regard, Tierney, Karpen, and Westberg (2016) criticise previous conceptions of brand meanings for failing to take into account a multi-actor and dynamic perspective. As an alternative, they propose the following definition: "Brand meaning [is] an idiosyncratic and evolving emotional and cognitive understanding attributed to a brand as a result of a socially negotiated process" (Tierney et al., 2016, p. 914). The negotiation to which they refer can be understood as a discursive (re-)interpretation of brand-related experiences and beliefs, such as a brand's personality or its role in society (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010). This entails the idea of brand meanings being cognitively (re-)shaped within each (discursive) exchange by distinct market actors. Beyond that, the meaning of branded possessions is highly dynamic and develops steadily over time (Richins, 1994). Due to their reflection of shifts in prevalent tastes and culture, brands can alter their meanings when they are related to a new zeitgeist, cultural surroundings, influential persons, or social collectives (McCracken, 1986). Such an evolution of meaning is contingent upon individuals' contextual, social, and emotional processing of brand-related cognitions (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Mick, 1986). Even brand associations can be situational and thus vary depending on consumers' purchase intentions or consumption behaviours (Keller, 2013). Likewise, Brown, Kozinets, and Sherry (2003) analysed the socio-cultural character of retro brands. Based on their study of *Star Wars* and the *VW New Beetle*, they identified four key features that determine a brand's meaning, in short the *4As*: *Allegory*, *Arcadia*, *Aura*, and *Antinomy*. Allegory designates a brand's symbolic story with focus on advertised narratives and the tales consumers tell each other. Arcadia relates to idealised brand communities (e.g. the *Harley Owners Group*). Aura denotes a brand's essence, or its authentic core values. Antimony implies a brand paradox that the authors conceptualise as "an irresolvable contradiction that

manifests itself at the level of brand consumption” (Brown et al., 2003, p. 25). Such contradictions allow consumers to integrate their individual desires into a brand’s meaning. Particularly, brand paradoxes reflect the socio-cultural complexity that can cause conflicting brand meanings and, from these, either create lasting brand loyalty or trigger a serious alienation of consumers from the retro brands (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012).

The aforementioned definition of brand meanings also reveals that multiple market actors are involved in the process of brand meaning development. Apart from brand managers and consumers, these actors comprise, for example, competing firms, retail employees, opinion leaders, governmental regulators, non-governmental organisations, and public media houses (Allen et al., 2008; Schau, Muniz, & Arnould, 2009). Holt (2004) moreover explains that the cultural context surrounding market participants also affects and substantially leverages the course of brand meaning making. Overall, brand meanings are often subject to a huge degree of ambiguity as they rest upon the subjective knowledge of a multitude of market actors (Keller, 2003; Tierney et al., 2016). This brand knowledge is virtually uncontrollable and is dependent on consumers’ behaviours, their interaction with other market actors, and their perception of the ambient consumption environment (Putnam, 1974). In summary, research has shown that brand meanings can vary considerably across consumer demographics, geographic locations, social groupings, and cultures, as well as across subcultures of consumption (Berthon, Pitt, & Campbell, 2009; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

Berthon et al. (2009) provide a general explanation of how the various paradigms of brand meanings have evolved in previous literature (see table 1). All in all, three major theoretical perspectives appear to be fundamental to the prevalent academic understanding of what brand meanings are: (1) a temporal perspective, (2) a socio-emotional perspective, and (3) a cultural perspective (Tierney et al., 2016). The first perspective implies meaning to be progressive rather than static; it develops over time and over shifting socio-cultural conditions (Kates & Goh, 2003; Hollenbeck, Peters, & Zinkhan, 2008). Secondly, brand meanings are socially negotiated by multiple market actors (Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). Thirdly, both the surrounding culture and the consumption context shape a brand’s meaning (Chandler & Vargo, 2011; Holt, 2004; Torelli, Özsomer, Carvalho, Keh, & Maehle, 2012). In sum, the significance and perception of brands change continuously, which makes it very difficult for marketers to determine a brand’s meaning at a specific moment in time.

Author(s)	Meaning Paradigm	Specification
Katz & Postal (1964)	Independent	Context does not affect meaning.
Clark (1978)	Intentional	Observers look for meaning interpretations intended by the object's holder.
Kleine & Kernan (1991)	Social Psychological	Meaning is highly context related.
Kates & Shaw-Garlock (1999); Thompson, Pollio, & Locander (1994)	Ideological	Meaning results from constant ideological struggles triggered by varying interpretations of different audiences.
Holt (2002)	Socio-Cultural	Consumers' socio-cultural environment determines a brand's meaning.
Kates & Goh (2003)	Morphing	Brand meaning morphs across cultural, communal, and social boundaries.
Escalas (2004); Vargo & Lusch (2004)	Self-Constructive	Consumers co-create meanings by integrating brands into their self-construct.
Berthon, Holbrook, Hulbert, & Pitt (2007)	Manifold	Brands have various temporally evolving meanings among different consumers.

Table 1: Overview of Brand Meaning Paradigms (adapted from Berthon et al., 2009).

2.1.2 Brand Meaning Creation

The subchapters below emphasise the elementary theoretical principles of brand meaning creation. In particular, the focus is on the contrast between conventional branding conceptions, commonly applied in organisational settings involving traditional brand management, and an emerging branding paradigm that emphasises the co-creation of brand meanings by companies, consumers, and cultural forces.

2.1.2.1 Conventional Brand Management

Organisations and marketers often still advocate the brand definition proclaimed by the *American Marketing Association* (AMA) in 1960. Accordingly, a brand is “a name, term, sign, symbol, or design, or a combination of them, intended to identify the goods or services of one seller or group of sellers and to differentiate them from those of competitors” (De Chernatony & Dall'Olmo, 1998, p. 419). This practical definition mainly focuses on product identification and organisations' ability to differentiate their goods and services from competitors by determining brand meanings. In addition, traditional brand management builds on three major categories of product benefits. These are *functional benefits* (i.e. features that solve external consumption needs, such as the battery capacity of a smartphone), *experiential benefits* (i.e. the capability to create positive sensory and cognitive stimulation, such as a fair-trade label on organic food), and *symbolic benefits* (i.e. the opportunity to convey one's self-image, such as

signalling prosperity by carrying a *Louis Vuitton* bag) (Keller, 1993; Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986). To provide these benefits, marketers orchestrate the marketing mix across four key dimensions: product, price, placement, and promotion (Tomeczak, Kuß, & Reinecke, 2014; van Waterschoot & van den Bulte, 1992). Further literature extends this list by adding the dimensions of process, physical evidence, and people, to take account of the growing service focus (Kotler, Keller, Brady, Goodman, & Hansen, 2009). These dimensions together constitute the *7Ps* of the modern marketing mix. In sum, Keller (2013) outlines the essential functions of brands for consumers and legal owners in line with conventional branding theories as follows (see figure 3):

Consumers	Legal Brand Owners
• Identification of product sources • Assignment of responsibilities to the manufacturer • Risk reducer • Search cost reducer • Bonding and trust guarantee • Symbolic device • Signal of quality	• Means of identification to simplify product handling or tracing • Means of legal protection • Promise of quality • Means of endowing products with unique associations • Source of competitive advantage • Source of financial returns

Figure 3: Conventional Brand Functions (adapted from Keller, 2013).

Traditionally, most companies are convinced that they govern these brand functions predominantly through their marketing and communication activities (Tierney et al., 2016). Many marketers assume that they can define and control the dominant meanings of their brands, products, and services (Keller, 1993, 2003). Thus, intended brand identities are supposed to be created by spreading relevant brand associations publicly via managed communication channels. In addition, other stakeholders are considered to contribute little to a brand's meaning, but primarily receive marketers' predetermined messages (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). An illustrative example of this managerial view is *Volkswagen's* renowned *Think Small* campaign. Back in 1959, *Volkswagen* set out to change consumers' perception of the *VW Beetle* (e.g. foster a minimalistic mind-set) as well as the general connotations of automobiles (e.g. cars are not only luxury products). By displaying a small *VW Beetle* on a bare background with little text, they created a highly recognised advertisement to propagate their novel brand associations. Rather than expecting consumers to shape this process, marketers chose to determine *Volkswagen's* new dominant brand meaning exclusively by themselves (Hiott, 2012). In total, brands are conventionally regarded as firms' private property and brand meanings

are meant to be created actively by marketers, whereas consumers are passive recipients of meanings and ideally perceive brands as intended (Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). All market actors (e.g. consumers, competitors, or the public) are therefore supposed to act on the brand associations that companies generate (Heding et al., 2008).

Nowadays, marketers have also grasped the scientific impulse of rethinking brands as cognitive construals. Building on consumer psychology and information processing theories, Ries and Trout (2001) explain that brands emerge and prevail in consumers' mind as informative knowledge structures. This brand knowledge comprises consumers' judgments, perceptions, sensory impressions, personal experiences, brand-related emotions, and specific information on product attributes (Keller, 1993, 2003). However, many marketers assume comparable brand knowledge among all targeted market actors and consequently the formation of homogenous brand meanings. Likewise, Berthon et al. (2009, p. 356) state that "the implicit assumption underpinning much of the branding literature is that if you keep your brand communications simple, steady, and memorable people reach a shared brand meaning that is consistent with an organization's." Strategic brand management approaches therefore tend to adopt a structural or cognitive branding perspective rather than focusing on the emotional complexity and experiential multidimensionality of consumer-brand relationships (Brown et al., 2003). Accordingly, through most practical positioning strategies, brand managers are assured of being able to dictate a shared sense of brand knowledge and hence to take full control over the process of brand meaning creation (Allen et al., 2008; Park et al., 1986).

Contemporary brand management uses metrics related to a brand's equity or value to control for the success of marketing activities (Tomczak et al., 2014). Psychological constructs such as brand awareness or the valence of brand attitudes are also inquired (Aaker, 1991; Keller, 1993). In general, brand equity measures the monetary value of marketing effects specifically related to a brand (Keller, 1993) while brand value reflects what a brand means to its legal owner in terms of sales value (Raggio & Leone, 2007). Nonetheless, Brown et al. (2003, p. 30) explain that "although customer-based approaches to brand equity allow for the existence of idiosyncratic consumer response, they encourage managers to view this experience as a passive or reactive result of marketing intervention." This proves the need to refine the prevalent brand metrics and broaden marketers' horizons of how brand meanings emerge by making them recognise and accept that other stakeholders (co-)create a brand's meaning.

2.1.2.2 Consumer (Co-)Creation

In contrast to the contemporary brand management perspective, Hirschman (1981) showed more than 25 years ago that commonly only 50% of target customers share the same brand meaning. Moreover, Meadows (1983) observed that consumers are not only passive recipients of a company's marketing activities but also active users who exploit brands for their own purpose. Building on these considerations, an alternative, meaning-based understanding of brands has emerged and is continuing to develop within postmodern consumer research (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Mick & Buhl, 1992). This participative branding paradigm centralises the symbolic and experiential facets of consumption, the implications of brands for consumers' socio-cultural environment, and branded products as meaningful entities for individual and collective identity construction (Belk, 1988; Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; Schau et al., 2009; Holt, 1997).

On an ontological basis, Allen et al. (2008, p. 788) argue that this “emergent view accepts brands as dynamic, co-created entities, and brand meaning as neither inherent in the product nor constant across individuals, but rather derived from the ‘contexts’ in which the brand ‘resides’.” Yet the analysis of this contextual structure is complex, since it comprises various perspectives, such as the surrounding social infrastructure, cultural and historical backgrounds, and distinct market actors who frame the meaning-making process (Holt, 1998; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Moreover, public brand meanings are subject to advertising activities and exposures in mass media (e.g. press releases, movies, or social media), as well as to associations with opinion leaders (e.g. celebrities) and social collectives (Richins, 1994; Holt, 2016). In sum, consumers compile their own brand meanings based on (1) the raw materials offered by marketers (e.g. marketing activities), (2) cultural intermediary cues (e.g. brand history and media), and (3) their idiosyncratic perceptions, experiences, needs, and identity goals (Brown et al., 2003).

The scientific literature provides various approaches for analysing the manifold, interpersonal, and temporally fluid process of brand meaning (co-)creation. Most notably, these include the *social learning theory* (Bandura, 1977), the *symbolic interactionism perspective* (Solomon, 1983), the *articulation theory* (Hall, 1986; Kozinets, 2001), the *mass media cultivation theory* (Bryant & Miron, 2004), and the *analysis of consumption stereotypes* (Lee, Kim, & Vohs, 2011). Yet, these approaches usually focus on specific properties of the process and fail to offer a holistic view.

At large, the participative branding paradigm re-conceptualises consumers as active brand meaning makers and communicators (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011; Thompson, Pollio, & Locander, 1994). Through publicly visible behaviours, all market actors can shape the perceived brand meanings of their observers (Berthon et al., 2007; Ind, 2014). In the course of analysing brand hijacking, Wipperfurth (2005) shows that co-creation primarily occurs when influential individuals alter consumption practices and transfer novel perceptions to the mainstream. This relates to Belk's (1988) work on possessions and the extended self in which the author revealed that individuals appropriate material objects, respectively brands, to construct unique self-identities and to define meaning in their life. The visible consumption of accumulated possessions provides an indication of who persons are or how they would like to be perceived. By altering their possessions over time and space, market actors can develop their identity or even establish multiple self-representations (Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998; Schau & Gilly, 2003).

Moreover, the symbolic interactionism perspective offers an explanation for individuals ascribing meaning to objects in terms of social interactions. Solomon (1983, 1988) found that individuals express different social roles by acquiring coherent brand bundles. Yuppies, for instance, are shown to perform their stereotypical role of being young urban professionals by consuming brands like *Perrier*, *Rolex*, *BMW*, *Esquire*, or *Brooks Brothers* (Allen et al., 2008). Hence, members of socio-cultural groupings often exhibit a shared understanding of brands (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). These collectives usually define themselves by common brand practices and aggregate the signalling power of many individuals to propagandise their particular notion of a brand's meaning (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). In return, the shared consumption symbols offer substantial linking value for individuals to express their group membership and establish their social self-representation (Cova & Cova, 2002). Three important forms of such social consumption collectives are presented below:

- *Subcultures of consumption*: building upon their ethnographic fieldwork with *Harley-Davidson* motorcycle riders, Schouten and McAlexander (1995, p. 43) specify “a subculture of consumption as a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity.” Related group members can be distinguished by their brand-oriented modes of symbolic expression based on a common language, ethos, values, rituals, and a hierarchical social structure (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995).

- *Consumer tribes*: Cova and Cova (2002, p. 602) define a tribe as “a network of heterogeneous persons – in terms of age, sex, income, etc. – who are linked by a shared passion or emotion; a tribe is capable of collective action, its members are not simple consumers, they are also advocates.” In general, consumer tribes focus on the social links between their members in a rather temporary and unstable manner. Brands or firms do not necessarily constitute the connecting element; social gathering happens more around shared experiences and the resistance or re-appropriation of dominant meaning systems (Cova, Kozinets, & Shankar, 2007).
- *Brand communities*: this form of a more enduring social grouping is characterised by Muniz and O’Guinn (2001, p. 412) as “a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships among users of a brand.” In addition, the authors identified essential features of a brand community as having a shared consciousness of kind, common brand rituals and traditions, and a sense of moral brand responsibility. Due to the formation of a collective identity, community members not only develop strong brand loyalty but also a high need for involvement in brand co-creative activities (Algesheimer, Dholakia, & Herrmann, 2005; McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002; Schembri & Latimer, 2016).

In terms of brand building, marketers should handle such consumer collectives carefully. Owing to their high signalling power, social groupings tend to have great influence on dominant brand meanings (Brown et al., 2003). This can be useful if the collective is steered by the firm and aligned with the intended brand positioning. However, if group members propagate their own grasp of a brand, companies can easily lose authority over their brands (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011; Schau et al., 2009). Marketers advocating an organisation-centric view may neglect the influential capacity of meaning co-creation. As this view favours simplicity and consistency, brand managers are generally considered as both the creators and owners of a brand. Taking co-creation into account results in a more complex, versatile, fragmented, mutable, and uncertain concept of brand meaning making (Berthon et al., 2009; Ind, 2014). Manifold meaning circulations among market actors imply less control by organisations and a greater need for purposive, open-minded, and consumer-centric marketing activities (Holt, 2002). Indeed, it is important to accept and integrate the (co-)creative capabilities of both individual consumers and social collectives. Empowered by digital information technologies, consumers nowadays have the ability to add substantial value in terms of

product co-development, positive word-of-mouth, or by disclosing their needs and desires (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Payne, Storbacka, & Frow, 2008). Emerging marketing theories investigate these new roles of consumers under the notions of *working consumers* (Cova & Dalli, 2009), *co-production* (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008), or *prosumption* (Humphreys & Grayson, 2008; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). On a meta level, the *service-dominant logic* overarches all these concepts by focusing on human value co-creation based on interdependent and reciprocal service exchanges (Vargo & Lusch, 2016). As the *Lego Group's Mindstorms* project shows, active community building and promoting consumer engagement can boost both a brand's market recognition and the urge of individuals to contribute to product and brand developments (Antorini, Muniz, & Askildsen, 2012; Zwick, Bonsu, & Darmody, 2008). To enable such a beneficial co-creation of value and meaning, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004) identified four managerial building blocks: (1) interactive dialogue and engagement, (2) access to internal information, (3) transparency, and (4) an analysis of the risk-benefit ratio (e.g. probability to alienate customers). Thorough consideration of these factors will allow marketers to establish what Iglesias, Ind, and Alfaro (2013) call *brand interfaces*, respectively a brand co-creation space (see figure 4).

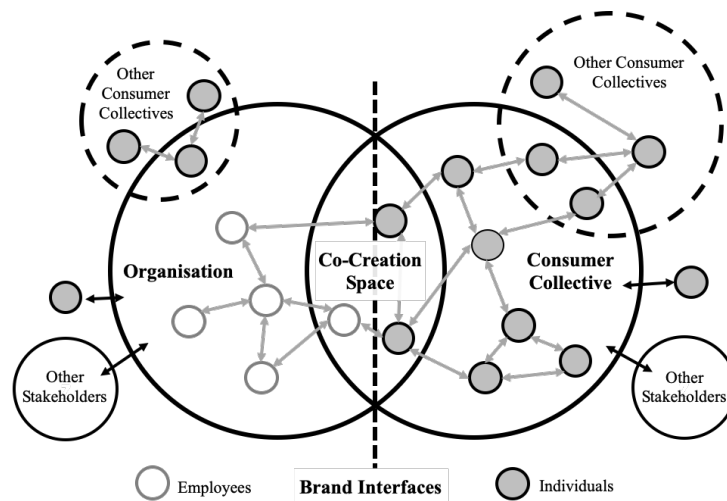


Figure 4: Brand Co-Creation Space (adapted from Iglesias et al., 2013).

Generally speaking, as consumers increasingly tend to create their own brand images and develop dynamic brandscapes, brand meanings are becoming more ambivalent, unstable, and the ground for socio-cultural contestations (Thompson & Arsel, 2004). In this sense, a consumer-centric branding perspective is indispensable for understanding consumers' brand-related behaviour, gaining insights into the surrounding consumption context, and enabling the opportunity for purposeful brand meaning co-creation.

2.1.2.3 Cultural Branding

In addition to companies and consumers, the cultural system is another important entity with great influence on the process of brand meaning creation. Holt (2004, p. 11) specifies cultural branding as a “set of axioms and strategic principles that guide the building of brands into cultural icons.” He explains that iconic brands are symbol-intensive with a high identity value and distinct brand meanings. In his theoretical model on meaning movement, McCracken (1986) also reveals that culture is the fundamental source of any brand meaning. Memorable examples of such culturally-coined, iconic brands are *Marlboro* and *Levi's*, since these succeeded in internalising the *Wild West* narrative and rooting related associations deeply in consumers' minds (Holt, 2016).

Noteworthy, brands for one thing evolve within cultural or subcultural meaning systems (i.e. values, ideologies, and social norms), then again, they function as cultural symbols through which individuals or collectives acquire and express identities (Elliott & Davies, 2006; Holt, 2004). In this regard, consumers may cultivate strong relationships with iconic brands and associated products. Fournier (1998) describes five socio-cultural factors that influence the types and strength of such consumer-brand relationships: consumers' cohort, gender, lifecycle, social network, and the surrounding culture. Building on these factors, McCracken (2005) adds further sources for cultural-driven brand meaning creation, such as the fashion and trend system, historical and local meaning cues, or consumers' occupations, social class, and status. Outstanding brand narratives can thus arise from an interplay between consumers, products, and socio-cultural mechanisms. Holt (2004) calls them brand identity myths and argues that they are a prerequisite for iconic brands. According to his model of myth generation, socio-cultural contradictions are the foundation of individuals' concerns and anxieties about publicly shared beliefs and moral imperatives. In particular, if genuine experiences contrast with the prevailing cultural ideologies, consumers generate a feeling of isolation and desire for redemptive cultural symbols and novel myths to repair their conflicted cultural perceptions (Holt, 2003, 2004). Through the adoption of appropriate cultural narratives, brands can resolve this tension and, therefore, become strong iconic symbols. The brand *Dove*, for example, offered with its *Real Beauty* campaign a way for woman to escape the fashion system's beauty ideology by emphasising imperfection and individuality. The well-received dissemination of this redeeming myth triggered a far-reaching social discourse and achieved iconic brand status for *Dove* (Allen et al., 2008).

However, as these brand identity myths rely on time and space for their existence, they are usually controlled by those who do not create the products (Stratton & Northcote, 2014). In fact, the cultural production system consists of influential gatekeepers, such as journalists, bloggers, designers, celebrities, film-makers, media authorities, social critics, or other opinion leaders (McCracken, 1986, 2005). These cultural intermediaries have the potential to endorse a brand but also to load it with unpredictable meanings or trigger anti-brand movements (McCracken, 1989; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Sociological articulation theory even suggests a meaning-related autonomy of cultural and ideological triggers, since distinct classes, groups, or subcultures are wholly free to appropriate these for their own use (Hall, 1986, 2006). For example, Kozinets (2001) showed that members of the *Star Trek* subculture adopt sacralising articulations to cope with social stigmas and their need for legitimacy. The resulting religious-like *Star Trek* myth shaped both the brand's public meaning and fans' private self-construction.

Overall, the awareness of brands being socially constructed, which implies that a brand's meaning emanates from its socialisation and participation in socio-cultural discourses (Richins, 1994), is highly uncomfortable for marketers. This is particularly the case for brands positioned in the popular media culture where, due to the dynamic market discourse, commercialised meanings swiftly become discordant with the prevalent brand identity myth (O'Reilly, 2005). To avoid the loss of control and build iconic symbols, brand managers need to author authentic and anticipatory brand narratives (Allen et al., 2008). They have to understand prevailing cultural contradictions and learn from cultural experts how to tell captivating stories (Gladwell, 2000). Cultural artefacts such as films, pieces of music, historical events, or fashion styles offer a wealth of inspiration for meaningful brand identity myths (Askegaard, 2006; Kozinets, 2001; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). In this regard, Holt (2002) outlines a range of cultural branding approaches: (1) *coattailing on cultural epicentres* – the insertion of brands into expressive social communities or subcultures, (2) *life world emplacement* – the creation of authentic meanings from trivial life situations, (3) *ironic, reflexive brand persona* – the use of irony to contrast conventional marketing approaches, and (4) *stealth branding* – indirect brand positioning by means of loyal tastemakers. More radically, Brown (2006) discusses the value of purposeful anti-branding strategies (e.g. *Uniqlo's* former claim: *you are not what you wear!*), which raises the question of whether an uncontrolled creation of cultural-seeded brand meanings might be reasonable.

2.1.3 Brand Meaning Disruption

Next to their creation, brand meanings are subject to an ongoing disruption process. Various stakeholders claim and propagandise brands for their own purposes, often outside of marketers' sphere of influence. This results in a multitude of publicly discussed brand perceptions. The related conglomerate of meanings forms the basis of diverse consumption practices and negotiation processes that determine the market-dominant brand meaning. To break down market actors' endeavours for brand alteration, the next chapters discuss the essential triggers and types of brand meaning disruption.

2.1.3.1 Brand Management Misconduct

As with human relationships, research showed that the quality of consumer-brand relationships depends on trustworthiness, reliability, supportiveness, and accountability for one's own actions (Aaker, Fournier, & Brasel, 2004; Fournier, 1998). If one or more of these factors is violated by a company's operation, the relationship between a brand and consumers can seriously deteriorate or even dissolve. This particularly applies if promised brand benefits (i.e. functional, experiential, or symbolic) are not fulfilled (Fournier, 1998; Kähr et al., 2016; Keller 1993). In this sense, Huber, Vogel, and Meyer (2009, p. 132) define brand misconduct as "the actions of a brand owner that seriously disappoint the consumer's brand expectations [...] resulting in an enormous public impact and, in most cases, a negative consumer response to the brand." Specifically, the authors differentiate four types of brand management misconduct:

- (1) *Insufficient product quality*: based on different information cues such as reviews, advertisements, or prior experiences, consumers attribute functional features and a certain level of quality to a specific product. If these operational performance expectations are not fulfilled, consumers tend to distrust their prevalent brand perceptions and devalue their individual brand relationship. Such product failures sometimes occur not only in the form of isolated incidents; instead, they can also be systematic in nature and thus cause an entire product-harm crisis (Dawar & Pillutla, 2000). A brand's meaning is especially at risk if the general public classifies the misconduct as threat to their safety or to other basic human needs. *Mercedes-Benz*, for example, experienced a serious product-harm crisis in 1997 when their newly introduced *A-Class* flipped during the moose test (Brown, 1997).

- (2) *Lack of service orientation*: the second type of misconduct embraces all forms of brands' service-related failures. Examples include inadequate or delayed product delivery, inappropriate communication, or an insufficient complaint management (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). Troublesome service touchpoints often impair consumers' purchase intentions and generate a negative public discourse around the focal brand. A prominent example is the case of *United Airlines* breaking Canadian musician Dave Carroll's guitar. As the company did not react to multiple compensation requests, the annoyed guitarist wrote a song about the incident that went viral on *YouTube* (i.e. 150,000 views within one day in 2009; 18 million views in 2018) and harmed *United Airlines* seriously (i.e. an approximately \$180 million or 10% decrease in share value in 2009) (Ayres, 2009).
- (3) *Symbolic-psychological misconduct*: another cause of consumer irritation can be grounded in the inability of brands to provide expected symbolic and experiential benefits. Especially shortcomings related to the delivery of promised sensory pleasures and positive cognitive stimulations can result in consumers' psychological rejection of a brand (Aaker et al., 2004). Moreover, if a brand proves to be incapable of creating and conveying a desired self-identity then consumers are frequently alienated and refuse further public consumption of the underlying brand. Such kind of symbolic misconduct can occur if marketers reposition a brand to reach new target customers with whom the existing customers can't identify. Accordingly, unwelcome reference groups often trigger strong negative effects on the self-brand connection of prevalent target customers (Escalas & Bettman, 2005).
- (4) *Socially debatable actions*: the last form of brand misconduct deals with the violation of consumers' expectations towards corporate social responsibility (CSR), ethical norms, and moral standards. According to the *triple bottom line*, CSR activities should enforce a firm's ecological, economical, and social sustainability (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012). If a company fails to comply with promised values or socially expected norms, stakeholders (in particular consumers, shareholders, or non-governmental organisations such as *Greenpeace*) tend to either withdraw their brand trust and investments, or publicly denounce the brand's misbehaviour (Fournier & Avery, 2011; Humphreys & Thompson, 2014). Examples of socially debatable actions include poor working conditions and child labour abuse within *Apple's* or *Nike's* supply chain, *Shell's* intention to sink the *Brent Spar* oil platform, or *Google's* censorship in the Chinese market (Huber et al., 2009).

Similarly, in their research on consumer-brand sabotage, Kähr et al. (2016) distinguish between two company-based sources for individuals' turning hostile against brands: (1) performance-based stimuli (i.e. product or service failures), and (2) value-based stimuli (i.e. violation of expected brand values). Their findings indicate that, through mental escalation processes, consumers evaluate the significance of these brand stimuli based on their individual experiences and interactions with the brand. Especially in the event of repeatedly negative brand experiences, consumers tend to develop adverse emotions and hostile cognitions. In line with appraisal theories, consumers' appendant reactions (e.g. instrumental or hostile aggressions) are subject to profound ruminations about these feelings and to contingency factors, such as having an aggressive mindset, the existing versatility of a brand's personality profile, and the quality of the prevalent consumer-brand relationship (Kähr et al., 2016).

General speaking, market actors devalue their relationship with brands or engage in anti-brand behaviours if they assume the brand to be involved in negative conduct that is harmful to their socio-cultural environment. Yet, due to varying levels of ideological containment, the perceived gravity of such misconduct differs across individuals (Klein, Smith, & John, 2004). Some even blame brands for product- or service-harm crises, which other organisations along the supply chain are responsible for: a phenomenon called *brand scapegoating* (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014). In particular, this occurs if strong negative brand-related disaster myths are generated by the public expert and media system. Such myths can arise, spread, and become internalised by consumers promptly without warning (Bryant & Miron, 2004). This can lead to either passive brand resistance or active brand sabotage, both of which jeopardise a brand's public meaning and value (Grégoire, Laufer, & Tripp, 2010; Kähr et al., 2016). To contain the negative effects, a brand crisis requires an appropriate response strategy. Yet, marketers are often unprepared or overstrained in dealing with the aftermath of their brand's misconduct. Although there is little research on this topic so far, pioneering studies reveal reaction strategies such as (1) *appeasement* – apologising to the affected stakeholders, (2) *counterstatement* – clarification that failure triggers are outside of the firm's control, or (3) *counterattack* – questioning the truth and objectivity of the accusations (Kähr et al., 2016). On an operative level, it is crucial to listen carefully to public and social media content as well as to act rapidly, transparently, and case-sensitively (Aaker et al., 2004; Dutta & Pullig, 2011; Herhausen, Ludwig, Grewal, Wulf, & Schoegel, 2019).

2.1.3.2 Consumer Resistance and Brand Sabotage

The concept of consumer resistance is commonly linked to behaviours of rejection, deferment, opposition, and infringement. These come along with emotions such as anger, frustration, outrage, or hatred and cognitions such as betrayal, identity threat, or powerlessness (Kähr et al., 2016). Yet, consumer resistance theories have their roots in the field of cultural studies (de Certeau, 1984). Scholars of the topic are driven by the question of how and why subculturalists oppose hegemonic structures by resisting the dominant culture that the public agrees to be normal (Hebdige, 1979). On this, the post-structuralist Poster (1992, p. 94) defines resistance as “the way individuals and groups practice a strategy of appropriation in response to structures of domination.” Moreover, a comprehensive literature review by Hollander and Einwohner (2004) revealed that action and opposition are the core elements of all analysed conceptions of resistance. Action implies that resistance is not a state of being but contains an active behaviour (i.e. verbal, cognitive, or physical doings). Opposition refers to the deviant attitude towards a dominant system that is perceived to be unjust or defective.

Both the marketplace ideology, with its consumption norms, and the market power of organisations can be considered as such dominant structures (Dalli, Romani, & Gistri, 2006). If market actors find themselves in opposition to the prevailing consumer culture, they might develop distrust in the oppressive marketing system and engage in resistant consumer behaviours (Dobscha, 1998). Accordingly, Firat and Venkatesh (1995) coined the notion of *liberatory postmodernism*, which states that consumers use their emancipatory power to (re-)gain control over marketer-dominated brands. Research has shown that both individuals and collectives take advantage of their freedom to create, alter, and impair a brand’s meaning by rebelling against its imposed positioning (Klein, 1999; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Thompson et al., 2006). However, marketing scholars doubt whether consumers are actually able to escape the dominant market forces (Holt, 2002; Kozinets, 2002). Nevertheless, a broad variety of consumer resistance practices can be identified. Penaloza and Price (1993) discuss these practices along four dimensions: (1) the *organisational dimension* differs between individual and collective resistance activities, (2) the *goals dimension* contrasts reformist and radical behaviours, (3) the *tactical dimension* distinguishes between actions offending the marketing mix and actions altering products’ meanings, and (4) the *relational dimension* delimits behaviours with and without the utilisation of marketing institutions or agents.

Strictly speaking, it is often difficult to categorise acts of resistance precisely, since they are part of an ongoing continuum with a varying degree of negative brand impact. This continuum ranges from passive avoidance behaviours via mitigating acts of coping (e.g. deflection or downsizing) up to different forms of active rebellion (e.g. complaining, jamming, or retaliating) (Fournier, 1998; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010). To enable a case-specific handling of such activities, Kähr et al. (2016) developed a conceptual framework of aggressive consumer behaviours in which they differentiate between instrumental and hostile forms of aggression. Instrumental aggression is associated with consumer behaviours that do not ultimately intend to actively harm a brand, but rather to vent negative emotions towards a brand by pursuing other objectives (e.g. by sharing negative experiences, expressing frustration, gaining self-fulfilment, or restoring trust by changing a brand's conduct). Related forms of resistance are commonly *negative word-of-mouth* (De Matos & Rossi, 2008), *brand avoidance* (Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009), *consumer boycott* (Klein et al., 2004; Sen, Gürhan-Canli, & Morwitz, 2001), *voluntary simplicity* and *dispossession* (Cherrier & Murray, 2007; Zavestoski, 2002), *culture jamming* (Klein, 1999; Lasn, 1999), *customer retaliation* (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008; Grégoire, Tripp, & Legoux, 2009), *authenticity celebration* and *transformative festivals* (Kozinets, 2002), *doppelgänger brand images* (Thompson et al., 2006), and *anti-brand activism* (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). The essential forms of instrumental resistance behaviours are discussed in detail below:

Firstly, dissatisfactory consumption experiences can result in negative word-of-mouth. This is characterised by informal, negative communication among consumers about their personal opinions of goods and services (Zhang, Feick, & Mitta, 2014). Earlier research has shown that the central triggers for transmitting negative word-of-mouth are disappointing company performances, unsuccessful complaints to the firm, and strong social ties to the recipient of the critique (De Matos & Rossi, 2008; Wetzer, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2007). Besides, word-of-mouth has been shown to spread rapidly and to have a strong impact on recipients' purchase decisions (Trusov, Bucklin, & Pauwels, 2009).

Next, consumer boycotts indicate people who refrain from purchasing or consuming a brand in order to protest against an egregious company act or behaviour (John & Klein, 2003). Boycotters are usually driven by social, political, moral, or environmental causes. Popular examples are the *PepsiCo* boycott, the California gas boycott, the *Mitsubishi* boycott, or the *Buy Nothing Day* (Sen et al., 2001). According to Klein et al. (2004),

consumers' key motivations for boycotting are (1) to make a societal difference by changing the target firm's conduct, (2) to gain social self-esteem by being perceived as a helpful and moral person, and (3) to act collectively without necessarily constraining their own consumption. On the whole, consumers consider boycotting as pro-social behaviour that can benefit other market actors, since the target firm suffers considerable economic loss and thus reshapes its business activities (Klein et al., 2004).

A further type of instrumental aggression concerns customer retaliation. This relates to actions on the part of customers that intend to cause a company inconvenience after the former get the impression of being treated wrongly (Grégoire et al., 2009). Hence, the main objective of retaliation is to reconcile with a brand by restoring the balance between equity and trust (Funches, Markley, & Davis, 2009). Common patterns of customer retaliation include creating negative media publicity, insulting frontline and service employees, or operating complaint websites (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Moreover, research suggests that brand betrayal is the fundamental driver that urges customers to restore fairness by seeking retaliation (Grégoire et al., 2009).

For its part, culture jamming deals with the practice of parodying advertisements to alter both transmitted messages and brand meanings (Klein, 1999). The modified messages aim to reflect the underlying truth and intentions that the jamming movement assumes to be behind a company's brand advertisements. The Canadian magazine *Adbuster*, for example, is built around such a jamming movement and uses guerrilla communication to disrupt mainstream capitalistic structures that are based on corporate advertising (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004; Rumbo, 2002). In practice, to rebel against the marketing system, culture jammers modify brand logos (cf. doppelgänger brand images; Thompson et al., 2006), hijack product- or service-related images, or revise a company's statements in a satirical or ironic way (Lasn, 1999). In doing so, they usually focus on capitalism's most vulnerable and well-known symbolic assets: high-value global brands such as *Nike*, *McDonald's*, or *Starbucks* (Holt 2002; Klein 1999).

Moreover, anti-brand activism refers to consumer collectives that follow disruptive ideologies and launch common anti-branding activities to publicly spread their concerns about corporate practices (Holt, 2002; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Especially the anonymously networked online space provides fertile ground for the formation of such anti-brand communities (Krishnamurthy & Kucuk, 2009). So, various implementations

of anti-brand activism (e.g. anti-brand websites, protests, demonstrations, information campaigns, large-scale boycotts, or viral shit-storms) can be planned, organised, or even executed efficiently (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010). A prominent example of anti-brand activism is the social movement around Naomi Klein's cultural manifesto *No Logo*, which criticises the unfettered globalisation and links branding to cultural degradations, environmental issues, and forms of human exploitation (Klein, 1999). Research has shown that the behavioural foundations for participating in anti-branding activities generally comprise three urges: (1) to disclose marketplace inequalities, (2) to share ideological ideas and restrictive lifestyles with peers, and (3) to construct a new collective identity (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006, 2010; Holt, 1997).

In contrast to these forms of instrumental aggression, Kähr et al. (2016) also revealed consumer behaviours that primarily aim at causing severe harm to a focal brand. The authors designate these intentional acts of actively deteriorating a brand's perceived meanings as *consumer brand sabotage*. They blame digital technologies and the media as major enablers of such sabotaging activities. In addition to performance-based stimuli (e.g. product failures), particularly value-based stimuli (e.g. unethical brand practices) trigger such hostile aggression behaviours. More precisely, Kähr et al. (2016) identified five essential elements for the classification of brand resistance as consumer-brand sabotage: firstly, an actual act of sabotage, either online or offline, has to be undertaken (i.e. mere thoughts or preliminary activities are insufficient); secondly, the sabotage has to be carried out consciously and intentionally; thirdly, both customers and non-customers can become brand saboteurs; fourthly, harming a brand is the sabotage's principle objective; and finally, the activities aim to cause harm by a direct impairment of other consumers' brand associations. An example of consumer-brand sabotage is a viral *YouTube* and *Twitter* campaign around the hashtag *#FitchTheHomeless*. This was launched by a non-customer to harm *Abercrombie & Fitch* while repositioning the brand as uncool and worn by homeless people after Michael Jeffries, the company's former CEO, made the following disparaging statement: "A lot of people don't belong [in our clothes], and they can't belong. Are we exclusionary? Absolutely. Those companies that are in trouble are trying to target everybody: young, old, fat, skinny" (Glazek, 2013).

The literature on consumer resistance is, on the whole, highly fragmented. Nevertheless, all the concepts covered have market participants in common who disrupt brand meanings through deliberate behaviours. Moreover, practical evidence suggests that

brand meaning disruptions are becoming more serious and frequent. This is in line with a growing number of customer complaints and consumers' increasing distrust in marketing practices (Darke & Ritchie, 2007). Market actors are unsettled by the suspicion of manipulative forces and overwhelmed by the pace and ambiguity of changing market conditions (e.g. new product and brand developments). They therefore internalise a repelling mindset shaped by society's ethical standards, the fear of being mistreated, and their desire to construct unique self-identities (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Accordingly, consumers seek to (re-)gain control over brands by demonstrating their market power through resistance and sabotage behaviours. The related degradation of brand images, reputations, and consumer-brand relationships poses a serious risk to any established brand management (Thompson et al., 2006). Beyond considering the declining effectiveness of marketing activities, marketers also have to be more than ever careful about what they communicate or how they position a brand. Any questionable branding activity can be scrutinised or misinterpreted by market actors and thus trigger fast-spreading resistance movements that can cause harmful brand meaning disruptions.

2.1.3.3 Co-Optation

In contrast to consumer resistance and brand sabotage, co-optation theory is not about individuals or collectives who disrupt brand meanings, but instead about the general mainstream society. This especially relates to the realm of *brandscape*s. According to Salzer-Mörling and Strannegård (2007, p. 412), a branded landscape, or a brandscape, is a "culture or a market where brands and brand-related items such as signs and logos increasingly dominate everyday life." Since consumers are ideologically infused by branded market experiences, they create individual lifestyles based on available symbolic resources (Askegaard, 2006). Thompson and Arsel (2004) developed this notion further by specifying the *hegemonic brandscape*. This refined concept refers to a cultural system of servicescapes that provide a variety of meaning sources (e.g. material objects and brand-related discourses). Consumers incorporate these sources into their interpretative thinking and utilise them for identity construction purposes. In addition, the authors explain that hegemonic brandscapes shape both consumers lifestyles and their perceived brand meanings by functioning as shared cultural cues for acting, thinking, and feeling. Yet, hegemonic brandscapes are not stable but rather underlie an ongoing transformation process that originates in subcultural structures and can provoke mainstream brand co-optation (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007).

According to Schiele and Venkatesh (2016, p. 430), “co-optation theory explains how the mainstream adopts the symbols and practices of a subculture.” Brands in particular can serve as such co-opted subcultural symbols (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). The underlying dilemmas are rebellious sub- or countercultures that neglect dominant cultural norms, create their own tastes and styles, and distinguish themselves by anti-hegemonic practices (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). In order to counteract these movements and to protect the dominant cultural code, the mainstream adopts these countercultural norms, symbols, styles, or practices and commodifies them into the market-dominant logic of meanings and behaviours (Clark, 2003). On an individual level, mainstream consumers are attracted by the countercultural expressions and utilise the commodified brands, styles, tastes, or products to construct distinct self-identities (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Hence, a society’s broad mass of consumers demands the co-opted countercultural symbols for individual purposes. As a result, these symbols are connected to mainstream meanings. In turn, the ongoing commercialisation discourages the countercultural rebels, as it takes away their basis for social distinction (Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016). This causes them to pursue new rebellious identification symbols, which triggers the cycle of co-optation to start over again. In summary, the interplay of subcultural brand appropriations and mainstream brandscapes can be understood through the *subcultural commodification model* (Goulding & Saren, 2007; Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016). Based on a revised version of this model, figure 5 presents the fundamental process elements of the brand meaning co-optation cycle: (1) rebellion, (2) fragmentation, (3) commodification, and (4) reclamation or reorientation.

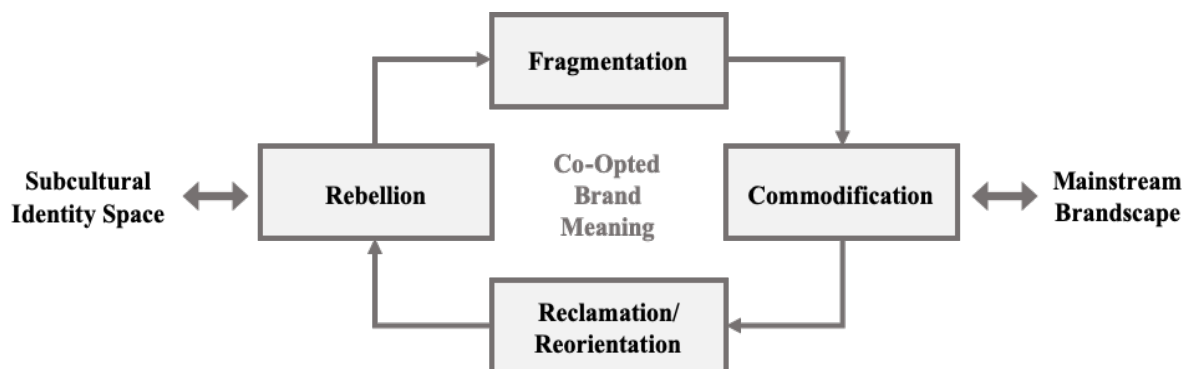


Figure 5: Brand Meaning Co-Optation Cycle (adapted from Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016).

Anchored in subcultural identity systems, the rebellion against mainstream structures accordingly constitutes symbolic brand meaning contextualisation. By fragmentation, suitable objects are charged with subcultural meanings and allocated to social groups.

Branded products thus become distinct signifiers for subcultural group membership. In return, mainstream consumers are attracted to utilise the meaning-laden brands for their own identity needs. As revealed by Schiele and Venkatesh (2016), this commodification process transfers subcultural meanings into mainstream brandscapes by using different market mechanisms. These include *mimicking* (i.e. the imitation of others to create social affinity; Tanner, Ferraro, Chartrand, Bettman, & Baaren, 2007), *mainstreaming* (i.e. the assimilation of subcultural symbols into commercial market standards), *mis-labelling* (i.e. mainstream's inaccurate attribution of symbolic items to a subculture), and *misinterpretation* (i.e. the false interpretation of subcultural meanings by members of other cultures). Co-opted brands obviously lose their value as distinct signifiers, so, to restore authenticity, subcultural actors begin to renegotiate their distinct identity by means of reclamation or reorientation processes. Therefore, to become more exclusive and inimitable, they either reclaim their existing symbols by novel practices, which are often trivial for outsiders, or they reorientate themselves by adopting new symbolic objects that they can appropriate and rebel with. In sum, these behavioural patterns feed the continuous cycle of brand meaning co-optation (Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016).

A related example is provided by the orthopaedic health-sandals brand *Birkenstock*. When *Birkenstock* became a countercultural identification symbol for hippie and hipster communities, the mainstream fashion system became attracted and co-opted the brand. Today fashionistas all around the world wear *Birkenstocks*, which they formerly disclaimed as highly unaesthetic. Thus, for countercultural rebels, the appropriation of distinct styles, brands, or practices can be a self-defeating activity (Health, 2001). By contrast, for legal brand owners, co-optation can imply the chance to obtain meaningful brands with broad public awareness and sale growth, or the risk of brand meanings that change uncontrollably (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Co-optation is commonly not initiated by marketers but is instead caused exogenously by a social majority of consumers who are attracted by similar identification symbols. Nevertheless, marketers should also be aware of the potential negative effects of this kind of brand disruption. In particular, brand dilution and brand morphing pose serious value threats.

Accordingly, brand dilution relates to negative consumption externalities: the more users a brand has, the less concrete and homogeneous its meaning (Ferraro, Kirmani, & Matherly, 2013). Moreover, Kates and Goh (2003) reveal that brand morphing implies the alteration of brand meanings across social, national, and cultural contexts on the

basis of reinterpretations by local market actors and social collectives (e.g. by brand communities). This is the case if brand communications assign different meanings to brands for different marketplaces, or if brand meanings emerge in subcultures and become co-opted by the mainstream. In either case, brand perceptions are subject to reinterpretations by diverging market actors and, thus, to morphs across social and cultural contexts (Kay, 2006). This becomes particularly evident within *brand publics*. According to Arvidsson and Caliandro (2016), a brand public is an organised (online) media space composed of a multitude of isolated, brand-related statements that are connected by enduring practices of mediation (e.g. by hashtags). Since a brand public is primarily structured around individuals' affects and heterogeneous perceptions, consumers do not develop a strong collective identity for the focal brand but instead utilise the brand as a beneficial lever to gain publicity (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016). This suggests that brand publics are a suitable realm for the observation of diluting or morphing brand meanings. As brands are co-opted and meanings morph, companies not only lose their immediate connection to customers but also their control over a brand's identity (Kay, 2006). Hence, to prevent brand meanings from becoming inconsistent, polysemic, or irrelevant, marketers have to deal with co-optations appropriately.

2.1.4 Brand Meaning Contestation

In principle, Thompson and Haytko (1997, p. 38) delineate the brand meaning space as “a contestable terrain that consumers rework in terms of their localized knowledge and value systems.” However, the authors do not specify in detail the inherent structures and procedural dynamics of this contestable market terrain. It remains unclear how and why antagonistic market actors alter the prevalent meaning of brands. Therefore, the concept of brand meaning contestation, which the present research work aims to develop, intends to constitute a profound paradigm. Notably, although a theory of contested brands has not yet been published, a preliminary notion exists (see chapter 3.3.2).^{*} Building on this notion, the contested brands concept attempts to explain how antagonistic market actors disrupt and negotiate prevalent brand meanings. Therefore, the conception of contested brands aims to reconcile the fragmented literature on brand meaning co-creation, on consumer resistance and brand sabotage, and on cultural appropriation and co-optation (see figure 6). Taken as a whole, all these corresponding theories contain certain forms

^{*}The preliminary notion of contested brands was first theorised by Prof. Ernst Mohr, Ph.D., Prof. Dr. Torsten Tomczak, and Dr. David Holzer, linked to a graduate marketing course at the University of St. Gallen, Switzerland.

of brand meaning contestations that emanate from clashing interests of different parties. These contesting parties comprise legal brand owners and sovereign market actors such as individual consumers, social collectives, and the general public. Accordingly, for brand meaning co-creation the contestants usually are target and non-target customers, for consumer resistance and brand sabotage they are legal brand owners and individual consumer or social collectives, and for cultural appropriation and co-optation they are members of subcultures and the mainstream society (Clark, 2003). So far, to the author's best knowledge, an overarching model that merges these theoretical perspectives has not yet been conceptualised and published. In this regard, the research at hand seeks to make an essential theoretical and practical contribution by developing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon of contested brands.

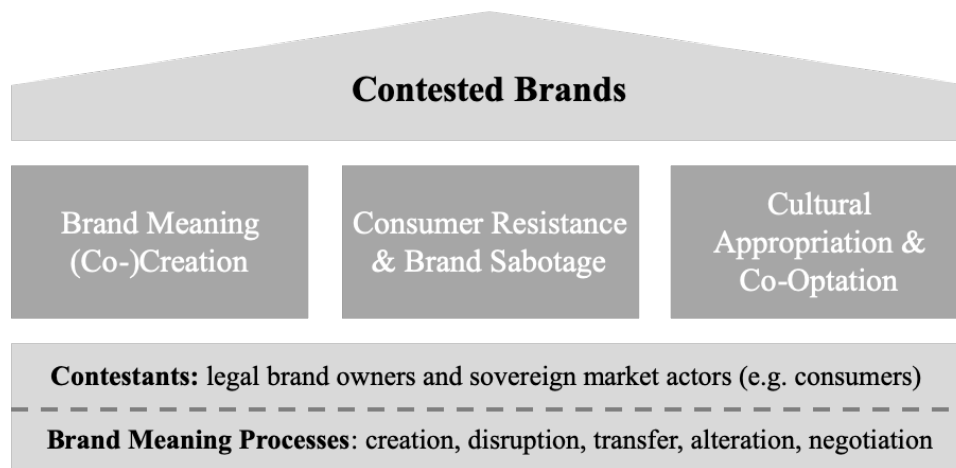


Figure 6: Conceptual Frame of Contested Brands (own illustration).

Nevertheless, some researchers have already touched on related topics or provided insights for comparable market phenomena. Thompson and Haytko (1997), for instance, explored consumers' use of fashion discourses to appropriate countervailing cultural meanings and hence to construct diversified self-identities. The authors revealed that macro-societal structures (e.g. socioeconomic and political systems), in the interplay with cultural intermediaries (e.g. artists, fashion designers, celebrities, journalists, retailers, or advertisers), provide the basis for idiographic meanings as well as for countervailing cultural discourses and their institutional integration. Consumers negotiate brand meanings in diverse social occasions connected with a multitude of consumption objects and juxtaposed cultural narratives (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Based on consumers' roles as interpreters and brand reconstruction artists (i.e. roles that are determined by their lifestyles, personal histories, life goals, localised frames of

socio-cultural references, and material living conditions), they appropriate brand meanings to create both self- and social-identities (Berthon et al., 2009; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). In addition, various researchers have shown that consumers have the ability to change the meanings attached to branded products or services by utilising them for the purpose of expressing an individualised and delimited sense of their personal selves (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Elliott & Davies, 2006; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Kozinets, 2001).

Moreover, in their work entitled *self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning*, Escalas and Bettman (2005) explored how consumers form profound self-brand connections with regard to different reference groups (i.e. in- and out-groups). Their findings suggest that, depending on the related reference groups, consumers purchase brands to construct their individual self-concepts. Building on the *construal level theory* (Trope & Liberman, 2010), two experimental studies demonstrate causalities between consumers' level of self-brand connection and the related reference group type. If a brand's image is consistent with the image of an in-group (i.e. a social group to which the consumer belongs), a higher self-brand connection could be detected. By contrast, if a brand's image is in line with the image of an out-group (i.e. a social group to which the consumer does not belong), a lower self-brand connection or even an active brand refusal was observed (Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Furthermore, the authors revealed that this negative effect is stronger for consumers with an independent self-construal (i.e. self-focused people who deemphasise others) in contrast to those with an interdependent self-construal (i.e. people who focus on others and their social self). This indicates that independent consumers have a greater need to distance themselves from social out-groups in order to avoid becoming affiliated with unwelcome associations (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, 2005). Consequently, consumers' brand choices can be understood as a strategic instrument to furnish their self-concepts with desired meanings. However, any brand consumption by members of antagonistic out-groups can impair a brand's meaning as perceived by in-group members: the brand becomes contested.

Other researchers analysed the effects of *conspicuous brand usage* (Ferraro et al., 2013), or of the *performing self* (Elliott & Davies, 2006), on the alteration and dilution of brand meanings. Conspicuous brand usage refers to consumers' brand-related practices for gaining public attention. Ferraro et al. (2013) indicated that such attention-grabbing behaviours underlie the ulterior motive of impression management, and change

observers' attitudes towards brands depending on their level of self-brand connection (i.e. the overlap of the self-concept and the brand image). Observers with a low self-brand connection showed degradation towards both the brand and the conspicuous brand users, whereas, observers with a high self-brand connection retained their positive stance towards the brand. This suggests the possibility of contested brands for conspicuous brand usage, or for status-driven marketplace performances, which implies the risk of brand dilution (Ferraro et al., 2013; Üstüner & Thompson, 2010) or consumer brand confusion (Foxman, Berger, & Cote, 1992). Also, research has shown that individuals partly use brands to exhibit multiple selves; some of these are performing selves and others are undesired selves. Both have the potential to contest a brand's public meaning. The performing self relates to conspicuous consumption activities and consumers' desires for positive public impressions. This self thus goes through an ongoing process of pretending and becoming (Elliott & Davies, 2006). By contrast, the undesired self is one a person fears to resemble. According to Hogg and Banister (2001), undesired selves provoke the avoidance of brands that are negatively perceived or associated with disliked consumer stereotypes. Altogether, the expression of (dis-)taste by symbolic (non-)consumption constitutes a strategic cue for consumers' identity construction.

Another concept that relates to the idea of brand meaning contestation is framed by Wipperfurth (2005) as *brand hijack*. This concerns the phenomenon of consumers' taking away a brand from its legal owner in order to transform its meaning and positioning. In general, the author differentiates between two types of brand hijacking: (1) *the serendipitous hijack* and (2) *the co-created hijack*. Serendipitous hijacks are largely linked to brand fanatics in subcultures who seek to gain control over a brand's persona, use, and ideology. This form of brand appropriation is usually unanticipated and unintended by marketing professionals. Yet, companies often attempt to derive benefits from a serendipitous hijack. *Harley Davidson* being hijacked by outlaw bikers and cultivated within the brand-sponsored *Harley Owners Group* provides a well-known example (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). On the other hand, co-created hijacking specifies marketers' active practice of inviting subcultures to co-create a brand's meaning with the intention of mainstream brand adoption, which equals an enforced co-optation (Wipperfurth, 2005). In the majority of cases, brand hijackers operate within the hard-to-control online environment. The webspace allows them to be anonymous, flexible, militant, collaborative, and highly participative. They can therefore make it

very difficult for companies to trace and mitigate their hijacking activities (Cova & Pace, 2006; Kozinets, 1999). Moreover, a specific manifestation of brand hijacks relates to the theory of *doppelgänger brand images*, developed by Thompson et al. (2006). These images pose a potential risk for emotional branding strategies, which strive to create relationship-oriented and story-intensive brands. Thompson et al. (2006, p. 50) define doppelgänger brand images as “disparaging images and stories about a brand that are circulated in popular culture by a loosely organized network of consumers, anti-brand activists, bloggers, and opinion leaders.” Hence, sovereign market actors can cause detrimental meaning contestations between the brand images promoted by the legal owner and their self-created doppelgänger brand images (Giesler, 2012). Prominent examples of such doppelgänger brand images circulating the Internet are derogative logo-disfigurements of brands such as *BP*, *Starbucks*, or *Burger King* (see figure 7).



Figure 7: Examples of Doppelgänger Brand Images (adapted from Thompson et al, 2006).

Taking it as a whole, brand meaning contestations embrace a variety of theoretical approaches, all of which tackle specific parts of a holistic analytical idea. The fundamental elements of this overarching idea are the creation, disruption, transfer, alteration, and negotiation of brand meanings by antagonistic market actors. Whereas brand meaning creation and disruption have already been discussed above, the transfer of brand meanings will be analysed from a semiotic perspective in the next chapter. For its part, brand alteration refers to the process of meaning change due to brand appropriations by dissociative reference groups that attach idiosyncratic connotations to a focal brand (Escalas & Bettman, 2005; White & Dahl, 2006, 2007). This often leads to an incongruity with the target group’s perceived brand meanings and therefore either to an ambiguous brand image or to the active negotiation of brand meanings that are prevalent in the marketplace (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010). According to Ligas and Cotte (1999), brand meaning negotiations involve three analytical dimensions: (1) *the marketing environment* – marketers’ branding activities to create an intended brand

meaning, (2) *the individual environment* – consumers’ brand usage for the purpose of self-representation, and (3) *the social environment* – symbolic interactions and mutual perceptions of brand consumption (see figure 8). In general, brand meanings are socially constructed by a steady interplay between the legal brand owner’s conduct, the beliefs and actions of individual market actors, and a brand’s adoption by social collectives (Ligas & Cotte, 1999; Thompson & Haytko, 1997). To ensure effective, brand-related communication (e.g. by verbal expressions, gestures, or the use of material objects), individuals must agree upon an aligned brand meaning, at least within their in-groups. Such agreements underlie a socialisation process of brand meaning negotiation that is steered by social rules of mutual exchange, acceptance, and self-integration. Otherwise a brand remains ambiguous and contested. Moreover, Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2010) revealed consumers’ motivations to negotiate a brand’s meaning: some intend to gain marketplace autonomy, others want to radicalise modern values, while others seek to transform their self-identity. In any case, market actors “engage in three learning processes when negotiating the meaning of a brand: (1) counterfactual thinking, (2) discursive storytelling, and (3) noncompulsory observation” (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010, p. 333). In summary, proper management of a contested brand constitutes a complex marketing task with the need to consider various perspectives on the creation, disruption, and negotiation of prevalent brand meanings.

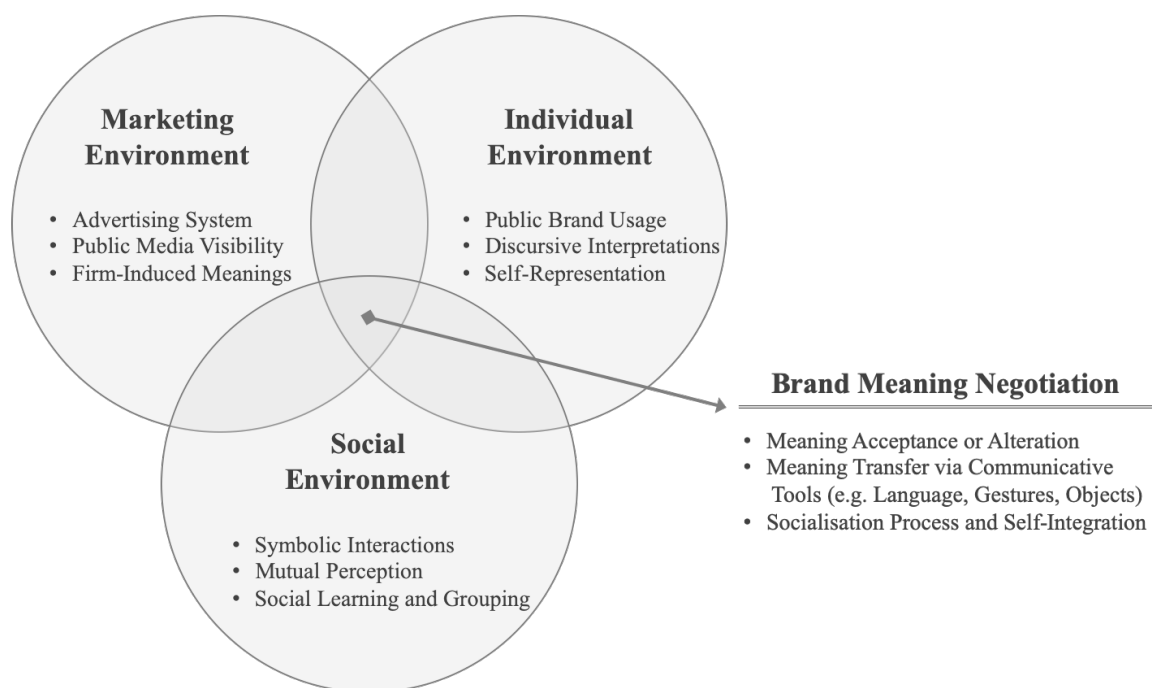


Figure 8: Brand Meaning Negotiation Framework (adapted from Ligas & Cotte, 1999).

2.2 Signs and their Significance

Understanding the contestation of brand meanings is subject to knowing the underlying symbolic dynamics of brands as signs. This chapter thus presents substantial theoretical perspectives on signs, their significance, and the transfer of signified meanings.

2.2.1 Semiotics in Consumer Research

Theories on consumer behaviour and consumer culture are frequently related to semiotic research (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Mick, Burroughs, Hetzel, & Brannen, 2004). This stems from semiotics' interpretative capacity to trace meaning-producing events. Drawing semiotic parallels is especially helpful in analysing brands and their meaning making. Similar to linguistic signs, brands' symbolic meanings, ideological conceptions, and cultural embodiment depend on encoding and decoding processes, which are performed by market actors involved in the communicative process (Mick, 1986). In this regard, Ransdell (1977) distinguishes between general semiotics, which aims to grasp the epistemological nature of meaning, and specific semiotics, which seeks to explain meaning acquisitions through sign interpretations. Both have been studied by two path-breaking linguists who laid the foundations for today's semiotic research: Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce.

The Swiss linguist de Saussure (1916) is considered to be one of the founders of semiology, a science that aims to study signs and their underlying mechanisms. According to Mick (1986, p. 197), "Saussure defined a linguistic sign as a wholly arbitrary, dyadic relationship between a concept that is the signified (e.g. blouse) and a sound image that is the signifier (e.g. the spoken word 'blouse')." In marketing terms, the *signifier* represents a branded object (e.g. a consumption good marked by a brand logo) and the *signified* indicates the object's associated meaning (see figure 9).

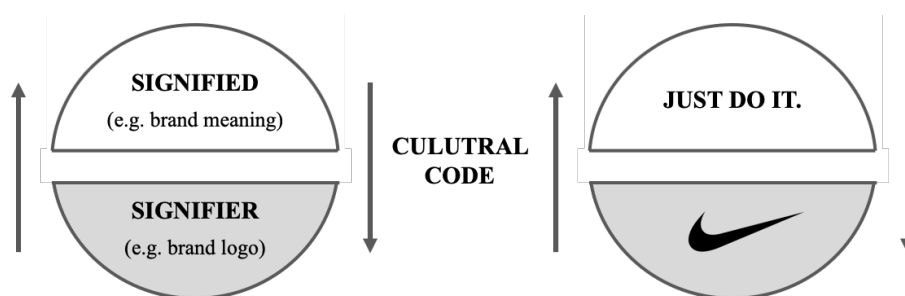


Figure 9: De Saussure's Dyadic Concept of a Sign (adapted from de Saussure, 1916).

Accordingly, the well-recognised *Swoosh*, for example, which represents the logo of *Nike*, signifies an athletic and fitness lifestyle brand under the meaningful slogan *Just do It*. In general, this dyadic signifier-signified relation, in combination with the notion of interacting signs, constitutes the basis for Saussure's thoughts on the result-driven creation of meanings (de Saussure, 1916). Mutually intelligible communication therefore requires a common understanding, among the actors involved, of the link between signifier and signified. Such an equilibrium in the signifier-signified relationship is established by a subliminal decryption code, which is based on common socio-cultural roots of the interacting parties (Mick et al., 2004). However, due to the widespread diversity of cultures, a multiplicity of decryption codes can arise, bringing signifier and signified together in heterogeneous equilibriums. In turn, these dissimilar cultural codes can seriously impede the consistent understanding of expressive objects and, thus, cause a brand's meaning to become contested.

The American linguist Peirce, by contrast, established a perspective on semiotics that manifests itself in a triadic relationship. As shown in figure 10, in Peirce's theory of signs, a communicative process requires a *sign*, a *signified object*, and an *interpretant* (Peirce, 1934). This concept is designated as Peirce's triadic semiosis.

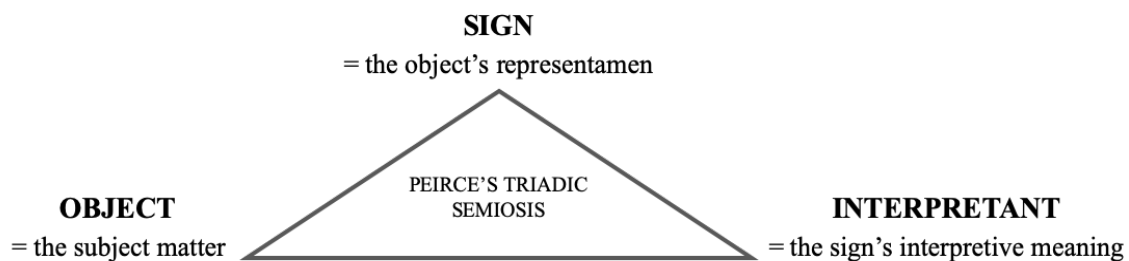


Figure 10: Peirce's Triadic Semiosis (adapted from Mick, 1986).

In this sense, Peirce distinguishes three phenomenological categories of signs: *icons*, *indexes*, and *symbols*. Firstly, an icon resembles or imitates a signified object (e.g. Magritte's painting of a pipe). Secondly, an index creates a direct, logical connection between itself and the object (e.g. a traffic sign that warns of a slippery road). Thirdly, a symbol denotes no direct resemblance to an object; instead, it solely manifests itself through socio-cultural conventions of interpretation (e.g. flags as symbols for countries). The related model of semiosis emphasises the interpretation of an objectified sign as a decoding process, dependent on market actors' characteristics, social institutions, and the cultural environment (Peirce, 1934). The interpretant can be considered as both the

meaning of the sign inherent in the interpreter's perception and as a sign by itself, since it can be re-interpreted by other market actors (Mick, 1986). Hence, communication is an infinite process of perception, meaning generation, and (re-)interpretation of signs. Unlike de Saussure's static equilibrium model, Peirce's continuous process of meaning convergence facilitates a dynamic analysis of the emergence of contested brands.

Beyond that, another semiotic concept, which originates in the field of art theory, has the potential to merge the two oppositional perspectives coined by de Saussure and Peirce: *the construction and interpretation of representations* (Mohr, 2014, 2016). Generally speaking, representations are signs that stand for another matter or resemble a focal object. A work of art, for example, is a visual representation of an artist's thoughts and has a meaning that is contingent upon to the recipient's interpretation (Mitchell, 1995). Representations can therefore be analysed by the object, the manner, and the meaning they represent. This unifies both the result-oriented equilibrium of the signifier-signified relationship and the process-oriented meaning creation based on a continuous course of interpretative acts (Mohr, 2014). Representations thus provide a suitable path for investigating the alteration of meanings in postmodern societies. A brand, for instance, represents a meaning that underlies observers' idiosyncratic interpretations. Although marketers attempt to steer the related interpretation process through marketing activities, they can never entirely control it. Richins (1994) states that consumers inevitably attach connotative meanings to visible possessions, since they decode them in a given context shaped by their cultural values. This relates to the sociological notion of *agency*, which attributes individuals the capacity to think and act independently based on their own perceptions and choices. Only structural factors (e.g. ethnicity, gender, or customs) constrain a person's free decisions and actions (Giddens, 1979). Thus, the interpretation of a sign is tied to a consumer's structure and agency.

2.2.2 Reader-Response Theory

An important adaptation of semiotics to consumer research is the reader-response theory. Pursuant to this theory, the meaning consumers assign to a perceived message (e.g. a textual advertisement) depends on the reader's circumstances and characteristics (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Scott, 1994). The associated behaviours and the meaning co-creation of the perceived brand are thus contingent upon consumers' distinct personal and sociological attributes. More precisely, Puntoni et al. (2010) identified three major

factors influencing consumers' interpretation process, or rather the reading and decoding of signs. Firstly, *the idiosyncrasy of consumers' knowledge*, which results from both differences between socio-cultural backgrounds and differences within an individual's multiple self-manifestations. Secondly, *the proximal context*, which denotes the immediate circumstances under which the interpretation takes place. And thirdly, *the distal context*, which comprises the subliminal influence of cultural norms, societal values, and mass media intrusions. Determined by these influential factors, consumers perceive observed signs or messages (e.g. brand-related advertisements), decode them, and respond in an arbitrary manner (Scott, 1994). Product customisation rituals, such as developing an individual design for one's shoes, are examples of consumer responding practices. To adopt brands for own purposes and to create a unique self, consumption objects are modified and presented in altered ways (Allen et al., 2008).

Accordingly, in postmodern societies, symbols and signs acquire novel meanings as the roles of producers and consumers are redefined (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). Consumers, or rather *prosumers*, are nowadays meaning-producing entities by themselves (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010). Yet, members of the same ideological subculture often produce similar interpretations in response to market experiences. Such subcultures are called interpretative communities and usually form around a common symbolic understanding, but still allow for individual diversity (Hirschman, 1998b). This is further reflected by Baudrillard's (1998, p. 60) conception of the *social logic of consumption*. According to this logic, consumption in postmodern societies is considered as a process of signification in which objects convey signs to function as semiotic codes. To understand a signified message, individuals need to decode the sign by applying a socialised language. Only if both the sender and receiver of a sign know the same language are the designated meaning transfer and mutual comprehension possible (Izberk-Bilgin, 2010). Additionally, Baudrillard (1998) conceptualised consumption as a process of social differentiation. Due to societal norms, consumption objects are charged with sign-values and classified in a socio-hierarchical order. As a result, the consumption of signified objects becomes connected to the assignment of social status, power, and prestige. This Baudrillardian value code assigns consumption objects substantial significance in the process of self-construction and the materialisation of social distinction (Izberk-Bilgin, 2010). Moreover, the theory of mutual knowledge implies the need for consumers to be familiar with the appropriate decoding scheme to properly understand the consumption

practices of other market actors and to compose consumption baskets with desired signalling properties (Berthon et al., 2009).

Seen from a different perspective, consumers' idiosyncratic interpretations of ambiguous brand conducts or advertisement cues imply for marketers the contingency of semiotic polysemy. This denotes the dissemination of multiple brand meanings across an audience in response to a unitary brand message (Puntoni et al., 2010). Such polysemy can result in different responses among the message's receivers. Those who feel themselves to be part of the respective target group usually show more favourable brand attitudes and behaviours compared to those who feel excluded by the brand's message (Whittler & Spira, 2002). Moreover, Puntoni et al. (2010) differentiate between two forms of marketing polysemy: *synchronic polysemy* refers to brand messages that mean different things to different groups of consumers, whereas *diachronic polysemy* occurs when individuals interpret an identical brand message differently over time. In both cases, conventional brand management determines what a brand or advertisement should mean to consumers and degrades any other meaning as an unintentional consequence or as miscomprehension (Jacoby & Hoyer, 1982; Pollay, 1986).

Nonetheless, an essential premise of modern marketing is "that segmentation leads to targeting, which leads to positioning, which then leads to the development of advertising messages" (Puntoni et al., 2010, p. 52). It is in this regard that the idea of *purposeful polysemy* was born. The related marketing approach refers to companies' intentional use of ambiguous brand messages in order to either target multiple consumer segments simultaneously or to avoid the alienation of non-target consumers, such as stigmatised minorities or segregated subcultures (Berthon et al., 2009; Puntoni, Vanhamme, & Visscher, 2011). Thus, marketers have the ability to establish flexible brand meanings that address consumers with different needs and socio-cultural backgrounds under a common thread of communication (Kates & Goh, 2003). *Absolut Vodka* or *Dolce & Gabbana*, for instance, have used visual advertisement cues with a plurality of potential interpretations to target different social groups (e.g. partygoers, members of the wealthy upper class, or LGBT collectives). Yet, such purposeful polysemy that utilises strategic ambiguity within the semiotic positioning of a brand should be applied with particular caution. If done thoughtfully, it can increase an audience's brand awareness and affinity; if not, it can cause a brand to become seriously contested.

2.2.3 The Transfer of Meaning

As discussed in the previous chapters, due to socio-cultural circumstances and semiotic patterns, market actors assign different meanings to a sign. Yet, perceived meanings also vary due to consumers' handling of signified objects (Ferraro et al., 2013). Hence, sign-interpretation processes essentially depend on consumption activities observed by other actors involved in the act of communication (Osgood, 1952). These activities include how a signified object is acquired, used, exchanged, or disposed of. Therefore, to steer the meaning of brands, marketers not only need to determine and manage their marketing communications but also the corresponding consumption behaviours.

In order to explain the transfer of meaning into consumption goods and consequently into consumers' lives, McCracken developed the model of meaning movement (McCracken, 1986; see figure 11). Accordingly, culturally constituted meanings are transferred via advertising and the fashion system into consumption objects. From here, repetitive behaviours (e.g. consumption rituals) forward them to consumers' minds. This suggests culture to be the primary source for brand meanings.

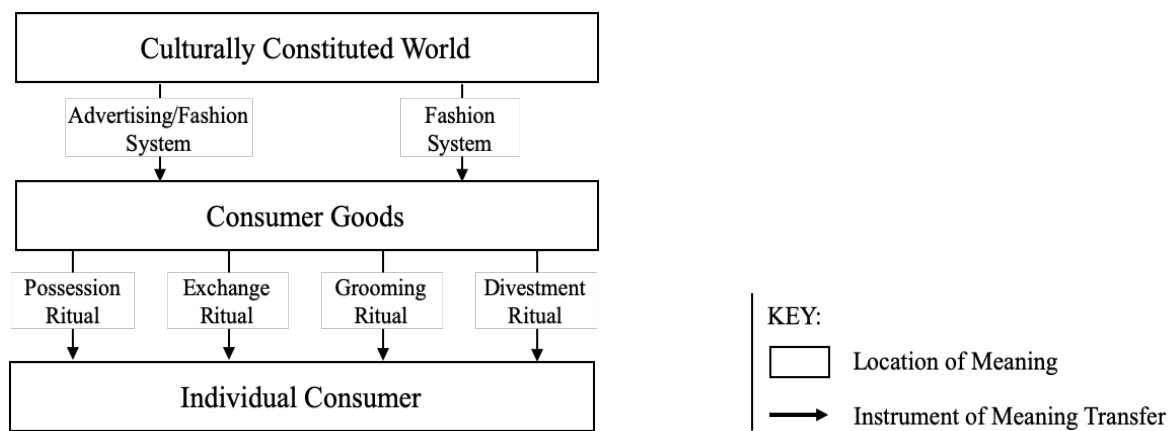


Figure 11: Movement of Meaning (McCracken, 1986).

Moreover, McCracken (1988) distinguishes between culture as a *lens* through which consumers construe their surrounding environment and culture as a *blueprint* of social behaviours and productive activities. Based on common cultural roots, both marketers and influential social actors (e.g. hippies, punks, or hipsters as fashion pioneers) have the potential to merge the culturally constituted world together with the consumer goods they utilise. Cultural properties are transferred to corresponding consumption objects by virtue of symbolic equivalences. The downstream consumption rituals that convey these

properties into consumers' perception can thus be classified as follows: (1) *possession rituals* – individual's handling of objects, such as using, personalising, comparing, reflecting, discussing, or showing-off, (2) *exchange rituals* – interpersonal meaning transfer through the exchange of gifts, (3) *grooming rituals* – caring about one's possessions and defending them against appropriation by others, and (4) *divestment rituals* – extracting or erasing meanings from disposed consumption goods (Lastovicka & Fernandez, 2005; McCracken, 1986; Rook, 1985; Sherry, 1983). The footwear brand *Dr. Martens* offers an example of such brand meaning transfers. Originally the brand's durable boots were marketed to outdoor workers, such as police or postmen and women. However, *Dr. Martens*'s widespread punk and skinhead narratives were drawn from related subcultures (i.e. the fashion system) and became deeply rooted in consumers' minds by prominent possession rituals, such as the signalling of nonconformist rebellion against dominant authorities (Berthon et al., 2007).

Prompted by McCracken's thoughts on the transfer of meaning, more recent research indicates that the aforementioned model has room for improvement. Contrary to the assumptions of back then, modern communication technologies allow consumers to interact closely and co-shape both their socio-cultural environment and personal goods (Cova & Pace, 2006; Kucuk, 2015; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2013). This implies two effects: on the one hand, consumers themselves create and transfer meanings back to consumption objects and the culturally constituted world; on the other hand, it provokes an opaque and uncontrollable spread of manifold brand meanings (Dietrich, 2018).

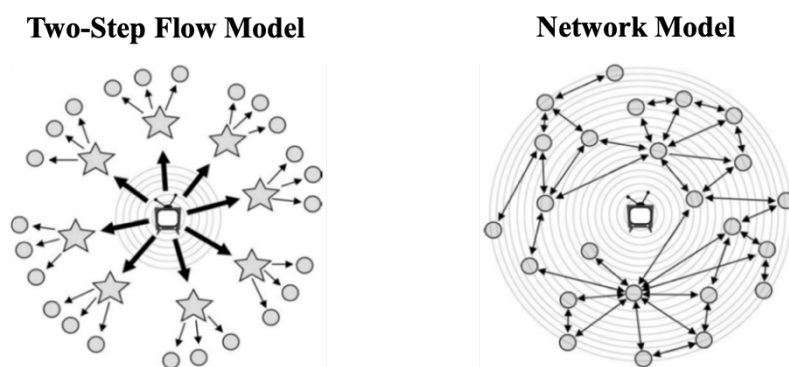


Figure 12: Models of Influence (Watts & Dodds, 2007).

Moreover, Watts and Dodds (2007) explain this evolution on the basis of two models of influence (see figure 12). The traditional two-step flow model follows McCracken's (1986) notion of opinion leaders (e.g. advertisers or trendsetters) who transfer meanings one-directionally from cultural sources via consumption objects to consumers' minds.

However, due to the fast-growing digital connectivity, the network model of influence has become more applicable. Reciprocal and multi-directional flows of information are reflected in this model, as nowadays many market actors function as opinion leaders by sharing content to a broad online audience. According to Winter and Neubaum (2016), the ulterior motives for consumers' opinion leadership activities within social media are the dissemination of decisive information, the persuasion of others towards a specific position, and the creation of a positive self-representation. Summarising, any act of communication, respectively the transfer of brand meanings, contains the following elements: firstly, it requires both a sender and a receiver of a transmitted message; secondly, it comprises the semiotic processes of encoding, transmitting, and decoding; thirdly, the outcome is determined by the degree of mutual understanding (Hall, 2006). In addition, the effectiveness of a symbolic interaction is contingent upon the cultural, contextual, and personal characteristics of the actors involved. Any discrepancy of these factors can cause miscomprehension and thus result in contested brand meanings.

2.3 Social Psychological and Sociological Principles

As seen above, making sense of brands inevitably involves acts of social interaction. Individuals, social collectives, and the general public play a crucial role in the process of brand meaning contestation. Hence, scholars have identified consumption decisions that are not only based on economic factors but also on social identity concerns (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000). Accordingly, the social psychological and sociological principles discussed below are essential for understanding the nature of contested brands.

2.3.1 Social Identity Approach

In social sciences, the term *identity* refers to anything that makes an entity definable or recognisable (e.g. a person's personality, values, public appearance, or expressions). In this light, the idea of the *self-concept*, also known as *self-identity*, comprises individuals' totality of thoughts and feelings about themselves (Sirgy, 1982). From a psychological perspective, the self-concept manifests itself within mental models such as self-knowledge, self-image, or self-esteem. Moreover, a distinction has to be drawn between the *personal identity* and the *social identity*, both being subsets of the self-identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Personal identity concerns the sum of an individual's idiosyncratic characteristics that develop over time independently of social affiliations (e.g. bodily attributes, cognitive faculties, and one's consciousness). On the contrary,

Tajfel (1974, p. 69) defines social identity as “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership.” From this, Tajfel and Turner (1979, 1986) developed the *social identity theory* (SIT) as a concept that uses social identity to explain and predict intergroup behaviours (e.g. differences in the status, legitimacy, permeability, and stability of social groupings).

In general, the social identity theory suggests that individuals’ membership within social groups (e.g. gender, age group, social class, family, company, or sports team) constitutes an important source for their identification, status, and self-esteem (Hogg & Reid, 2006). Thus, market actors are motivated to increase their in-group’s status in order to strengthen their own self-image. In-group members tend to favour their peers, whereas they hold prejudices against, distance themselves from, or discriminate against those belonging to out-groups (Tajfel, 1974). Considering the mental processes that induce the creation and distinction of social groups, Tajfel and Turner (1986) distinguish the following: *social categorisation*, *social identification*, and *social comparison*.

Social categorisation relates to the process of grouping people together in categories (e.g. by demographic variables or organisational membership) in order to identify them and understand their behaviour in a collective manner. This cognitive segmentation allows individuals both to define others based on prototypical heuristics and to locate themselves within their social environment (Turner, 1985). Building on this, social identification refers to the perception and allocation of oneself in social groups. The related identification process depends on the distinctiveness and prestige of the in-group as well as on the salience of related out-groups. This process commonly results in an approximation of the self-concept to the in-group identity and in behaviours congruent with those of other in-group members. In return, this causes social cohesion, collective conduct, stereotypical thinking, and individuals’ emotional dependency on their group membership (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Finally, the process of social comparison specifies the mental act of comparing one’s in-group attributes with related out-groups. This intergroup comparison has several functions: it enables both an external validation and a subliminal amplification of one’s self-image, it maintains in-group members’ status-distinctiveness and self-esteem, and it explains social exclusion, discrimination, or active harassments against out-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Based on this social identity theory, Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, and Wetherell (1987) explored and framed the *self-categorisation theory* (SCT). Together, both theories are known as the *social identity approach*. In general, the self-categorisation theory addresses cognitive categorisation processes that cause people to perceive themselves and others as members of a social group and thereby give rise to group-related behaviours (Hogg & Reid, 2006). It answers the question about how, and with what consequences, an aggregation of people is recognised in social group terms. The resulting meta-principle states that any social behaviour intends to increase both the similarity within and the distinction between social groups (Turner, 1985). Further research has shown that this principle generates a variety of social identity effects. Amongst others, it engenders collaboration and altruism, shared norms, emotional contagion, ethnocentrism, mutual influence, and stereotyping (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner et al. 1987). Furthermore, self-categorisation often causes depersonalisation, which implies an assimilation of peoples' self-concept towards the in-group identity prototype (Hogg & Reid, 2006). In total, the social identity approach allows to explain a wide range of sociological and organisational phenomena. Examples include those that deal with social signalling, opinion leadership, or group polarisation, which frequently relate to divergent perceptions of brand meanings (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Sirgy, 1982).

2.3.2 Cognitive Process Systems

Another important psychology notion that helps to explain human's cognitive reasoning, judgmental decision-making, and social behaviours, is based on the idea of two different systems of thinking. This *dual-process theory* differentiates between *system 1* and *system 2* to analyse peoples' interactional and analytical capabilities (Evans, 2003). System 1 refers to intuitive, associative, and largely unconscious reasoning that emerges from automatic, implicit, and contextualised decisions. Moreover, system 1 processes are known to be fast with a low requirement for cognitive effort, as they rely on emotions (e.g. peoples' gut feelings) and prototypical information (Sloman, 1996). Examples include the various ways individuals make everyday shopping decisions, recognise affection from others, or judge people by their visible clothing. Such deeply rooted behavioural patterns suit Bourdieu's (1977) idea of the *habitus*, which states that individuals' habits, skills, and dispositions are ingrained in their life experiences. According to Kahneman (2011), the mode of fast thinking (i.e. system 1) is based on such habits and is therefore fairly difficult to be changed or manipulated. By contrast,

the cognitive system 2 is slow, deliberative, and more logical. It involves conscious decisions that are rather rational, explicit, and rule-based. This controlled form of analytical reasoning requires both a high level of cognitive effort and abstract, unemotional expertise (Evans, 2003). Corresponding examples include making complex life choices (e.g. what and where to study), focusing on specific sensual stimuli, or overcoming stereotypical judgments through unconventional behaviour. Research has shown that this slow mode of thinking (e.g. system 2) generates more reliable outcomes. However, it is less consistent than system 1 as it is rather subject to change effected by social persuasion, education, reflection, and its exercise (Kahneman, 2011).

In general, humans spend most of their time in system 1, since they act on subconscious impressions, intuitions, intentions, and feelings. New stimuli are assessed via existing patterns rather than by creating new ones. These uncontrollable and automatic processes are effective for making fast and sufficient decisions (Sloman, 1996). Yet, behavioural economists have shown that the underlying decision heuristics cause a variety of human biases, such as the adjustment and anchoring effect, the availability heuristic, or the representativeness bias (for details, see Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Hence, to grasp consumer behaviours it is crucial to identify the triggers that activate system 2 thinking. If individuals consciously reflect their experience-based decisions, they are able to filter system 1 instincts, overcome cognitive biases, and adjust their idiosyncratic habitus.

2.3.3 Self-Brand Connection and Reference Groups

An important identity-related decision is consumers' selection of products and brands that surround and distinguish them. Symbolic objects have great value in contributing to peoples' self-construction. Thus, Escalas and Bettman (2003, p. 340) conceptualise *self-brand connection* as "the extent to which individuals have incorporated brands into their self-concept." Such links between a brand and the self are often established to achieve personal and social identity goals (Ferraro et al., 2013). These include the creation of a desired self-image and the presentation of this image to other market actors. It also relates to the idea of self-congruity, which predicts consumer behaviours (e.g. purchase decisions) based on a cognitive match between a consumer's self-concept and a product's value-expressive capabilities (Sirgy, Johar, Samli, & Claiborne, 1991). Hence, branded products are chosen to increase the congruency between the actual and the ideal self-concept. This function of brands as a symbolic identity source suggests

that the degree of individuals' self-brand connection relies on a brand's social perception and meaning constellation, also known as the *brand gestalt*. Diamond et al. (2009) specify a brand gestalt as a versatile system of continuously interacting brand meanings that involve multiple interdependent stakeholders. Within such systems, market-dominant brand meanings emerge and reside. These meanings can be classified on the *brand gestalt continuum*, which ranges from antagonistic via prosaic to iconic brand gestalts (Tierney et al., 2016, see table 2). On this continuum, individuals decide which brands are most suitable for helping them to achieve their identity goals and, thus, for building strong self-brand connections. This is often the case for iconic brands with which people form positive emotional ties (Holt, 2004); by contrast, antagonistic brands are more likely to be rejected due to their unpopular meanings (Grégoire et al., 2009).

Brand Gestalt Continuum			
Brand Gestalt	Antagonistic	Prosaic	Iconic
Dominant Brand Characteristics	socio-culturally rejected, hated, dreaded	socio-culturally accepted, neutralised, tolerated	socio-culturally epitomised, loved, embraced
Self-Brand Connection	low	mostly irrelevant	high
Brand Example	Barclays (financial services)	Colgate (oral hygiene)	Apple (technology provider)

Table 2: Brand Gestalt Continuum (adapted from Tierney et al., 2016).

Beyond that, research revealed two key triggers for individuals to create and maintain identity through strong self-brand connections, namely *self-verification* and *self-enhancement* (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). Self-verification designates peoples' tendencies to preserve their existing self-concept by seeking social feedback that confirms their self-image (Schlenker, 1980). In particular, such self-verifying feedback is determined by decisions on the social environment and the symbolic objects displayed in it. Niedenthal, Cantor, and Kihlstrom (1985) showed that these choices underlie a social heuristic, called *prototype matching*, which is subject to a cognitive sequence. At first, people imagine prototypical actors in line with their choice set. Then, they identify and select the option (e.g. the branded product) that maximises the congruency of their self-image with the image of the desired prototypical actors. The need for self-verification thus requires consistent social feedback via stereotypical thinking.

On the other hand, self-enhancement describes individuals' quest for social feedback by means of impression management. The underlying impulse to enhance one's self-esteem imposes distortive cognitive filters on both incoming and outgoing information (Escalas & Bettman, 2003). In this regard, the psychological attribution theory suggests that people tend to attribute the positive results of a decision towards themselves and the negative results towards external circumstances (Miller & Ross, 1975). This self-serving bias also affects social interactions. Early research on impression management by Goffman (1959) and Schlenker (1980) revealed that people engage in acts of self-presentation to either control others' reactions or to maximize their positive feedback. Both social approvals and favourable impressions provide individuals with status and intrinsic satisfaction. Besides, this topic relates to the concept of *identity signalling*, which indicates that "consumers often make choices that diverge from those of others to ensure that they effectively communicate desired identities" (Berger & Heath, 2007, p. 121). Here, it has to be differentiated between service and product domains that are more suitable for signalling consumer traits, so-called *identity domains* (e.g. hairstyles or cars), and *utilitarian domains*, which are less suitable (e.g. phone plans or detergents). In general, it holds true for both domains that the identity-signalling effect is stronger for goods consumed in public settings with many observers (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). Besides, research disclosed further techniques for consumers' impression management. Examples are the confirmation of social norms, flattery, behavioural self-promotion, or conspicuous brand consumption (Ferraro et al., 2013; Schlenker, 1980).

All things considered, it is decisive for the formation of profound self-brand connections how individuals perceive themselves and how they interpret their perceptions of other market actors. Escalas and Bettman (2005) bring these two perspectives together. With respect to the idea of self-construal, the authors distinguish independent people (i.e. those who focus on their personal identity) and interdependent people (i.e. those who focus on their social identity). Based on this distinction, it was shown that the type of self-construal determines consumers' degree of self-brand connection subject to related reference groups, with reference groups specified as "social groups that are important to a consumer and against which he or she compares himself or herself" (Escalas & Bettman, 2003, p. 341). Such groups function as an informative source for individuals to form and evaluate their brand-related perceptions and behaviours (Bearden & Etzel, 1982). Consumers thus usually adopt brands associated with favoured in-groups and

avoid brands related to disapproved out-groups. Moreover, Escalas and Bettman (2005) found that the negative effect on self-brand connections due to brand usage by out-group members is stronger for people with an independent rather than an interdependent self-construal. This implies that interdependent people focus more on brand meanings that circulate within their social in-group, whereas independent people rather gain identity value through social distinction from undesired out-groups.

It is becoming evident that brands function as an important symbolic source for individuals' social identity construction (Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998). Accordingly, market actors reside in complex and constantly changing social relationship networks. In general, this is reflected in scientific literature on the *actor-network theory* (ANT) (for details, see Law, 2009). Also, reference groups' influence on the emergence of brand meanings is often related to extreme instances. For example, the idea of brand tourism differentiates between brand tourists, favourable non-core users who enhance a brand's meaning, and brand immigrants, unwelcome non-core users that threaten a brand's meaning. Further instances include polit-brands, which reflect an alternative and often extreme socio-political agenda (O'Guinn & Muniz, 2005), and religiously or ideologically stigmatised brands (Kates, 2004; Muniz & Schau, 2005).

2.4 Practice Theory

Brand-related behaviours are substantial for market actors to create their self-identity and propagandise idiosyncratic brand perceptions. If such consumption activities occur in routinised and interconnected ways, they can be designated as *practices*. Noteworthy, this term should not be confused with the singular 'practice' (i.e. '*Praxis*' in German), which describes the holistic reality of human actions in contrast to theory, whereas a 'practice' (i.e. '*Praktik*' in German) is specified by Reckwitz, (2002, p. 249) as "routinized type of behaviour which consists of several elements, interconnected to one other: forms of bodily activities, forms of mental activities, 'things' and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge." Related examples include cooking and physical-exercise practices, or with regard to consumption activities practices such as commoditising, grooming, or customising consumer goods (Schau et al., 2009). Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) emphasise that an analysis of such routinised behavioural patterns needs to focus on how an agent acts, speaks, thinks, and interacts with material objects.

The corresponding epistemological concept in social sciences is called *practice theory*. However, so far a uniform theory of practice does not exist. Practice theory rather refers to a family of fragmented theoretical approaches spreading from philosophy to sociology that overcome traditional positivist and rationalist perspectives (Reckwitz, 2002). The social theorists Pierre Bourdieu, Anthony Giddens, Michel Foucault, and Theodore Schatzki are considered to be the major contributors to practice theory. All of them consider the following elements for analysing social phenomena: (1) situated practices are constitutive for the social world, (2) knowledge structures are embedded in practices, (3) practices feature a socio-material nature, (4) practice-oriented theorising rejects dualisms (e.g. mind and body, structure and agency, or individual and institutional), and (5) practices are recursive and interconnected (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011; Reckwitz, 2002). In order to investigate such routinised behaviours, practice theorists usually draw on three dimensions, namely *understandings* (i.e. explicit, discursive knowledge), *procedures* (i.e. tacit, embedded knowledge), and *engagements* (i.e. emotional structures and representations) (Warde, 2005; Schau et al., 2009). As shown in Arsel and Bean's (2013) study on taste regimes, these dimensions manifest themselves in material objects, bodily doings, and perceived meanings. Moreover, practices generally vary over space and time, bodies and minds, and individuals and groups, as they are constantly being re-enacted by their social carriers (Reckwitz, 2002). In sum, practices are patterns of actions and thoughts that reproduce and transform themselves by being executed in socio-cultural settings.

Considering this practice-theoretical perspective in the present research allows for more comprehensive theorising as well as a profound analysis of the socio-cultural processes of brand meaning creation, disruption, and negotiation (Reckwitz, 2002; Warde, 2005). In particular, since practice theoreticians argue that “everyday actions are consequential in producing the structural contours of social life” (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011, p. 1241). The underlying ontology, which implies that social reality is constituted by practices, provides empirical and theoretical approaches for the analysis of consumer behaviours. The essential objectives of a practice-theoretical research lens are to understand by which means practices arise, develop, transfer, and change, how consumers' perceptions and desires emerge from practices, why people withdraw from or reject certain practices, and which outcomes individuals' involvement in practices can have (Warde, 2005). Moreover, social practices can diverge among consumers in

many ways (e.g. by socio-cultural contexts, temporal evolutions, demographics, and knowledge structures). Nevertheless, practices can also be considered for social classification purposes. According to Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) theory of practice, a recurrence of experiences results in the unintentional formation of tastes and practices. His idea of the habitus, explained as "the permanent internalisation of the social order in the human body" (Eriksen & Nielsen, 2013, p. 159), allows for the recognition of subconscious practices related to status consumption (Bourdieu, 1990). Moreover, due to the increasing diversity of consumption opportunities, market actors engage in an ever-increasing number of practices. This ongoing expansion of behavioural consumption patterns results in a variety of socio-economic consequences, such as an increasing degree of individuality, ambiguity within social interactions due to a more difficult interpretation socio-material behaviours, and a rising complexity for companies to properly understand their customers (Holt, 1995; Warde, 2005). To shed light on this diversification of practices, it is essential to bear in mind that the individual consumer is the unique anchor point of all associated bodily-mental routines (Reckwitz, 2002). Therefore, investigating individuals' simultaneous as well as sequential engagement in practices allows for a profound understanding of postmodern market phenomena, such as the fragmentation of social identities or the contestation of brands (Warde, 2005). Altogether, observing and analysing consumption practices over space and time offers insights into consumers' bodily and mental activities, states of emotion and knowledge, and their dynamic (re-)production of brand meanings.

Seen from a methodological perspective, a set of eligible analysis techniques exists to uncover the structures and interrelations of consumers' brand-related practices. These have been summarised by Nicolini (2009) under the metaphorical expression of *zooming in and out*. Zooming in means to first identify relevant practices and then magnify their details. Hence, the micro-structural elements of a practice, such as the sayings and doings, conditions of legitimacy, or socio-material features involved, should be moved into the foreground. By contrast, zooming out refers to the switching of theoretical lenses (e.g. consumer culture theory, semiotics, and social identity theory) and the tracing of interconnections between focal practices. This procedural approach combined with an ongoing readjustment of the research focus allows to understand social occurrences in-depth, to extract the dynamic effects of practices, and to analyse the continuous development of meanings (Nicolini, 2009). Practice-theoretical researchers

therefore oscillate between both perspectives, zooming in and zooming out, until an interpretative saturation is achieved. Moreover, practice-analyses usually rest upon qualitative data, collected by means of different research methods, such as in-depth interviews, field observations, or ethnographic studies (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Finally, different ways of presenting the results of practice-theoretical studies exist, such as (1) *the microscope approach* – to explain the whole and gain credibility by revealing powerful instances, (2) *the saw-tooth model* – to present the recursive nature of practices by temporally interacting sequences, and (3) *the fishbone technique* – to show the causes of a specific outcome based on its fundamental practices (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). Accordingly, table 3 summarises the essential practice-theoretical aspects for consumer research that enable the analysis of brand-related consumption behaviours.

Practice-Theoretical Analysis of Brand-Related Consumer Behaviours	
Theoretical Focus	<i>The ‘sayings and doings’ of brand consumption:</i> activities of different market actors with the effect of brand meaning creation, negotiation, and alteration
Epistemological Foundations	<i>Temporally and locally situated practices being constitutive for the social reality:</i> Diverse practice-theoretical roots with common elements: • Knowledge as embedded in practices • Socio-material nature of practice • Recursivity and interconnectivity of practices
Methodological Approach	<i>Investigation of practices based on material objects, bodily doings, and meanings by:</i> • Zooming in and out: switching theoretical lenses and tracing practice connections • Qualitative in-depth analysis of understandings, procedures, and engagements • Presentation via the microscope approach, saw-tooth model, or fishbone technique
Empirical Exemplars	<i>Holt (1995):</i> identification of a typology of consumption practices <i>Schau et al. (2009):</i> investigation of how brand community practices create value <i>Arsel and Bean (2013):</i> study of taste regimes and market-mediated practices

Table 3: Practice Theory for Consumer Research (adapted from Langley & Abdallah, 2011).

Contrary to other fields of science (e.g. organisational studies), the existing amount of practice-theoretical investigation in consumer research is limited. Nevertheless, the interest in, and enthusiasm for, this scientific approach is growing fast. This is proved by some leading publications on the analysis of consumption practices. One of the first consumer researchers who applied the practice-theoretical lens was Holt (1995) in his fundamental investigation of the question how consumers consume. Therein, he developed a typology of consumption practices based on an extensive observational case study of baseball spectators. The resulting typology classifies four types of consumption practices based on their purpose and structure of action (i.e. consumption as experience, play, integration, and classification). Furthermore, Holt generated a theoretical model

that links the identified practices to each other, to certain spectators, and to related consumption entities (e.g. the ballpark, players, or media and merchandise).

Another prominent example for the utilisation of practice theory is Schau et al.'s (2009) study on practices of collective value creation within brand communities. For this, the authors collected qualitative data from participants from nine brand communities across diverse product categories (e.g. *Apple Newton*, *Garmin*, and *BMW Mini*). The revealed structure of value-creating practices is presented through a dynamic process model that contains twelve behavioural patterns aggregated along four thematic clusters. These are brand use, community engagement, social networking, and impression management. Remarkably, the authors discuss the characteristics of the identified practices (i.e. procedures, understandings, and emotional engagements) very detailed for each brand community and conclude with the underlying value-creative effects.

As mentioned above, Arsel and Bean's (2013) investigation also constitutes a groundbreaking implementation of practice-theoretical procedures in consumer research. The two authors analysed how taste manifests itself in consumers' daily practices. For this purpose, the popular home design blog *Apartment Therapy* was longitudinally explored with regard to bloggers' discursive routines and habitual knowledge. In this way, *taste regimes* were conceptualised as normative systems that link aesthetics with consumption practices. The market-mediated practices identified – problematisation, ritualisation, and instrumentalisation – are presented via the microscope approach, which orchestrates related consumption objects, doings, and meanings. Further practice-theoretical studies include Kjellberg and Helgesson's (2007) work on markets as constituted by practices, Echeverri and Skalen's (2011) study of co-creation and co-destruction practices, or Arsel and Thompson's (2011) research on demythologising consumption practices. In sum, practice theory provides novel and valuable opportunities for consumer research.

2.5 Excursus: Who owns a brand?

Legal ownership generally implies the right to exclude others from any influence on tangible or intangible assets – at least to the extent that third-party rights are not conflicted (Demsetz, 1967). By law, this also holds true for the intangible property of brands. On this basis, conventional marketing theories assume that legal brand owners can determine and control the meaning of brands by themselves (Keller, 2013). Due to their property rights, companies are supposed to enjoy exclusive sovereignty over their

brands. This implies that only marketers are enabled to create, change, transfer, and obtain the benefits of a brand's meaning. In contrast to this narrow perspective, market experiences affirm that for most brands varying meanings prevail in public discourses.

Rose (2000) highlights that, in addition to *private property*, there is a multitude of other property right regimes on the market. The major forms are *collective property* – property that is owned by larger groups of people (e.g. public property, such as parks and streets), *anticommons* – property with high exclusion and no access (e.g. technology patents with diverse right-holders), or *open access* – property with low exclusion and unlimited access (e.g. deep sea fish stocks with unrestricted exploitation). Moreover, economic literature differentiates between four types of goods dependent upon (1) their degree of usage rivalry and (2) their degree of usage excludability (Bowles, 2004; Heller, 2009). These types are known as *private goods* (e.g. clothes or cars), *common goods* (e.g. fish stocks or timber), *club goods* (e.g. toll roads or pay TV), and *public goods* (e.g. fresh air or public radio). In line with traditional marketing theory, consumers' use of brands is rivalrous and excludable. This classifies brands as private goods (Cova & Pace, 2006). However, as market reality shows that brand usage by different actors is usually not excludable, brands may nowadays rather be conceptualised as shared cultural property, respectively as common goods (Holt, 2004; see table 13).

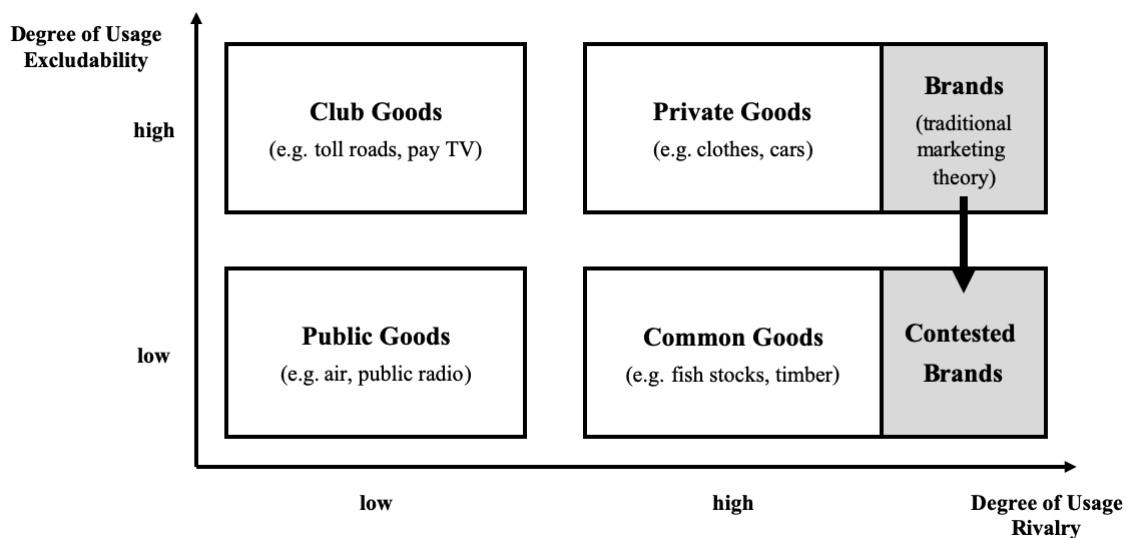


Figure 13: Typology of Goods (adapted from Bowles, 2004).

This particularly holds true because brands as intangible assets can be utilised by anyone, even by those who do not physically own the branded product (e.g. by spreading disparaged brand logos via the Internet, see Thompson et al., 2006). In accordance with

Hardin (1968), this implicates the potential for a brand-related tragedy of the commons, since too many market participants have access to the process of brand meaning creation. Such a tragedy of the commons involves a multitude of individual consumers or consumer collectives who appropriate brands for their own interests, independent of the legal owners' intention. Consequently, brands may become diluted, devalued, or unrecognised on the market. In order to avoid or mitigate this momentous tragedy, marketers should consider what Heller (2013) calls *the rose theorem*. This theorem suggests that, to understand the present property right regime of certain resources such as brands, one needs to "pay attention to history, to community, to groups, [to legal regulations, and] to the stories that people tell themselves and each other as they struggle over scarce resources" (Heller, 2013, p. 49). Thus, to recognise a brand's actual owners and meanings, it is crucial to trace pertinent brand events, socio-cultural developments, the brand's adoption by social collectives, and brand narratives that circulate within online and offline media discourses (Cova & Pace, 2006).

Moreover, psychological literature states ownership to have a double-edged character. Apart from legal property rights, there is also an attitudinal ownership perspective (Etzioni, 1991). Pierce, Kostova, and Dirks (2001, 2003) specify a possessive state of mind as *psychological ownership*. The authors illustrate that consumers feel material or immaterial assets to be theirs, even though they do not hold legal property rights. Such a feeling of possession enfolds "thoughts, beliefs, and awareness, coupled with an emotional or affective sensation" (Pierce et. al, 2001, p. 299). Psychological owners may even sense their possessions as an extension of their self (Belk, 1988). This holds true, as all surrounding material objects contribute to individuals' perception of their personal and social identity. Moreover, Pierce et al. (2001) attribute psychological ownership as a cognitive-affective condition to three main causes: (1) *efficacy and effectance* – individuals' desire to control the surrounding environment, (2) *self-identity* – the urge to know oneself and adopt possessions for symbolic identity expression, and (3) *having a place* – the need to possess home territory. Besides, Jussila, Tarkiainen, Sarstedt, and Hair (2015) have identified the additional cause of *stimulation* that refers to individuals' need for affective activation and cognitive arousal. Consequently, psychological owners are prompted to benefit from their perceived possessions, to care for them, to modify them, or to defend them against detrimental external influences. This in turn leads to their impression of having control over the psychologically owned good, and thus to an

intimate emotional relationship with it. Research has shown that such in-depth relations to presumed possessions can have positive and negative effects (Pierce et al., 2001, 2003). On the positive side, individuals develop a strong attitude of citizenship towards their property, which entails favourable appraisals, affective commitment, and voluntary contributions to in-groups' wellbeing. On the negative side, psychological ownership creates an aversion to share, the urge to retain exclusive control, and distress in the case of an alteration or loss of the possession (Jussila et al., 2015; Pierce et al., 2003).

In regard to the marketing context, consumers may similarly acquire the feeling of brand ownership although there are no legal grounds for it. O'Guinn and Muniz (2005) showed that this especially applies for members of brand communities. Highly engaged community members usually develop a strong claim of ownership and the desire to shape the focal brand pursuant to their own beliefs and interests. This feeling of psychological brand ownership is reinforced through customer empowerment and brand familiarity (Cova & Pace, 2006). On the contrary, marketers are recognised as temporary brand stewards who are not sufficiently interested in a brand's wellbeing but rather in profit-oriented business affairs and personal benefits. Muniz and O'Guine (2001, p. 424) hence conclude that a "brand's very ownership is contested."

Furthermore, as individuals' influence over a brand grows, they often develop a greater sense of proximity and affinity, which can cause them to behave similarly to employees (Ind, 2014). In such a positive scenario, psychological owners utilise their brand citizenship to reinforce brand meanings seeded by a company or to create new, favourable meanings. Consumers' stated passion or even love for brands like *Apple* exemplifies such affirmative psychological adoptions (Albert, Merunka, & Valette-Florence, 2013; Batra, Ahuvia, & Bagozzi, 2012). Yet, psychological appropriations can also lead to unpredictable interpretations and ostentations of brand meanings. In the moment consumers feel that they own a brand, the legal owner loses his immediate authority over the brand's public appearance (Thompson & Haytko, 1997). Since anyone can consume a branded product how, when, and where they like, it is inevitable that uncontrolled brand meanings spread publicly. Therefore, if consumers either with brand perceptions that differ from marketers' intentions or even with brand hate take psychological ownership, they can seriously harm a brand (Dalli et al., 2006; Kucuk, 2016). To avoid such detrimental consequences, Muniz and O'Guinn (2001) emphasise the need to thoroughly consider all brand owners, both legal and psychological ones.

3 Empirical Research and Results

3.1 Research Paradigm, Approach, and Methodology

After having discussed the theoretical foundations related to the creation, disruption, and negotiation of brand meanings, the empirical section pursues the research objective of exploring the phenomenon of contested brands. With regard to the research questions (see chapter 1.2), the present work intends to reveal a conceptualisation and a typology of contested brands (see Q₁), to examine the emergence and negotiation of contested brand meanings (see Q₂), and to identify prevention and counteraction strategies that mitigate the public spread of undesired brand meanings (see Q₃).

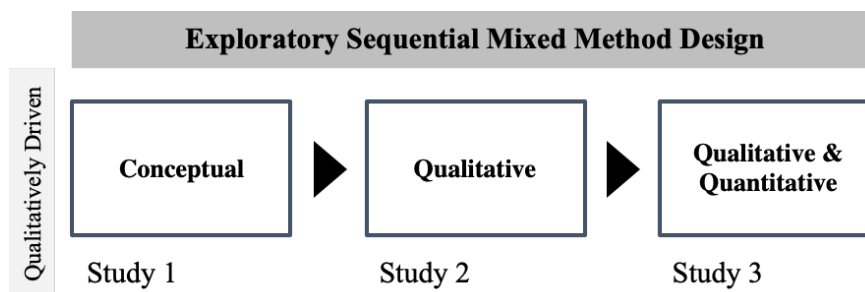


Figure 14: Sequential Mixed Method Research Approach (own illustration).

Due to the differing nature of the successive research questions, the overall research approach is determined as an *exploratory sequential mixed method design* (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Creswell & Clark, 2011; see figure 14). The research’s exploratory character draws from the fact that “actors’ roles, motivations, and influence on brand meaning creation [and disruption] have not been explored” (Tierney et al., 2016, p. 916) sufficiently in existing literature. Therefore, the research approach is qualitatively driven and consists of three separate phases that are sequential and dependent. According to Eisenhardt (1989), the sequential nature of the applied methodology is beneficial for neutralising issues related to unilateral method choices and for obtaining more holistic results. Moreover, the mix of qualitative and quantitative methods overcomes the restrictive methodical dualism and thus facilitates to generate in-depth, content-rich, and versatile insights into complex social phenomena (Creswell & Clark, 2011). In addition, a mixed method design allows for the integration of both inductive and deductive reasoning (Creswell, 2013). Inductive reasoning here refers to the development of new theories based on collected empirical data. Accordingly, qualitative data are interpreted to reveal dominant patterns and pertinent dependencies (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013).

By contrast, deductive reasoning deals with the derivation of hypotheses from existing theories and the testing of these hypotheses through quantitative data analysis. Such confirmatory procedures usually intend to explain causalities or to generalise qualitative insights (Black, 1999). Furthermore, conceptual approaches focus on the analysis of existing, non-empirically collected information to develop new ideas and theories. In sum, an interplay between conceptual thinking, inductive exploration, and deductive verification seems to be highly suitable for the investigation of contested brands.

Study	Objective	Question	Approach	Methods
1	Define and classify contested brands	What?	Conceptual & Inductive	Secondary Data Analysis, Multi-Case Study
2	Explore the emergence and negotiation of contested brands	How and why?	Inductive	In-depth Consumer Interviews, Focus Groups, Netnography
3	Identify and test prevention and counteraction strategies	Which? Verifiable?	Inductive & Deductive	Expert Interviews, Experimental Research

Table 4: Methodological Study Approaches (own illustration).

As shown in table 4, the present research consists of three studies that relate to the three research questions. Firstly, a conceptual study prepared the ground for the subsequent investigations by defining the concept of contested brands and by developing a typology that classifies instances of contestation (see chapter 3.3). This initial study rested upon a cross-analysis of secondary theories and a multi-case analysis. A set of contested brand cases was therefore classified by means of the theoretically derived typology. Secondly, a qualitative study explored a theoretical process model that explains why contested brands emerge and how they are negotiated among antagonistic market actors (see chapter 3.4). This investigation takes a practice-theoretical perspective for the interpretative analysis of in-depth interviews, focus groups, and netnographic data. Finally, a third study with a more practical focus identified and verified preventive and counteractive measures against the spread of undesired brand meanings (see chapter 3.5). These measures were developed via expert interviews and tested in parts by experimental follow-up research. Noteworthy, all investigations were based on an explorative pre-study (see chapter 3.2). And in order to maximise the scientific rigour of the research findings, different validity and reliability criteria were consulted for both the three individual research studies (i.e. criteria for qualitative and quantitative methods) and the integrated mixed method approach (Johnson & Christensen, 2017).

Furthermore, to follow the researcher's reasoning, it is essential to know the applied philosophical research paradigm, which determines the researcher's ontological and epistemological view on social reality (Neuman, 2014). A supportive overview of the link between paradigms, approaches, and methods is provided by the research onion (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; see figure 15). The overarching research paradigm applied is that of pragmatism (Feilzer, 2010; Morgan, 2014). From an epistemological perspective, pragmatists assume that knowledge should be assessed by its practicability (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). The ontological perspective of pragmatism considers reality as an experiential process and emphasises its continuous change. Moreover, pragmatists utilise different research methods in a goal-oriented way in order to answer the designated research questions most effectively. They evaluate theories and empirical procedures according to their impact on the intended research contribution (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Theoretical concepts are seen as instruments with varying degrees of applicability subject to particular situations and environments. Yet, while the prevalent research paradigm is guided by a pragmatic view, it entails drifts towards the paradigm of interpretivism. Thus, particularly practice-theoretical ideas constitute an important epistemological foundation for the qualitative interpretations in the second study. This consideration of practice theory enables an understanding of social structures and entities as constituted in routinised behaviours, which overcomes the limitations of dualistic views (see chapter 2.4). Generally speaking, for interpreting socio-cultural phenomena and the associated construction of theory, it is important not only to reduce complexity but also to grasp and order complexity in an intelligible way (Geertz, 1973).

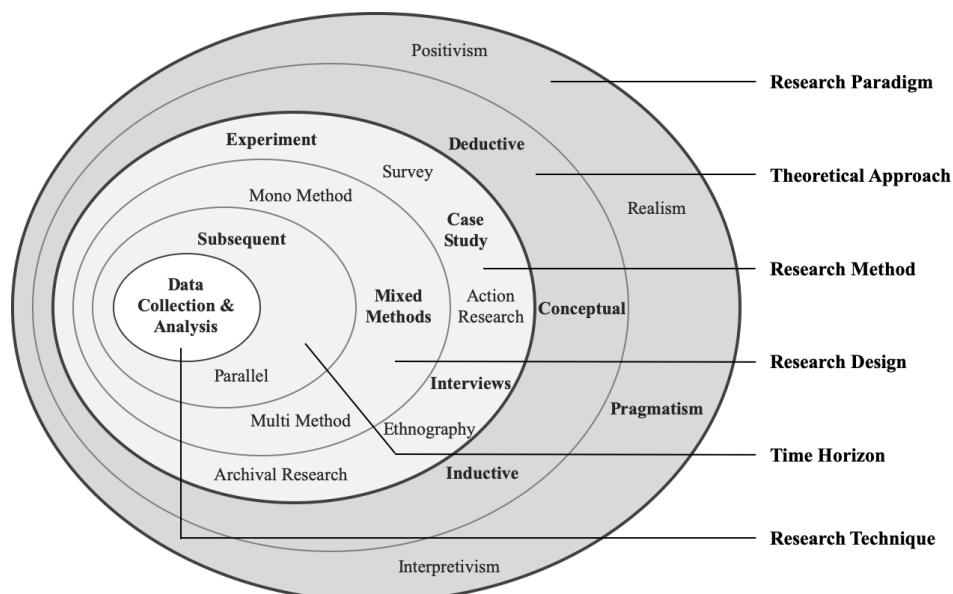


Figure 15: The Research Onion (adapted from Saunders et al., 2009).

3.2 Explorative Pre-Study

This chapter briefly summarises the objective, design, and results of an explorative pre-study. The investigation intended to gain initial impressions on the contestation of brand meanings from a consumer viewpoint and to pave the way for the main research studies.

The pre-study's primary objective was to generate insights on how consumers perceive the creation, disruption, and negotiation of brand meanings. To derive the stated research questions (see chapter 1.2), a preliminary understanding of the phenomenon of contested brands was essential. The pre-study thus explored consumers' brand-related contestation behaviours. This included their brand preferences, their use of brands for the purpose of identity construction, brand-related consumption stereotypes, and how they perceive and deal with brand meaning alterations. In addition, initial observations of consumption practices related to the contestation of brands were made. Therefore, a set of consumer interviews provided preliminary information. Based on existing literature, a suitable interview guide was developed, which consisted of five parts related to the different topics of inquiry. Notably, in the course of the second main study, both the pre-study guide and the collected pre-study data provided the basis for further investigations (see appendix B2). Moreover, the pre-study supported the identification of contested brand cases relevant for the first main study. Beyond that, the pre-study paved the way for the third main study by revealing initial ideas on how to countervail contested brands.

Qualitative pre-study data were collected through a series of semi-structured consumer interviews (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Participants were university students aged between 20 and 30 years. There was no monetary remuneration involved and anonymity was guaranteed for all informants. The Interviews were conducted in person or by phone in participants' native language (i.e. English or German) and had a conversational character to elicit rich narratives on participants' personal market experiences. For the purpose of pre-study data analysis, ten interviews, ranging from 35 to 70 minutes in length, were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.* Interview notes were also taken to capture informants' immediate non-verbal reactions. These data were analysed via a qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2010, 2015). Accordingly, the transcribed data were coded and structured, interpreted in comparison with the theoretical foundations, and attributed to higher-level themes related to the topic of contested brands.

*Both the audio files and interview transcripts are available electronically and can be provided on request.

The pre-study findings gained offer insights into consumers' attitudes towards the creation and negotiation of brand meanings, and into consumption practices related to the contestation of brands. Accordingly, consumers differentiate between brands they perceive as value adding and brands to which they do not wish to be related. Such dispositions are contingent upon a brand's management performance, the surrounding socio-cultural environment, and consumers' self-brand identification. As shown by Kähr et al. (2016), both value and performance triggers influence consumers' acceptance or resistance of a brand. In addition, pre-study participants indicated that the perception of a brand is strongly related to their observation of the consumption habits of other market actors as well as to their social interactions with trustworthy peers. In terms of consumption behaviours, inspiration and opinions are often gathered within the online space (e.g. via social media content) and from there transferred to the offline reality. In this manner, brands are often adopted by consumers to differentiate themselves from other market participants by constructing unique self-identities (Belk, 1988; Elliott & Davies, 2006). Such behavioural consumption patterns inevitably lead to the formation and memorisation of consumer stereotypes. Accordingly, many informants were able to associate identity signalling brands with a specific type of consumers (e.g. the *Apple* brand with creative minds and extroverted people). These stereotypes are intensified and socially distributed as a result of public brand consumption.

Thus, next to companies' branding activities, brand meanings are shaped by individuals' perceptions and attributions of stereotypical consumption patterns (Allen et al., 2008; Echeverri & Skalen, 2011). These patterns comprise brand-holders' characteristics, values, attitudes, social roles, and conspicuous market activities. Therefore, meaning transfer takes place in both directions, from brands to consumers and vice versa. This finding is in contrast to McCracken's (1986) model of meaning movement, according to which meaning only flows one-directionally (see figure 11). Pre-study interviewees further revealed that brand-related stereotypes are often represented by particular groups of consumers or subcultures (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). If individuals cannot identify themselves with associated social out-groups, brand meanings become subject to ambiguous public discourses or to social contentions. Corresponding brand meaning negotiations take the forms of interpersonal debating and signalling, individuals' self-brand reconsideration, consumer resistance, or cultural appropriation of symbols and norms (Holt, 2002; Penaloza & Price, 1993). Moreover,

social activists and opinion leaders are revealed to appropriate brands for their own propaganda purposes and to gain public attention. Apart from these pre-study findings on consumers' attitudes towards brand meanings, the content analysis allowed for preliminary insights into pertinent contestation practices. As presented in table 5, nine brand meaning contestation practices were identified and clustered into the following three categories: (1) perception of brand meanings, (2) disruption of brand meanings, and (3) reaction to disrupted brand meanings (Dietrich, 2018).*

Category	Practices	Specification
Perception of Brand Meanings	Observing	Observing consumption habits (offline and online) of other market participants is essential for the adoption of brand meanings.
	Informing	Brand-related information is commonly drawn from social media, peer reviews, and own experiences. Marketing is less relevant.
	Debating	Perceptions are often formed and adjusted by debating brand meanings with trustworthy market participants and social peers.
Disruption of Brand Meanings	Identifying	Consumers utilise brands for their self-construction. This identification process can trigger the emergence of consumer stereotypes.
	Signalling	Public brand consumption is frequently performed to signal status, values, identities, or the affiliation to social groupings.
	Sharing	By sharing idiosyncratic brand meanings, consumers often oppose the brand perceptions of others and thus disrupt meanings.
Reaction to Disrupted Brand Meanings	Passivating	In case of low self-brand connection, the cognition of undesired brand utilisation by other market actors can cause passive brand withdrawal.
	Resisting	For high self-brand connection, meaning disruption usually releases some kind of resistance behaviour (e.g. boycott or retaliation).
	Promoting	Upon brand meaning disruption, opinion leaders tend to promote their own brand perceptions to gain social and public attention.

Table 5: Consumer Practices of Brand Meaning Contestation (Dietrich, 2018).

It is worth noting here that table 5 merely offers an initial impression of frequently observed brand meaning contestation practices. These will be further extended by means of the subsequent main research studies. Nevertheless, the following investigations essentially build on the understanding of consumers' brand-related attitudes and market practices derived from the pre-study, since the knowledge gained facilitates a profound analysis of the underlying social structures and processes. Altogether, the pre-study findings substantiate the theoretical foundations of the present thesis and provide a valuable basis for the further analysis of contested brands.

*Pre-study findings have partly been published by the author in the scientific journal *Marketing Review St. Gallen*.

3.3 Study 1: Concept and Typology of Contested Brands

Overall, the first research study determined both a conceptualisation and a typology of contested brands. For this purpose, a conceptual analysis of corresponding theoretical notions and of a broad range of brand contestation cases was conducted.

3.3.1 Objectives and Design

More specifically, the purpose of study 1 was to identify reasonable conditions and criteria for defining contested brands. The related conceptualisation process was based on Gallie's (1956) notion of *essentially contested concepts*. This notion also provided the foundation for developing a practice-oriented evaluation scheme, which allows for an assessment of a brand's general degree of meaning contestability. In addition, the specified criteria were cross-analysed by means of secondary theories related to the idea of contested brands and, thus, utilised to distinguish different types of contested brands. The corresponding typology makes market observations more systematic, provides a logical overview, and reduces complexity. According to Bailey (1994, p. 1), classification is "the ordering of entities into groups or classes on the basis of their similarity." In so doing, researchers seek to maximise both the within-group homogeneity and the between-group heterogeneity. Moreover, typologies are a specific kind of classifications, since they are multidimensional and, in contrast to taxonomies, non-empirically derived (Bailey, 1994). Doty and Glick (1994) clarify that typologies conceptually construe ideal types, each one consisting of a unique combination of the classification criteria. The research at hand therefore aimed to set appropriate boundary conditions in order to capture the most contested brand contingencies possible. Besides, the applicability of the derived typology was checked by a multitude of observed and analysed contested brand cases. A coherent visualisation of the typology should in sum provide both a comprehensive overview and an applicable management tool.

3.3.1.1 Essentially Contested Concepts

For the conceptualisation of contested brands, the first study utilised the theoretical approach of essentially contested concepts. This reflective conception was developed by the social theorist Walter Gallie (1956) with the intention of explaining diverging interpretations of abstract terms, such as art, democracy, or social justice. Gallie suggests that the recognition of an essentially contested concept primarily demands the identification of people who disagree upon the proper use or meaning of a concept.

Moreover, as no distinct use of a concept exists, different uses with varying meanings are often prevalent. It further has to be taken into account that all actors involved assume their own interpretation of a concept as the correct one and thus defend it against other disputants. The resulting conflict of interests, which is never entirely resolvable through social negotiations, forms the basis of an essentially contested concept.

In his article submitted to the *Aristotelian Society*, Gallie (1956) furthermore outlines seven necessary conditions for a concept to be essentially contested: the first five of which are formally defining conditions, whereas the other two are justifying conditions. A brief summary of these conditions is provided as follows: (1) *appraisiveness* – the concept must be evaluative and signify some sort of value achievement, (2) *internal complexity* – the concept can be characterised by various components and thus has an internal complex structure, (3) *diverse describability* – the concept must allow for disparate and rival descriptions of its use or meaning, (4) *openness* – the concept is subject to considerable and not completely predictable modifications due to changing external circumstance, (5) *reciprocal recognition* – the contesting actors take different positions on the correct use or meaning of the concept and mutually recognise the contested nature of the concept contingent upon the views of the other actors (i.e. aggressive and defensive use), (6) *original exemplar* – the concept's various interpretations are derived from a common exemplar whose authority is approved by all contestants, and (7) *progressive competition* – the continuous dispute between the contesting actors sustains or develops the original exemplar's value achievement. In sum, if these seven conditions are sufficiently fulfilled, a concept can be designated as essentially contested (Gallie, 1956). This implies, in turn, that certain market participants position their own interpretation of a concept against the perception of other parties in order to gain sovereignty. Whether the idea of an essentially contested concept can also be applied to brands is demonstrated in the course of the present study.

3.3.1.2 Scientific Typology

After defining the concept of contested brands, an expedient typology of related market instances had to be developed. According to Bailey (1994), a typology can be considered as a qualitatively derived, conceptual classification that represents specific types of a particular concept. In addition to its complexity-reducing ability, a typology allows for the comparison of the identified types in order to study their similarities and differences. This facilitates a profound analysis of the relations between the types and their practical

management. The first stage in creating a typology is to define the classification scope (Bailey, 1994), which means determining inclusion and exclusion rationales for the selection of entities to be classified. The next step involves specifying the classification criteria, which requires that the characterising attributes of the entities are evaluated based on their importance. Due to the study's conceptual nature, these attributes partly stem from a cross-analysis of secondary branding theories. The attributes then have to be grouped and abstracted into higher-order classification criteria. According to Sneath and Sokal (1973), the selected criteria should be informative, simple, independent, relevant to many cases, and unambiguous. In addition to this, the determined criteria can be ordered to derive a hierarchy with lower and higher levels of differentiation. Essentially, the resulting classification scheme should be *mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive* (MECE). Moreover, it should contain appropriate labels for the classes identified and be illustrated by means of a representative tree or matrix (Bailey, 1994). Finally, to verify the typology's applicability, it should be used to classify relevant entities. For the present study, these entities are instances of contested brands observed in the marketplace. In general terms, it is always a distinct combination of different criteria that identifies a specific entity.

In terms of the validity and reliability of a classification scheme, Gregor (2006) highlights the following evaluation factors: (1) suitability for analysing the phenomenon under study (i.e. to compare the related entities), (2) distinct and comprehensible classification criteria, (3) an expedient criteria hierarchy (i.e. distinct levels of abstraction), (4) meaningful labels for the criteria and classes, (5) a clear logic of application, and (6) completeness and exhaustiveness. More specifically, the following quality criteria exist for typologies: *validity*, *simplicity*, *relevance*, and *difference* (Meyer, 2007). Validity refers to a typology's consistency with existing theories (i.e. construct validity) and its unambiguity with regard to the classification criteria and types involved (i.e. content validity). Simplicity implies a compact and comprehensive typology with a manageable number of classes. Relevance means to focus on the most essential criteria, which allow for a distinct allocation of entities. Finally, difference seeks an accentuation of major differences between the entities included in the typology. Therefore, "the focus should be on contradictory assumptions and conflicting norms" (Meyer, 2007, p. 28). Accordingly, the quality of the derived contested brands typology was assessed by applying it to classify diverse contested brand cases.

3.3.1.3 Multi-Case Study Approach

A broad set of market instances were investigated in order to verify the derived contested brands typology. Referring to Yin (2009, p. 18), a multi-case study is a highly useful “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context.” Choosing appropriate cases was crucial. Case selection therefore drew on existing literature, practical studies, and market observations. In addition, also the pre-study revealed cases of brand meaning contestation. The instances selected this way originate from various industries, product categories, and socio-cultural environments. Moreover, they incorporate different market actors, social collectives, and subcultures with varying intentions for contesting a brand. Thus, market information was gathered for both within-case and cross-case analyses (Eisenhardt, 1989). In line with Yin (2009), the related data collection mainly focused on archival data (e.g. news articles and corporate communications), online data (e.g. blog and forum posts), and market observations (e.g. field notes). In general, the multi-case study approach had an instrumental character, since it aimed to apply the derived contested brands typology (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Accordingly, the typology criteria were assessed by structuring, interpreting, and comparing the case data. In this manner, the application of the typology sought to ensure both its scientific rigour and its practical relevance.

In a second step, the identified contested brand cases were clustered in accordance with their degree of contestability. The cases were thus quantitatively evaluated by means of the seven dimensions relating to an essentially contested concept. In general, a cluster analysis intends to group similar objects, based on characterising variables, into specific clusters that maximise the within-group homogeneity and the between-group heterogeneity (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Related clustering algorithms can be hierarchical (e.g. Ward’s method) or partitioning (e.g. k-means method) and aim to resolve distance optimisation problems iteratively. The quantity of the determined clusters is crucial for achieving a meaningful designation and interpretation of them. Accordingly, in order to find and validate an optimal number of clusters that represents the data structure most appropriately different heuristics and statistical methods exist (e.g. the agglomeration coefficient, an analysis of variance, or the discriminant analysis) (Hair et al., 2010). All in all, the case clustering conducted simplified the data structure, allowed to analyse relationships between contested brands, and enabled strategic advice for marketers on how to best handle different forms of brand meaning contestation.

3.3.2 Preliminary Notion of Contested Brands

Prior to the analysis, an initial grasp of the phenomenon under investigation is presented. As mentioned in chapter 2.1.4, a preliminary notion of contested brands does exist and was developed by Mohr, Tomczak, and Holzer (2015) linked to a graduate marketing course at the *University of St. Gallen* in Switzerland. Yet, to the author's best knowledge, it has not been published elsewhere. Drawing on semiotic analogies, this initial notion considers brands as carrier of meaning and therefore understands them as symbolic signifiers. Through public brand consumption, individuals send certain messages to other market actors. Following de Saussure's (1916) dyadic concept of a sign, the interpretation of such messages can be considered as a brand's significate (i.e. a brand's meaning; see figure 9). However, a reasonable communication can only be achieved if the receiving market actor shares a similar cultural code with the transmitting actor and thus is able to decode the transmitted message as intended (Mick et al., 2004). If this is not the case, a brand becomes contested (see figure 16).

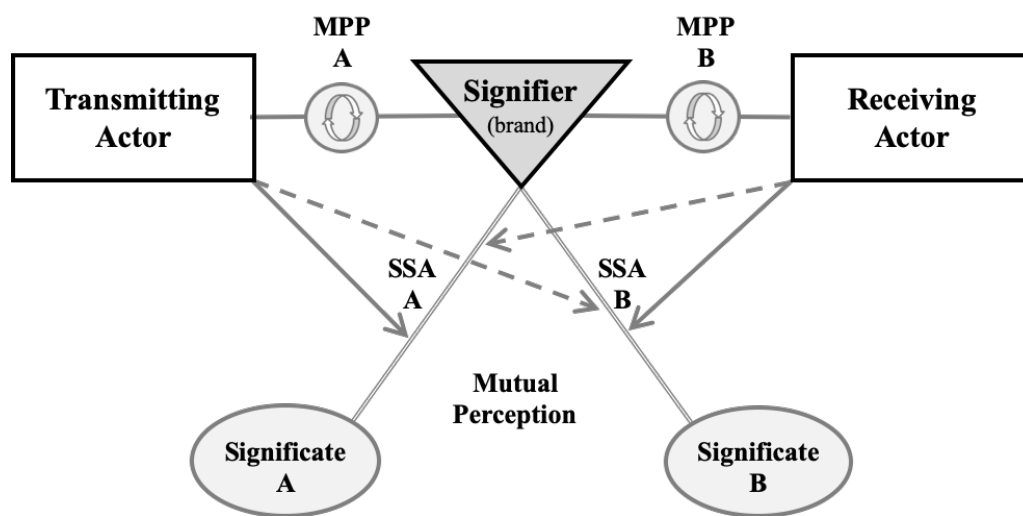


Figure 16: Preliminary Contested Brands Framework (Mohr et al., 2015).

This preliminary framework intends to explain the interplay between transmitting and receiving market actors who communicate (non-)verbally via the public utilisation of brands as signifiers. Each market actor (e.g. individuals, social collectives, or organisations) establishes a particular set of meanings associated with the physical, symbolic, and figurative attributes of a branded product or service. This set of meanings is designated as *signifier-significate association* (SSA). Moreover, if multiple markets actors share a similar SSA, they can be grouped into a brand coalition. Thus, any performance by a market actor that involves a signifier (e.g. a brand logo) has the

potential to influence the SSAs of other market participants. Such behaviours include the ways in which a branded good is produced, promoted, sold, bought, consumed, possessed, personalised, advocated, or even disposed of. Taken together, these behaviours are referred to as *market practice performance* (MPP). According to McCracken's (1986) model of meaning movement (see figure 11), such MPPs have the capability to transfer SSAs from one market actor to another. If consumers' perceived SSA is identical, or at least similar, to the marketers' submitted SSA then a distinct brand meaning manifests itself. However, subject to the uncontrollability of consumers' MPPs, observers can also adopt SSAs that are unintended by the legal brand owner; in this case a brand becomes contested. In general, the combination of SSAs and MPPs can either be beneficial for a brand's positioning or evoke contradictory brand meanings. The latter usually holds true if unwelcome market actors (e.g. non-target customers or anti-brand activists) utilise brands for their own purpose and engage in disparaging market performances (Kähr et al., 2016). In turn, the SSA-MPP combinations of favourable actors become impaired. The overall result is a polysemy of meanings that can reduce a brand's awareness, deter customers, or even harm a brand's value.

From a marketing perspective, in order to handle such precarious brand meaning contestations, the preliminary notion states the need to evaluate the legal owner's *degree of signifier control*. This is defined by two dimension that relate to the pertinent MPPs: (1) the ability of the legal owner to prevent non-target actors from engaging in unintended MPPs, and (2) the ability of the legal owner to enable target actors to engage in intended MPPs (see figure 17). If both dimensions are fulfilled to a high degree, the legal owner has strong control over its brand with low risk of meaning contestation.

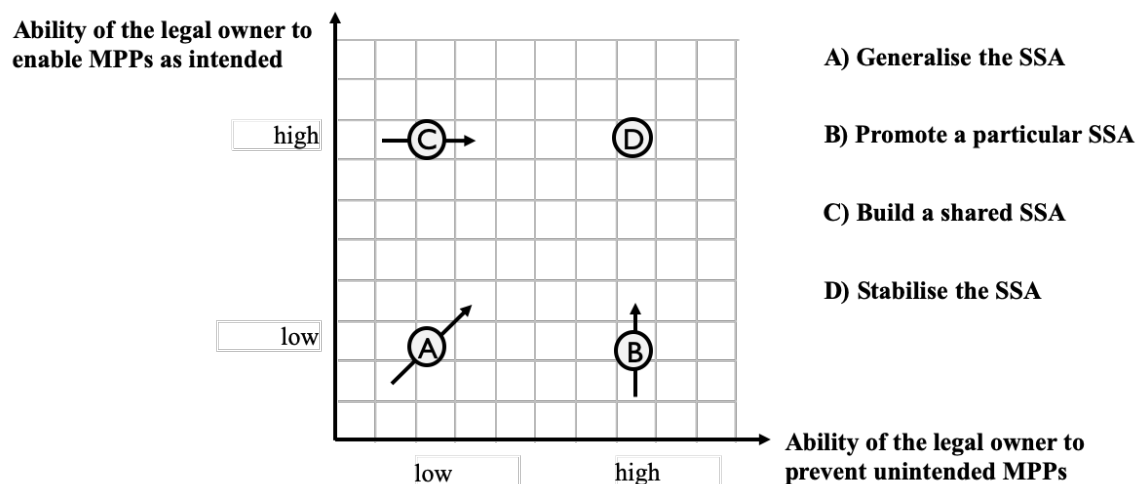


Figure 17: Degree of Signifier Control (Mohr et al., 2015).

Moreover, according to the rose theorem, to capture a brand's prevalent SSA-MPP combinations it is essential to trace both its historical development (e.g. critical brand events) and brand coalitions that influence the degree of signifier control (Heller, 2013). Thus, socio-cultural and structural factors can severely impact marketers' capability for signifier control. More specifically, such factors embrace the public visibility and conspicuousness of intended MPPs, or the simplicity and uniqueness of intended SSAs. Building on this knowledge, marketers can intervene through marketing measures that alter a brand's transmitted SSAs and aim to increase the degree of signifier control (e.g. by the type of offering, brand slogan, or promotion activities). In sum, this preliminary notion presents a substantial basis for the further exploration of contested brands. However, it does not yet reveal a distinct definition of contested brands, the actual process of brand meaning contestation, and specific advice for marketers on how to efficiently deal with different contingencies of brand meaning contestation.

3.3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The applied approaches of data collection and analysis with regard to the development of the concept and typology of contested brands are outlined next. In general, the data primarily stem from secondary sources, such as related theoretical concepts and market case information. Moreover, contested brands were defined by means of subsuming the gathered characteristics under the seven dimensions of an essentially contested concept. Attention was also paid to the development of an evaluation scheme that enables to determine the degree of contestability of specific contested brand instances. In addition, the following chapters detail the research procedure applied for deriving, implementing, and validating the contested brands typology.

3.3.3.1 Theoretical Cross-Analysis

For the purpose of developing a scientifically meaningful and practically applicable contested brands typology, a broad variety of secondary theories related to the idea of contested brands were analysed and compared. This theoretical cross-analysis intended to identify typology criteria that are most suitable for the classification of contested brand cases. Therefore, a total of 53 existing theoretical branding concepts were thoroughly reviewed and grouped into the following three categories: (1) brand meaning (co-)creation, (2) consumer resistance and brand sabotage, and (3) cultural appropriation and co-optation (see table 6). The main rationale for the identification and selection of

the analysed branding concepts was their theoretical relevance with regard to contested brands. Accordingly, many of these theories have already been discussed within the theoretical foundations of the present work (see chapter 2). In addition, the theory selection focused on diverse and leading-edge branding concepts published over the last 20 years in renowned and peer-reviewed marketing journals, such as the *Journal of Consumer Research* or the *Journal of Marketing*. Yet, some substantial theories that are still evolving also stem from less well-known, scientific niche journals. Overall, it was important to include impactful publications that are frequently cited and exhibit different research approaches. Noteworthy, highly similar theoretical branding concepts were partially aggregated and analysed together (e.g. customer retaliation and customer revenge). For an overview of all the branding concepts included, see table 6.

Contested Brands – Theoretical Cross-Analysis	
Brand Meaning (Co-)Creation	
▪ Brand Endorsement (McCracken, 1989) ▪ Brand Double Jeopardy (Ehrenberg et al., 1990) ▪ Brand Confusion (Foxman et al., 1992) ▪ Subculture of Consumption (Schouten & McAlexander, 1995) ▪ Consumer-Brand Relationship (Fournier, 1998) ▪ Brand Revitalisation (Keller, 1999) ▪ Brand Community (Muñiz & O'Guinn, 2001) ▪ Psychological Brand Ownership (Pierce et al., 2001) ▪ Consumer Tribe (Cova & Cova, 2002) ▪ Brand Legitimacy (Kates, 2004) ▪ Brand Co-Creation (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004) ▪ Brandscape (Thompson & Arsel, 2004) ▪ Self-Brand Construal (Escalas & Bettman, 2005)	▪ Brand Literacy (Bengtsson & Firat, 2006) ▪ Customer Empowerment (Cova & Pace, 2006) ▪ Identity Signaling (Berger & Heath, 2007) ▪ Brand Gestalt (Diamond et al., 2009) ▪ Customer Brand Engagement (Hollebeek, 2011) ▪ Brand Love (Batra et al., 2012) ▪ Brand Advocacy (Wallace et al., 2012) ▪ Brand Passion (Albert et al., 2013) ▪ Brand Dilution (Ferraro et al., 2013) ▪ Brand Tourism (Bellezza & Keinan, 2014) ▪ Brand Authenticity (Morhart et al., 2015) ▪ Brand Public (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016)
Consumer Resistance & Brand Sabotage	
▪ Consumer Resistance (Penaloza & Price, 1993) ▪ Brand Appropriation (Thompson & Haytko, 1997) ▪ Brand Bullying (Klein, 1999) ▪ Consumer Boycott (Klein et al., 2004) ▪ Consumer Activism (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004) ▪ Brand Hijacking (Wipperfurth, 2005) ▪ Brand Dislike (Dalli et al., 2006) ▪ Doppelgänger Brand Image (Thompson et al., 2006) ▪ Customer Retaliation (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008)	▪ Brand Avoidance (Lee et al., 2009) ▪ Anti-Branding (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010) ▪ Brand Co-Destruction (Echeverri & Skalen, 2011) ▪ Infidel Brands (Izberk-Bilgin, 2012) ▪ Brand Divorce (Sussan et al., 2012) ▪ Consumer-Brand Disidentification (Wolter et al., 2013) ▪ Brand Audience Dissipation (Parmentier & Fischer, 2015) ▪ Consumer Brand Sabotage (Kähr et al., 2016) ▪ Brand Hate (Kucuk, 2016)
Cultural Appropriation & Co-Optation	
▪ Culture Jamming (Lasn, 1999) ▪ Brand Morphing (Kates & Goh, 2003) ▪ Cultural Branding (Holt, 2004) ▪ Brand Religiosity (Muniz & Schau, 2005) ▪ Brand Manifold (Berthon et al., 2007)	▪ Co-Optation (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007) ▪ Lifestyle Branding (Chernev et al., 2011) ▪ Uninvited Brand (Fournier & Avery, 2011) ▪ Stereotype Threat (Lee et al., 2011) ▪ Branding Disaster Myth (Humphreys & Thompson, 2014)

Table 6: Theoretical Cross-Analysis (own illustration).

All these theoretical concepts were analysed individually and in comparison with each other. For this purpose, information was gathered concerning the theories' fundamental ideas, their relevance for the contested brands typology, and their practical applicability. The appendices A1, A2, and A3 present a comprehensive summary of this investigation.

A cross-analysis of the collected theoretical information provided relevant typology classification criteria that were subsequently reduced to the most meaningful ones. In doing so, the criteria were subdivided into three major categories: antecedents, processes, and outcomes of concepts related to brand meaning contestations. The criteria ultimately chosen determine a contested brands typology that allows for a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive case classification. Finally, the derived contested brand types were explicitly labelled in order to unambiguously differentiate between the different cases. Chapter 3.3.4.2 reveals the resulting contested brands typology.

3.3.3.2 Contested Brands Multi-Case Analysis

Beyond the theoretical view, practical data on a multitude of contested brand instances that have actually occurred were collected with a two-sided objective. On the one hand, diverse cases were consulted to prove the reliability and validity of the developed contested brands typology. To this end, case data were evaluated in accordance with the defined classification criteria. On the other hand, the various contested brand cases were assessed by means of their degree of contestability. This quantitative evaluation of real-world instances facilitated a cluster analysis with the intention of identifying meaningful similarities and differences between the cases. The resulting clusters were used to gain a better understanding of similar contested brands and to derive cluster-specific advice for practitioners. If the evaluation scheme of brand meaning contestability proves to be useful for clustering and analysing occurred instances of brand contestation, it may also be utilised to assess a brand's prevalent state of contestability.

In total, secondary data for 30 contested brand cases were collected (see table 7). The fundamental sources for these data were company reports, articles in newspapers and magazines, social media content, as well as online blogs and brand community websites. For case selection purposes, the developed defining characteristics of a contested brand were considered. Cases also had to feature public attention and relevance. In addition, to enable a comprehensive analysis, the selected cases encompass diverse industries (e.g. apparel, beverages, or the automotive industry), varying company sizes and brand values, different socio-cultural environments (e.g. wealthy upper class, hipsters, or mainstream consumers), and a broad set of contestation practices (e.g. boycotting, co-optation, or consumer brand sabotage). Once selected, all cases were provided with data concerning the following dimensions: general company characteristics (e.g. industry, size, revenue, and brand value), contestation case data (i.e. timeframe, location, target

customers, intended brand meanings, contesting actors, unintended brand meanings, cause of contestation, contestation practice, and contestation consequences), and data on the contestation-related brand management conduct (e.g. preventive measures and counteractions). An overview of the case data collected is presented in appendix A4.

Contested Brand Cases	
Timeframe: 1970s – 2009	Timeframe: 2010 – today
Dr. Martens (1970s, Europe): Co-optation by multiple subcultures	BP (2010, U.S.): Anti-branding by ecological activists
Coca-Cola (1985, U.S.): Consumer resistance by brand lovers	Engadin St. Moritz (2010s, Switzerland): Brand audience dissipation due to super-rich from emerging countries
Lonsdale (1990s, Europe): Brand appropriation by neo-Nazis	Nestlé (2010, Global): Anti-brand activism by Greenpeace
Louis Vuitton (1990s, France): Identity signalling by hip-hop lovers	Henkel (2011, Germany): Brand hate by Pril co-creators
Red Bull (1990s, Europe): Public doppelgänger brand images	McDonald's (2011, Finland): Culture jamming by social activists
Tommy Hilfiger (1990s, U.S.): Brand hijacking by hip-hop artists	A&F (2013, U.S.): Brand sabotage by a non-customer
Camel (1996, U.S.): Culture jamming by Adbusters	Birkenstock (2014, Europe): Co-optation by modern fashionistas
BMW (2000s, Germany): Customer retaliation by an angry client	P&G (2014, Germany): Brand dislike by German Ariel clients
Burberry (2000s, U.K.): Brand appropriation by chavs	Hermès (2015, U.K.): Brand co-destruction by a celebrity
Feldschlösschen (2000s, CH): Brand avoidance by Swiss modernists	Weight Watchers (2015, U.S.): Brand endorsement by Oprah Winfrey
Lego (2000s, Global): Co-creation by adult brand fans	Adidas (2016, Germany): Brand audience dissipation by creators
Pabst Blue Ribbon (2001, U.S.): Co-optation by urban hipsters	New Balance (2016, U.S.): Consumer brand disidentification
Starbucks (2003, U.S.): Sceptical brandscape by social activists	Victoria's Secret (2016, China): Infidel brand among Chinese women
Dell (2005, U.S.): Brand sabotage by an upset blogger	Nivea (2017, Global): Consumer resistance by the broad public
Rolux (2007, U.S.): Stereotype threat by a criminal	
United Airlines (2009, U.S.): Customer retaliation by an angry artist	

Table 7: Overview of Contested Brand Cases (own illustration).

To analyse these 30 cases, the data collected were grounded within existing theoretical concepts, iteratively compared to each other, and interpreted along the derived typology (Eisenhardt, 1989). Therefore, both a within-case and a between-case analysis enabled a distinct case classification. By contrast, the case clustering is based on a quantitative assessment of each case. Hence, the developed evaluation scheme of brand meaning contestability was applied by rating each of the seven evaluation criteria on a five-point Likert scale (i.e. from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Noteworthy, the secondary case data were utilised to evaluate the cases at the time of their occurrence and not in terms of the current brand situation (see appendix A7). In order to avoid subjectivity in the evaluations, different data sources were consulted for the criteria assessment. The quantitative evaluation data were then fed into the case-clustering algorithm. This cluster analysis was executed through the statistical software *SPSS*. An overview of the mathematical procedure is given in appendix A8. Thus, a hierarchical, agglomerative clustering was executed first, based on *Ward's method*, to identify the optimal number of clusters. Secondly, a centroid-based *k-means clustering* was applied to gain a stable and reliable cluster solution (Hair et al., 2010). Finally, the resulting clusters were explored, interpreted, and tested for validity by a post-hoc analysis of cluster variance.

3.3.4 Results: Concept and Typology of Contested Brands

3.3.4.1 Conceptualisation of Contested Brands

In order to establish a coherent conceptualisation of contested brands, Gallie's (1956) interpretative frame of essentially contested concepts was applied to the notion of brands. Building on this discussion, an evaluation scheme for the degree of brand meaning contestability was then developed. Therefore, in line with Clarke (1979), brands as a general concept were analysed to be essentially contested, whereas particular brand instances on the marketplace were investigated to be contestable.

Considering brands as a contested concept requires a theoretical subsuming of their characteristics under the five necessary and two justifying conditions set out by Gallie (1956), as discussed in chapter 3.3.1.1. In line with the necessary conditions, first, a brand inevitably constitutes an anchor point for the assessment of the legal owner's conduct. This appraisiveness is best portrayed by a brand's value, which signifies both a company's value achievement and a brand's revenue potential by virtue of public recognition and customer loyalty (Ehrenberg, Goodhardt, & Barwise, 1990; Keller, 1993; Raggio & Leone, 2007). Since brands inevitably have a certain value, the first condition of an essentially contested concept is fulfilled. For example, Interbrand (2018) revealed its renowned report on *Best Global Brands 2018* that *Apple* (~ \$ 215 bn.), *Google* (~ \$ 156 bn.), and *Amazon* (~ \$ 101 bn.) are the world's most valuable brands. Second, due to the versatile structure of brand identities, the internal nature of a brand is inherently complex. Marketers determine a brand's identity in terms of their intended brand positioning (Kapferer, 2012). According to Aaker's (1996) brand identity model, this embraces a brand's essence (i.e. the central brand promise), its core identity (i.e. brand values), and its extended identity (i.e. brand associations and personality). Moreover, brands' internal complexity can be substantiated by the existence of multiple perspectives on its underlying nature, such as the views of a brand as a symbol, a product, an organisation, or a person. Third, with respect to the dimension of diverse describability, publicly consumed brands (i.e. offline and online) inevitably entail heterogeneous descriptions or rival usage. In contrast to the brand identity, a brand's image indicates how external market actors perceive and associate a brand (Aaker, 1996; Thompson et al., 2006). This external perception varies due to brand's utilisation by different stakeholders, for different purposes, within different socio-cultural contexts, and over time and space (Allen et al., 2008). Thus, any brand's meaning is subject to

heterogeneous public interpretations. Fourth, since in open economic systems both target and non-target customers can freely acquire and consume branded goods, brand meanings cannot be completely predicted or controlled. In addition, due to the far-reaching influence of non-customers (e.g. online-based disparagements of brand symbols by rebellious activists), brand meanings are subject to continuous change (Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016; Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010). Thus, brands as common goods can be considered as being open with their meanings depending on external circumstances and ongoing social negotiations. Fifth, reciprocal recognition implies that market actors hold and mutually recognise different brand perceptions, which is the case as antagonistic stakeholders pursue distinct interests by aggressive or defensive brand consumption (Bourdieu, 1990; Escalas & Bettman, 2005). Based on the semiotic nature of brand meanings this entails communication processes founded on mutual recognition.

With regard to the justifying conditions, sixth, the existence of an original exemplar is a further requirement for an essentially contested concept. As a brand's different meanings derive from a common ground (i.e. the legal owner's initial composition, positioning, and communication of a brand), the genuine authority is familiar to all contestants (Keller, 2013). The company behind a brand is thus the primary origin for its meaning. However, the moment a brand goes public, the legal owner loses its immediate control and the brand becomes available for manifold interpretations (Tierney et al., 2016). Nevertheless, any brand has a distinct original exemplar. Seventh, increasing competition calls for an ongoing dispute, or negotiation, between the contesting actors about the brand's true interpretation, which either sustains or develops a brand's value achievement. Since the negotiation of brand meanings is an ongoing social process between different market actors, the first part of this condition is fulfilled (Ligas & Cotte, 1999). However, although brand meanings develop successively over time, their evolution does not always improve a legal owner's value achievement, as it can also seriously harm a brand's value (Kähr et al., 2016). If contestants load brands with undesired associations, both a brand's meaning and equity can be impaired. Yet, in line with the detailed wording of the seventh condition, only the probability of value improvement must be given, which is certainly the case for brands. Moreover, brand deteriorations also manifest a kind of meaning development that sufficiently complies with the seventh condition. Brands inevitably offer room for ideological framing, which suggests that any contestation extends a brand's meaning beyond its original identity.

Overall, the discussion reveals that brands fulfil all of Gallie's (1956) necessary and justifying conditions. It can therefore be argued that brands constitute an essentially contested concept. This facilitates the following conceptualisation of contested brands:

A contested brand is defined as a brand that is utilised by antagonistic market actors for heterogeneous purposes who publicly engage in controversial market practices that influence both the brand's prevalent meaning and its value.

Strictly speaking, this definition covers three factors for a brand to be considered as contested. To begin with, a brand needs to be adopted by different market actors (e.g. its legal owner, consumers, activists, or brand communities) for distinct purposes. These actors are antagonistic in terms of diverging perceptions towards the focal brand. In addition, the contestants have to publicly practice and mutually recognise brand-related behaviours. In this manner, they interact, negotiate, and oppose each other. Lastly, these controversial market practices have to affect – by causing either a positive improvement or a negative impairment – the brand's prevalent meaning and value.

Furthermore, this conceptualisation and the idea of essentially contested concepts were used to develop an evaluation scheme for the degree of brand meaning contestability (see table 8). The purpose of this scheme is to analyse contested brand instances quantitatively and derive practical recommendations for marketers. The scheme contains seven criteria and related analytical questions that make it possible to determine how strongly a brand is contested at a certain point in time (see chapter 3.3.4.3).

Evaluation Criteria		Analytical Questions
Necessary Conditions	(I) Appraisiveness	Does the brand constitute a value achievement for its legal owner?
	(II) Internal Complexity	Does the firm's intended brand meaning have different components of interest?
	(III) Diverse Describability	Can the brand's meaning be described or interpreted in diverse ways?
	(IV) Openness	Do market actors have access to change the brand's meaning?
	(V) Reciprocal Recognition	Do antagonistic market actors attribute different meanings to the brand and mutually recognise its contested nature?
Justifying Conditions	(VI) Original Exemplar	Does an original brand meaning exist on which all contestants agree upon?
	(VII) Progressive Competition	Does an ongoing negotiation of the prevalent brand meaning develop the brand's value achievement (in a positive or negative sense)?

Table 8: Brand Meaning Contestability Evaluation Scheme (own illustration; based on Gallie, 1956).

3.3.4.2 Contested Brands Typology

For specifying the contested brands typology, as a first step boundary conditions were determined for the brand cases covered. Hence, based on the contested brands concept developed, the typology facilitates a classification of brands that fulfil the following characteristics: (1) brands that are adopted by antagonistic market actors for different purposes, (2) brands that are loaded with heterogeneous meanings (e.g. legal owner's intended meaning vs. unintended meanings by non-target customers), and (3) brands that are publicly utilised within distinct social-cultural environments by means of controversial market practices (i.e. in online or offline settings). If a brand case, regardless of other characteristics such as industry type, company size, product category, or brand value, features these boundary conditions, the typology may be applied. In addition, the contested brands typology rests upon the principle of the *methodological individualism* (Arrow, 1994). Accordingly, the phenomenon of brand meaning contestation is principally analysed based on individual market actors' behaviours and not on group dynamics per se. Social groups are treated as clusters of similar individuals. Yet, due to behavioural aggregation, different analytical levels can be distinguished. Fundamentally, contestation practices are ascribed to individuals' actions (micro-level). If multiple individuals think and act similarly, the centre of interest shifts to the social collective (meso-level). Beyond that, a societal majority of individuals can also be responsible for a brand's contestation (macro-level). Thus, through the interaction and coalition building of like-minded market actors, more complex social structures can arise and unleash a more far-reaching impact on the market.

Next, informed by a theoretical cross-analysis of related branding concepts (see chapter 3.3.3.1 and appendices A1, A2, and A3), a range of potential classification criteria was identified. These criteria were grouped into three distinct categories: (1) antecedents of brand meaning contestation (e.g. contestation causes, socio-psychological stimuli, and context determinants), (2) structures and processes of brand meaning contestation (e.g. contesting actors, appraisal and negotiation processes, and practices of contestation), and (3) outcomes of brand meaning contestation (e.g. contestation consequences, gravity of brand impact, and countervailing measures). From these, a small set of practicable criteria was determined. Therefore, it was crucial to choose criteria that facilitate a typology, which is mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive (MECE) with regard to the contested brand types contained (Bailey, 1994). This suggests that the criteria are

sufficiently abstract to enable a distinct (i.e. no overlaps between the types) and comprehensive (i.e. all the brand cases within the boundary conditions are classifiable) classification. In addition, it was important for the typology's applicability to utilise criteria that are intelligible, evaluable, and manageable by legal brand owners. Pursuant to these requirements, criteria from the third category (i.e. outcomes of brand meaning contestation) were not suitable. Their evaluation requires the contestation to be elapsed; hence, to reasonably manage brand instances at an early stage of contestation, outcome variables cannot be considered for the typology. Besides, criteria such as context determinants, negotiation structures, or contestation practices are highly versatile and often occur simultaneously in different forms (see chapter 3.4). Thus, these do not allow for a MECE classification. The criteria reduction consequently revealed the following two typology dimensions to be most appropriate: (1) *level of action* (i.e. contesting actors) and (2) *contestation cause* (i.e. stimuli for contestation).

In line with the methodological individualism, the level of action focuses on the social actors who contest a brand, independent from the legal brand owner. Accordingly, this dimension distinguishes between a micro-, meso-, and macro-level. On the *micro-level*, individual market actors are considered as contestants. On the *meso-level*, like-minded individuals, grouped into social collectives, contest brands for common objectives. Examples for such collectives are brand communities or subcultures of consumption (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995). Finally, on the *macro-level*, the majority of individuals in a society, often considered as the mainstream, is deemed to act similarly and, thus, exert public influence on a brand's prevalent meaning.

The second typology dimension is the contestation cause, which concerns different kinds of stimuli that prompt sovereign market actors to contest a brand. This dimension distinguishes between *legal owner-based* and *actor-based* stimuli that provoke contestation practices. Legal owner-based stimuli refer to companies' brand-related (mis-)conduct. To this end, in line with Kähr et al. (2016), the typology differentiates between causes that stem from *operative performance failures* (i.e. performance-based misconduct by the legal brand owner) and *systematic value discrepancies* (i.e. persistent value-based dissonances by the legal brand owner). More precisely, performance-based causes designate brand or product failures with regard to operative interactions with market actors (e.g. insufficient product quality, lack of service quality, or inappropriate marketing communications). Such failures can cause contestants to vent negative

emotions or redeem the insufficient performance. By contrast, value-based causes refer to systematic and persistent discrepancies between a firm's promised, or market actors' expected, brand values and those actually perceived (e.g. unethical brand positioning, immoral business practices, or inadequate CSR activities). In this respect, market actors often criticise brands publicly to (re-)claim their expected value systems. In addition to these legal owner-based causes, literature reveals a further contestation cause that originates from independent market actors (e.g. sovereign consumers) themselves in that they are continuously striving to (re-)state their personal and social identity. Accordingly, detached from legal owners' conduct, brands are appropriated to create and express both individual and collective identities (see chapter 2.3). Brands thus enable market actors to pursue idiosyncratic identity goals by signalling both personal characteristics and social group affiliations (Belk, 1988). This actor-based cause is therefore independent from legal owners' performance or value system. Instead, it is driven by brands' suitability for idiosyncratic meaning appropriation related to actors' identity goals. Figure 18 illustrates the resulting final typology of contested brands.

CONTESTATION CAUSE

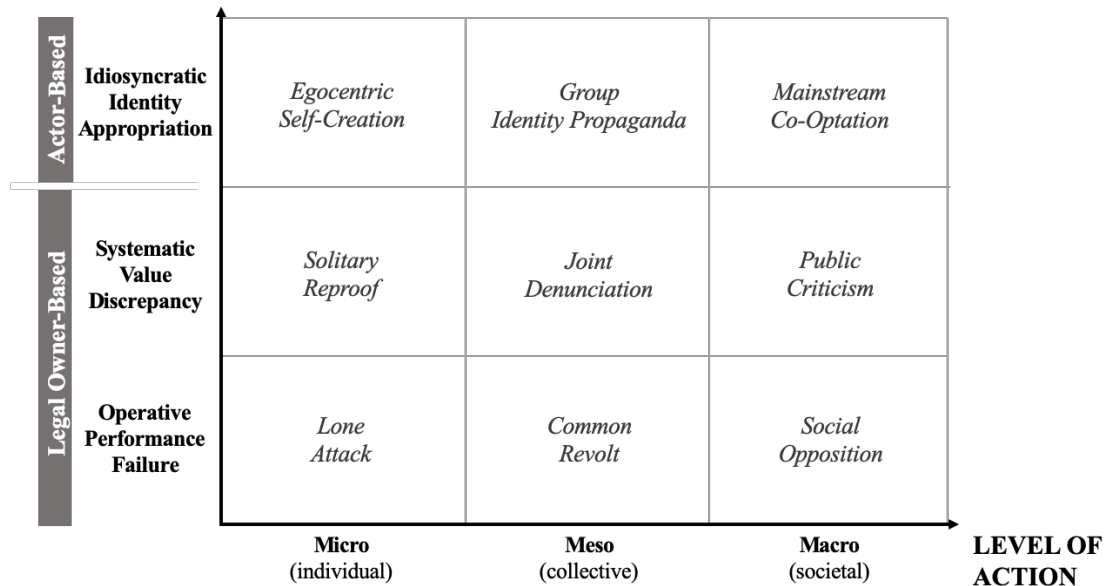


Figure 18: Typology of Contested Brands (own illustration).

As shown, the typology divides contested brands into nine different types. Noteworthy, this typology refers to the classification of particular brand contestation cases (i.e. time-, space-, and occasion-dependent) and not to the classification of brands in general. Each of the nine contested brand types designates a certain kind of meaning contestation and is termed based on the underlying course of contestation. In detail, these types are:

- *Lone attack*: an individual market actor displeased about a brand's business performance offends the brand by means of public degradation.
- *Common revolt*: a group of market actors offends a brand in order to express their resentment about the legal brand owner's unsatisfactory operations.
- *Social opposition*: a brand's performance failure that has far-reaching impacts on a substantial part of a society evokes momentous public opposition.
- *Solitary reproof*: an upset moralist publicly condemns a brand for its non-compliance with particularly expected or commonly assumed value standards.
- *Joint denunciation*: an organised collective of market actors (re-)claims a socially approved brand-value system by means of public denunciation and protestation.
- *Public criticism*: a brand's value-related, socially debatable behaviour affects a society's majority and therefore triggers public criticism and common resistance.
- *Egocentric self-creation*: a self-focused individual adopts a brand to pursue idiosyncratic identity goals and differentiate from other market actors.
- *Group identity propaganda*: a social collective of like-minded individuals utilises a brand in non-conformist ways to propagate a common identity.
- *Mainstream co-optation*: a brand loaded with expressive subcultural identity value becomes appropriated and commodified by mainstream market actors.

A qualitative evaluation of the two typology dimensions has to be conducted in order to assign a contested brand case to one of these nine types. Firstly, the social level of action on which the contestation takes place has to be analysed. Is it an individual, a collective, or the social majority contesting a brand? Secondly, the underlying cause for contestation has to be identified. Does the contestation originate from a legal brand owner's (mis-)conduct or from market actors' independent striving for identity? In sum, a well-founded case classification allows marketers to derive suitable measures for countervailing a particular contestation case. For the purpose of verifying the typology's validity and reliability, it will next be used to classify various cases of contested brands.

3.3.4.3 Typology Application and Case Clustering

In order to test the applicability of the derived typology, a total of 30 contested brand cases were evaluated based on the two typology dimensions. An overview of the cases included in the evaluation (i.e. cases that comply with the contested brands concept and fulfil the required boundary conditions) is provided in table 7 (for the detailed case

analyses, see appendix A4). A qualitative case-by-case assessment of both the level of action and the contestation cause resulted in the following classification (see figure 19).

CONTESTATION CAUSE

CONTESTATION CAUSE	LEVEL OF ACTION			
		Micro (individual)	Meso (collective)	Macro (societal)
Actor-Based Legal Owner-Based	Idiosyncratic Identity Appropriation	Tommy Hilfiger (1990s, U.S.) Rolex (2007, U.S.) Weight Watchers (2015, U.S.)	Lonsdale (1990s, Europe) Louis Vuitton (1990s, FR) Burberry (2000s, U.K.) Lego (2000s, Global) Engadin St. Moritz (2010s, Switzerland)	Dr. Martens (1970s, Europe) Pabst Blue Ribbon (2001, U.S.) Birkenstock (2014, Europe)
	Systematic Value Discrepancy	Camel (1996, U.S.) A&F (2013, U.S.) Hermès (2015, U.K.)	Starbucks (2003, U.S.) Nestlé (2010, Global) McDonald's (2011, Finland)	Red Bull (1990s, Europe) Feldschlösschen (2000s, Switzerland) Adidas (2016, Germany)
	Operative Performance Failure	BMW (2000s, Germany) Dell (2005, U.S.) United Airlines (2009, U.S.)	Henkel (2011, Germany) P&G (2014, Germany) Victoria's Secret (2016, China) New Balance (2016, U.S.)	Coca-Cola (1985, U.S.) BP (2010, U.S.) Nivea (2017, Global)

Figure 19: Application of the Contested Brands Typology (own illustration).

The illustration indicates that each contested brand case – referred to by a specific time and region – was assigned to a distinct contestation type. Yet, in any case, the focal brand was contested by antagonistic market actors who elicited controversial brand meanings. It is worth noting that some cases are limited to a narrow place and timeframe, whereas other cases spread widely and last for a long time. A comparison of the different cases revealed that, for contestations caused by the legal brand owner, the effects on the brands were generally negative. The corresponding brands received public pressure on different action levels, which impaired their meanings and values to different degrees. Yet, for the contestations caused by market actors' idiosyncratic identity appropriation, the effects were partly negative and partly positive, depending on the social relationship between the contesting actors and the brand's target customers. If the contesting actors were appealing to the target customers, the effect was rather positive; if they were repulsive, the effect was rather negative. Next, examples for each type will be discussed:

If contestations were caused by operative performance failures of the legal brand owner, consumers commonly tended to dislike, boycott, retaliate, or sabotage the focal brand; in particular, if the brand repeatedly failed on multiple touchpoints. On the micro-level, in the case of *Dell* (2005, U.S.), the upset customer Jeff Jarvis founded the online anti-brand blog *Dell Hell* to vent his anger about his long-lasting customer service troubles.

The blog triggered a widespread social media shitstorm that resulted in a serious drop in *Dell's* overall customer satisfaction, market share, and stock price. On the meso-level, *Henkel* (2011, Germany) suffered a public backlash of disappointed co-creators after the firm manipulated a *Facebook* idea contest related to *Pril's* product design. In addition, *BP* (2010, U.S.) illustrates a performance-based macro-level case. Due to both the debatable rebranding from *British Petroleum* to *Beyond Petroleum* and the hazardous *Deepwater Horizon* oil spill, environmental activists and negative media coverage induced the public to boycott *BP*, which seriously harmed the brand's value.

Moreover, contestations that originated from value discrepancies caused by the legal owner primarily sparked public criticism and brand rejection on different action levels. In the micro-level case of *Camel* (1996, U.S.), the *Adbusters* magazine – co-founded by the cultural jammer Kalle Lasn – created disparaging doppelgänger brand images about *Joe Chemo* as a parody of *Camel's* brand figure *Joe Camel*. Hence, the magazine aimed to establish an anti-smoking movement and to publicly denounce *Camel* for targeting children. On the meso-level, the consumer collective calling itself *Food Liberation Army* criticised *McDonald's* (2011, Finland) for alleged unethical brand values and business conducts. In a bid to gain public attention, the cultural activists kidnapped a *Ronald McDonald* statue and urged the company to answer some critical questions. *McDonald's* did not react, however. On the macro-level, *Red Bull* (1990s, Europe) was exposed to negative public rumours (e.g. that it was liquid cocaine, a *Viagra* equivalent, or deadly), since the drink was initially illegal in some European states due to health concerns.

Finally, if brand contestations were based on sovereign market actors' idiosyncratic identity appropriation, they either entailed negative stereotype threats or positive brand endorsements through mainstream co-optation. In this regard, *Rolex* (2007, U.S.) constitutes a micro-level case. After O. J. Simpson was arrested on charges of robbery and kidnapping, his status-signalling *Rolex* watch was pledged by law for penalty payment. Yet, it turned out to be a worthless counterfeit in a discovery that got broad media attention and marked the brand as a misleading status symbol. On the meso-level, the iconic luxury brand *Burberry* (2000s, U.K.) was appropriated by *chavs*, the members of an anti-social British youth subculture, as a collective identity symbol. Chavs' public presentation of *Burberry* counterfeits triggered negative brand meanings, deterred target customers, and lowered *Burberry's* U.K. sales seriously. Finally, *Pabst Blue Ribbon* (2001, U.S.) offers a macro-level example of mainstream co-optation. The American

beer brand was initially adopted by urban hipsters (e.g. bike messengers) as an idiosyncratic identification symbol that differentiated them from their parents, who consumed the big traditional beer brands. Later, mainstream consumers followed this trend and co-opted *Pabst Blue Ribbon*, resulting in a momentous sales growth.

Taken as a whole, the cases discussed provide an overview of different contingencies of contested brands and how to classify them. For more profound insights, appendices A5 and A6 review the cases of *Birkenstock* (2014, Europe) and *New Balance* (2016, U.S.) in detail. By referring the conducted multi-case analysis to Gregor's (2006) validity and reliability criteria for scientific classifications, it can be stated that the developed contested brands typology fully serves its purpose. It provides intelligible classification criteria that feature a reasonable level of abstraction. Furthermore, both criteria and types have a clear logic of application and comprehensible labels. In line with Meyer (2007), the typology is consistent with related branding theories (i.e. construct validity) and contains unambiguous types (i.e. content validity). Overall, the contested brands typology complies with Bailey's (1994) MECE requirement, as it allows for a mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive classification of contested brand cases.

In the second part of the multi-case study, the case data gathered were utilised to apply the evaluation scheme of brand meaning contestability (see table 8). Accordingly, the degree of contestability was determined for the 30 cases and compared by means of a statistical cluster analysis. Hence, for each case, the seven evaluation criteria of brand meaning contestability were separately assessed on the basis of five-point Likert scales. The outcome of this assessment is illustrated in appendix A7 using *Harvey Balls*. The evaluated criteria were then used as variables to feed an explorative cluster analysis in three steps: (1) an application of *Ward's hierarchical clustering method* determined the optimal number of clusters to be three, (2) the *k-means clustering algorithms* delivered a statistical reliable and robust cluster solution, and (3) a *post-hoc analysis of the clustering variance* tested the clusters' validity (for details, see appendix A8).

The result of this explorative cluster analysis revealed three distinct contestability clusters for contested brand cases. For each of these clusters mean values of the seven clustering variables were determined. Hence, figure 20 shows how much the individual variables contribute to the different clusters. Notably, the evaluation variable *original exemplar* obtained the maximum score in any cluster, since all the brand cases included

have original brand meanings on which the contestants agreed. Thus, this variable is not suitable for differentiating the clusters. Besides, the *appraisiveness* variable scores rather similarly for all clusters and therefore does not add significant explanatory value. The rationale here is that brands with high value achievements are in general more likely to become contested, independent of the clusters. Yet, the other five variables are clearly distinguishable between the clusters and contribute to their characterisation. As shown in figure 20, the criteria *internal complexity*, *diverse descriptability*, *openness*, *reciprocal recognition*, and *progressive competition* received significantly different values for the three clusters. Overall, the degree of contestability is evinced to be rather low for cases in cluster 1, medium for cases in cluster 2, and high for cases in cluster 3.

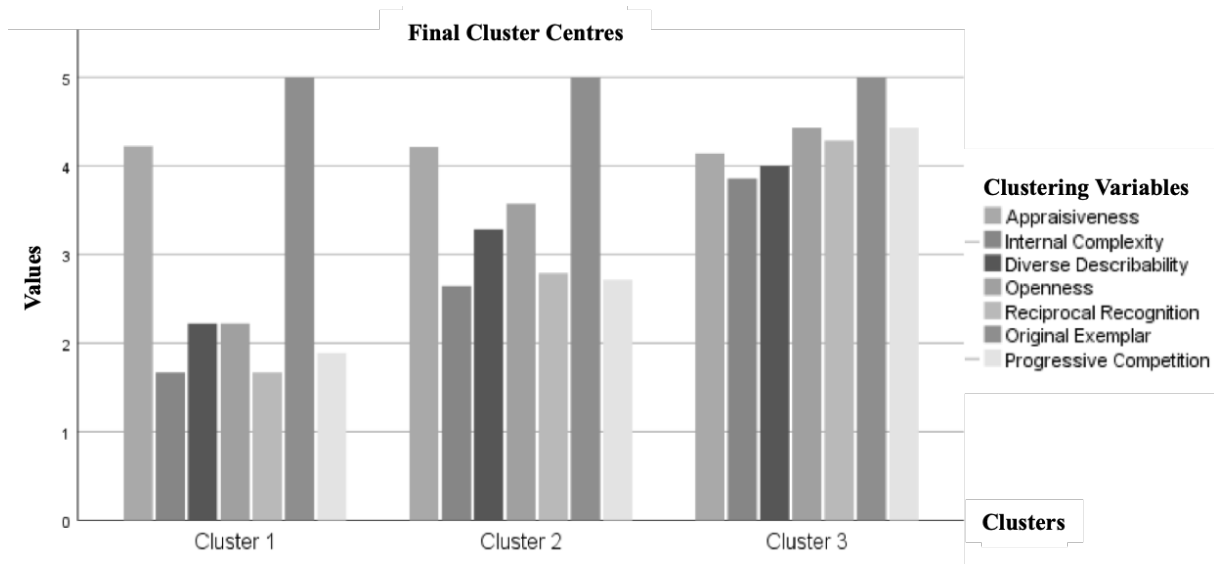


Figure 20: K-Means Clustering Variable Distribution (own illustration).

In addition to the distribution of the clustering variables, the results allow for a specific allocation of each of the contested brand cases to one of the three clusters. According to the clustering algorithm, more similar cases were grouped together (i.e. maximisation of the within-cluster homogeneity), whereas more different cases were located in separate clusters (i.e. maximisation of the between-cluster heterogeneity). An overall illustration of the contested brands case allocation is given in figure 21 by contrasting the cases' average scores from the five necessary contestability conditions (x-axis) with their average scores from the two justifying contestability conditions (y-axis). It is important to keep in mind here that the case clustering presented does not refer to the analysed brands in general but specifically to the contested brand cases listed in table 7. Accordingly, the time- and space-stamps of the individual cases were reduced merely for the sake of clarity and to produce a more comprehensive illustration.

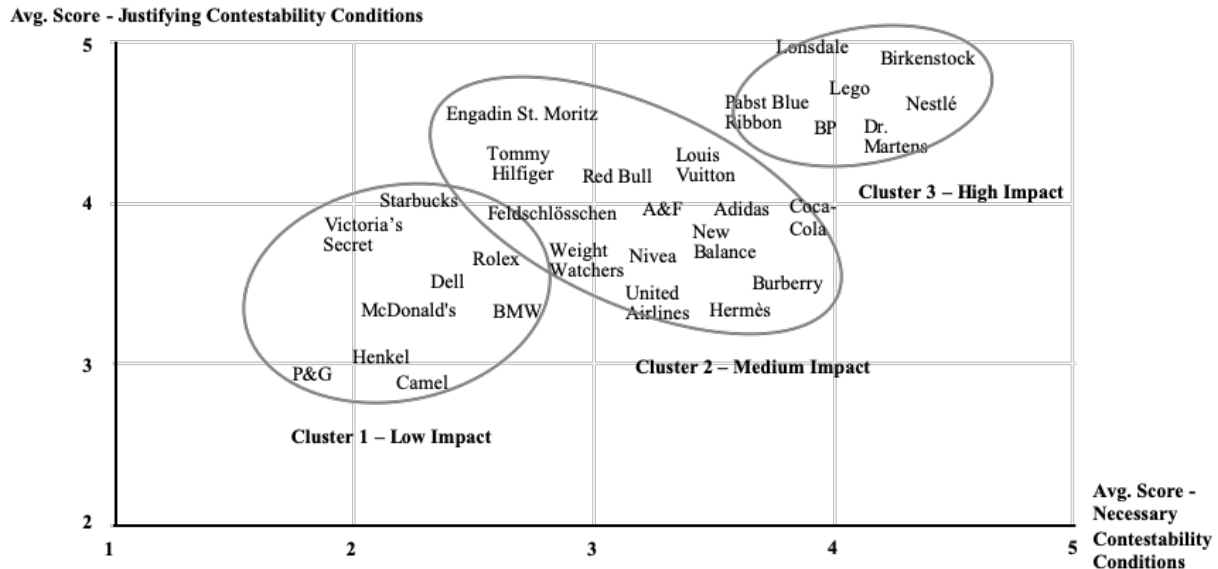


Figure 21: Contested Brands Case Clustering (own illustration).

The graph shown indicates that the explorative clustering algorithm allocated nine cases into cluster 1 (e.g. *McDonald's*, *Dell*, and *BMW*), fourteen cases into cluster 2 (e.g. *A&F*, *Hermès*, and *Nivea*), and seven cases into cluster 3 (e.g. *BP*, *Lego*, and *Birkenstock*). Based on this allocation and the previously discussed variable distribution, cluster 1 can be designated as the *low impact cluster*. All related companies were subject to contestations that did not drastically alter their brand's meaning or persistently harm their brand's value. This was due either to marketers handling the situation appropriately or to a low intensity and short duration of the related contestation practices. Cluster 2 can in turn be interpreted as the *medium impact cluster*, since all the brands in it were seriously affected by their contestation (e.g. meaning changes and loss of market shares), yet the legal owners eventually managed to overcome the consequences and regain authority over their brands. By contrast, the brands in cluster 3, referred to as the *high impact cluster*, were all exposed to momentous and permanent alterations of their meanings. The related legal brand owners therefore lost a maximum level of control over their brands and had to experience how market actors appropriated and persistently transformed their brands' prevalent meanings. Remarkably, the brands' meanings were not always impaired: in some cases (e.g. *Lego* or *Birkenstock*), the contestation also created desired meanings and improved the brands' value. Taken as a whole, the clusters identified allow for an analysis of the cases' structural nature and offer marketers practical advice about similar contestation contingencies as well as about best- and worst-case scenarios. Based on this case clustering, further contested brand cases can be evaluated and categorised in order to derive appropriate counteraction strategies.

3.4 Study 2: Process Model of Brand Meaning Contestation

In the second study, a theoretical process model is developed to explain the course of brand meaning contestations. Therefore, a triangulated set of qualitative consumer data was collected, coded, and analysed exploratively using the grounded theory approach.

3.4.1 Objectives and Design

The primary objective of study 2 was to gain a substantial understanding of why and how brand meanings are contested by antagonistic market actors. This explorative investigation is based on the contested brands concept and typology as revealed in the first study. Due to the unexplored nature of the phenomenon under investigation, a qualitative approach was chosen to reveal in-depth insights about the causes and social dynamics that shape the process of brand meaning contestation. As Vallaster and von Wallpach (2013, p. 1506) emphasise, so far only a small number of research studies have contemplated “brand meaning as continuously and dynamically co-created through social interaction within dynamic stakeholder networks.” This fact also justifies the practice-theoretical perspective of the present study (see chapter 2.4). The applied research approach utilises an interpretative mind-set and focuses on consumers being involved in recurring and interconnected brand practices. This analysis of market actors’ behavioural patterns facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the social processes and effects related to the emergence and negotiation of contested brand meanings, and thus an opportunity to answer the second research question (see chapter 1.2):

Q₂: What theoretical model, grounded in qualitative data, can explain the emergence and negotiation of contested brand meanings by antagonistic market actors?

The corresponding research design relies on three sources of qualitative consumer data: (1) in-depth consumer interviews, (2) topic-specific focus groups with market actors, and (3) a supplementary netnographic investigation. After the extensive data collection, the qualitative information was analysed with the intention of developing a grounded theory model. Hence, the emerging findings were constantly compared and adjusted to related theoretical concepts. The analysis thus produced a process model that covers the essential antecedents, practices, and outcomes of brand meaning contestations. Moreover, both the model’s theoretical rigour and practical relevance were ensured by considering validity and reliability criteria tailored to interpretative, qualitative studies.

3.4.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for study 2 generally focused on qualitative consumer information related to the perception and utilisation of branded goods. This included bodily and mental activities, social interactions, knowledge structures, as well as states of emotions. The applied practice-theoretical research lens allowed for a study of the emergence, development, transfer, disruption, and alteration of brand meanings caused by routinised consumption habits (Reckwitz, 2002). With the aim of identifying and understanding relevant brand contestation practices, qualitative data were collected and triangulated through 25 in-depth consumer interviews, participant observations, six focus groups, and netnographic research. This resulted in a large amount of qualitative data (e.g. about 580 pages of interview and focus group data transcription) which were successively coded, structured, and analysed according to the *grounded theory approach* developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967). Generally speaking, grounded theory is an inductive research method that enables to systematically explore qualitative data with the intention of generating new theory. Therefore, the approach utilises iterative data sampling and analysis steps that involve both a constant comparison of the emerging concept with existing theories and a gathering of further data until saturation is achieved as the new theory becomes stable (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). More precisely, it involves repetitive coding, memoing, theorising, integrating, and refining of the emerging theory.

Once the qualitative data had been collected, data coding was executed by means of the software tool *Atlas.ti 8* according to the following procedure: (1) *open coding*, (2) *axial coding*, and (3) *selective coding* (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013; Spiggle, 1994). In line with the grounded theory approach, open coding refers to the process of identifying first-order concepts based on textual phrases, also known as in-vivo codes, from transcripts and documents. Essentially, these concepts had to contribute to answering the pursued research question on contested brands. In addition, for the subsequent theorising process, it was crucial to elaborate memos on the meanings and understandings of the identified concepts. Axial coding was then applied to derive second-order categories that represent more abstract groups of similar first-order concepts. Finally, selective coding aimed to build new theory, respectively a theoretical process model that explains the contestation of brand meanings, by integrating, connecting, and refining the essential second-order categories in alignment with existing theories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Figure 22 shows a structural excerpt from the multi-stage data coding and analysis

procedure applied. For more details, a comprehensive codebook, which includes all 133 first-order concepts and 15 second-order categories derived, is provided in appendix B8.

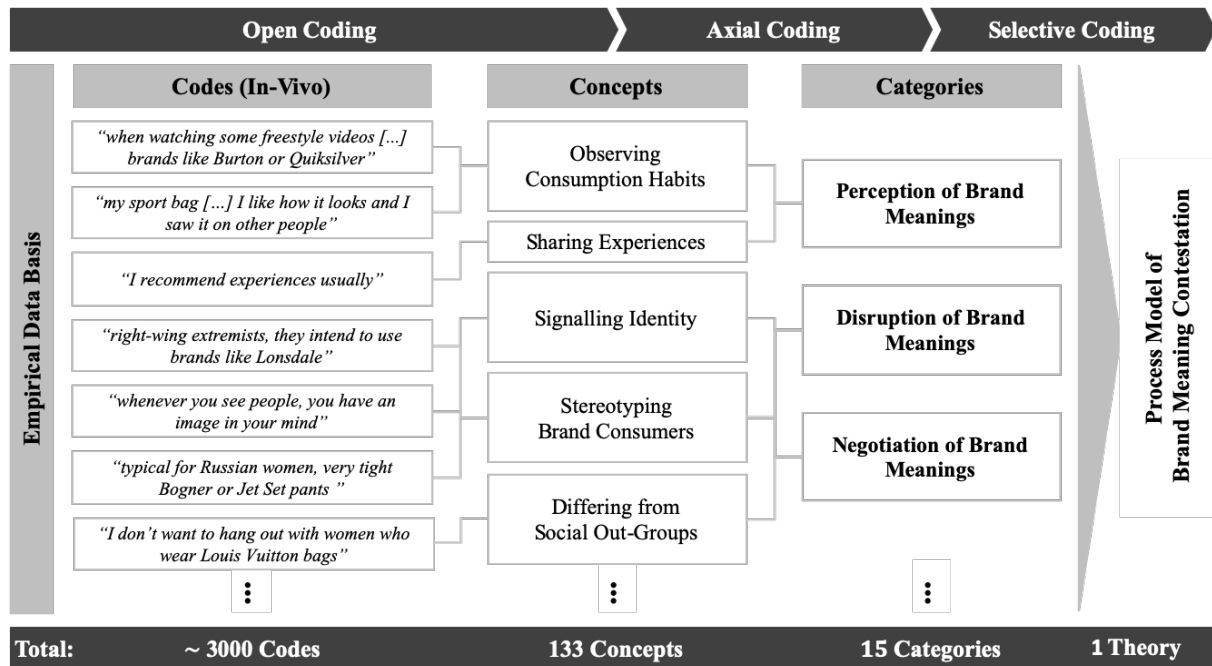


Figure 22: Grounded Theory Coding Procedure (own illustration).

In order to ensure the validity and reliability of both the data analysis procedure and the emerging theoretical process model different, scientific quality criteria were considered. Accordingly, data triangulation was applied to add credibility to the research findings by covering different perspectives on contested brands (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Thus, brand meaning contestations were studied from individual consumer perspectives, from topic-specific focus group perspectives, and from an observer perspective within the online environment. This triangulation enabled to cross-check the qualitative data by different sources, to deepen the level of insights, to reveal unique findings, and to enhance the researcher's confidence in a valid data analysis. Hence, a more objective coding was facilitated, since potential triggers for subjectivity were reflected critically across the different data sources. Beyond that, in line with Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness of the research findings was ensured by considering the following criteria: *credibility* (e.g. member checks to gain feedback from participants and reflect the outcomes), *transferability* (e.g. evidence of the findings' applicability to different contexts and situations), and *dependability* (e.g. provision of a transparent research documentation that enables other researchers to retrace the analysis). Finally, to provide clarity, the resulting process model is presented using the microscope approach and discussed by zooming in and out on the revealed contestation practices (see table 3).

3.4.2.1 In-Depth Consumer Interviews

To collect data, in a first step 25 semi-structured consumer interviews were conducted (Froschauer & Lueger, 2003). For the sake of purposive sampling, it was important to approach consumers with a sensibility towards brands and an understanding of modern communication technologies. Thus, participants were recruited via the communication management post-graduate programme at the *University of St. Gallen* in Switzerland. Yet, interview participation was completely voluntary and did not involve any form of financial compensation. To avoid a potential self-selection bias distorting the research findings, data collection was triangulated by further sources. Overall, the final sample consists of university students from Switzerland and Germany with an average age of 25 years (i.e. 5 male and 20 female participants). Moreover, the in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face in March 2017 and in participants' native languages (i.e. English or German) in order to facilitate confidence and articulateness, as well as rich narratives on interviewees' personal brand experiences. After receiving approval from each participant, the interviews, which lasted between 40-80 min. (on average 60 min.), were audio-recorded and later transcribed verbatim.* In addition, all the interviewees signed an interview participation consent form, which, among other things, guaranteed their anonymity in the subsequent data analysis (see appendix B7). Noteworthy, appendix B1 outlines all conducted interviews and provides the basis for the interview references by listing participants' anonymised first names (note: CI stands for consumer interview).

In terms of the interview questions, a consumer interview guide was developed based on the explorative pre-study (see chapter 3.2), the research objective, and existing theories (see appendix B2). Overall, this guide consists of the following five sections: (1) introduction (i.e. initial questions to get participants in a narrative mode and reveal their brand preferences), (2) identity work and stereotype perception, (3) changing brand perceptions, (4) reactions and counteraction strategies, and (5) conclusion (i.e. follow-up questions to encourage participants to share further experiences or explanations). Each of these sections entails around 1-3 guiding questions and a couple of explorative sub-questions. However, dependent on an interview pre-test, on experiences during data collection, and on the recursive nature of the grounded theory approach (i.e. the emergence of new or revised questions by going back and forth between data, findings,

*Both the audio files and interview transcripts are available electronically and can be provided on request. With regard to the interviews conducted in German, sections of the transcript were only translated into English if this was necessary for the purpose of direct quotation.

and theory), some adjustments to the interview guide were made during the research process. Also, as the interviews were semi-structured, certain questions were added spontaneously or skipped by the interviewer contingent on the individual course of each interview. Moreover, in the fourth section of the interviews, participants were stimulated by pictures of contested brand cases (e.g. *Birkenstock* and *New Balance*; see appendix B3) to create a hermeneutic research setting wherein interviewees should reflect on personal experiences and take their own brand behaviours into consideration (Thompson et al., 1994). Altogether, interviews were conducted until data saturation was achieved, as additional interviews became repetitive and did not reveal any further insights.

3.4.2.2 Focus Groups

In a second step, to triangulate the qualitative interview data and deepen the insights gained with regard to specific topics of brand meaning contestation, six focus groups were carried out (Hennink, 2014). In particular, focus group research was chosen in order to understand consumers' brand-related feelings, attitudes, and practices more profoundly by giving them the chance to discuss their experiences of brand meaning contestations with other market actors. Such interactive settings enable different points of view and emotional process cues to be traced. Hence, each of the focus groups consisted of 4-6 attendees, which added up to a total of 31 participants. Moreover, all the attendees were assigned randomly to the different focus groups. In order to get a broader sample of consumers (compared to the in-depth interviews), participants were drawn from different degrees, programmes, and fields of study at the *University of St. Gallen*. In total, 16 female and 15 male students from Switzerland and Germany with an average age of 24 years took part in the focus groups. Again, participation was voluntary and did not involve a financial reward. Free training in qualitative research methods was offered as incentive for participation, however. At the beginning of each focus group, all attendees signed a consent form relating to participation in focus group research, which explained the procedure and assured that data would be treatment anonymously (see appendix B7). Taken as a whole, the six focus groups were conducted in German in a face-to-face setting between February and March 2018. Moreover, they lasted between 60-80 min. (on average 70 min.), were audio recorded, and transcribed for the most part verbatim.* For the collection of observational data, the focus group

*Both the audio files and focus group transcripts are available electronically and can be provided on request. Sections of the focus group transcripts were only translated into English if this was necessary for direct quotations.

moderator was assisted by a second researcher during the group discussions. After the focus groups had ended, participants were asked to complete a short questionnaire in order to collect some additional information and demographic data (see appendix B6). In sum, appendix B4 shows a table of all focus group participants with their anonymised first names, personal characteristics, and brand preferences. This table also functions as list of references for focus group quotations (note: FG denotes focus group).

With regard to the subjects covered in the focus group discussions, a topic guide was developed based on both the consumer interview findings and the typology of contested brands (see figure 18). Accordingly, each of the six groups covered a set of similar questions but focused on one specific type of brand meaning contestation (see figure 23). The topic guides thus differ between the causers of a contestation (i.e. legal brand owners or sovereign market actors) and the social level of action on which a contestation takes place (i.e. by an individual, a social collective, or the societal majority).

CONTESTATION CAUSE				
	Market Actor-Based	Focus Group 2 (FG-2) 4 participants	Focus Group 4 (FG-4) 6 participants	Focus Group 6 (FG-6) 5 participants
Legal Owner-Based		Focus Group 1 (FG-1) 5 participants	Focus Group 3 (FG-3) 6 participants	Focus Group 5 (FG-5) 5 participants
		Micro (individual)	Meso (collective)	Macro (societal)
		LEVEL OF ACTION		

Figure 23: Focus Group Classification (own illustration).

However, all focus group guides included the following five sections with 1-3 questions each: (1) introduction (i.e. a warm-up question that had to be answered by each attendee getting to know the others' attitudes towards brands), (2) identity work and consumer stereotypes, (3) preconditions of brand meaning contestation, (4) negotiation of dominant brand meanings, as well as (5) outcomes of brand meaning contestations and marketing reaction strategies (see appendix B5). In addition, during the data collection process, the guides were slightly refined and applied flexibly by the moderator based on the course of each focus group. In doing so, the moderator's main intention was to take an unobtrusive position and facilitate a dynamic yet controversial group discussion about participants' experiences with brand meaning contestations (Morgan,1997).

3.4.2.3 Netnography

In addition, netnographic research was conducted to enrich and cross-check the collected consumer data. As Kozinets (2002) states, netnography is the transfer of ethnographic procedures to the Internet for the purpose of studying socio-cultural interactions. Thus, brand-related contestation practices were traced online over a longer period (i.e. data gathering took place between 2017 and 2019). Muniz and O’Guinn (2001) revealed the Web to be a highly capable source for the analysis of consumers’ habits, their values, and their relationships with brands. The explorative aim of the conducted netnography was to gain an understanding of contested brands by looking at systematic patterns in market actors’ behaviours, expressions, and interactions mediated online. Thus, web-documentation of contested brand cases was observed and the related online discourses followed passively by the researcher. In particular, netnographic was applied since it offers the potential to study brand contestation and negotiation practices detached from a local field site but orchestrated by modern communication technology.

Based on the multi-case study approach presented in chapter 3.3.3.2, several critical contested brand cases were investigated throughout the Internet (see appendix A4). In addition, the netnographic investigations were related to findings from the consumer interviews and focus groups. In general, the online data sources comprised online news journals (e.g. *The Wall Street Journal*), corporate websites and communications (e.g. *newbalance.com*), forums and blogs (e.g. *Das Neue Birkenstock Forum*), as well as social media platforms (e.g. *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Instagram*, or *Pinterest*).* For two distinct deep dives, special emphasis was given to tracing the contested brand cases of *Birkenstock* and *New Balance* (see appendices A5 and A6). Therefore, by means of different public and social media sources, consumers’ attitudinal and practice-oriented shifts related to these two brands were systematically studied by long-term observations. It is worth noting here that the netnographic data documentation was not subject to the grounded theory coding procedure. The online insights gathered were rather utilised as background information in the process of data analysis and theoretical sense-making. Moreover, the netnographic data allowed for triangulation to ensure objectivity in the research findings. Overall, the netnography provided a substantial contribution to the development of a profound process model of brand meaning contestation.

*Netnographic data for specific contested brand cases are available electronically and can be provided on request.

3.4.3 Results: Process Model of Brand Meaning Contestation

Substantiated by the diverse spectrum of collected qualitative data, a comprehensive theoretical process model of brand meaning contestation was developed (see figure 24). Grounded in theory and data, the overall structure of this model comprises three major parts. The first part concerns the antecedents of brand meaning contestations and thus covers the major causes and cognitive triggers for why brands become contested. The second part reveals consumers' essential brand-related contestation practices, which comprise the routinised and interconnected ways of how consumers perceive, disrupt, negotiate, and react in regard to contested brand meanings. In total, twelve contestation practices were identified and integrated into a continuously spinning contestation wheel. Finally, the third part of the process model covers the potential outcomes of brand meaning contestations. Particular attention is paid here to the change of brand meanings, brand utilisations, and brand values. In addition, both context and contingency factors are presented in parallel with the sequential contestation process. These factors were revealed to have a distinct influence on the process steps and dependencies within the model. For differentiation, context factors rather concern the procedural antecedents of brand meaning contestations, whereas contingency factors relate more to the transitional (re-)action phase, which determines the kind and intensity of contestation outcomes. Generally speaking, any public brand can become subject to the unveiled process of brand meaning contestation, although the emphasis with regard to the different process steps may diverge and the entire process must not always be passed through. Nevertheless, in most cases a recursive interplay and repetition of multiple process steps – particularly with respect to the identified contestation practices – provides the basis for a sophisticated understanding of a contested brand incident.

With regard to the development of the final process model, the identified data codes and concepts were constantly compared with related theories and thus aggregated into higher order categories (see appendix B8). Hence, the final grounded theory was gained via an iterative (re-)arrangement of the emerging concepts and categories, dependent on an ongoing collection of qualitative data, the researcher's theoretical understanding, and profound interpretations. This inductive procedure was applied until additional data no longer altered the emerging theory and so a stable process model was found. At a glance, the final process model of brand meaning contestation is presented in figure 24 and subsequently discussed in-depth with reference to the qualitative data sources.

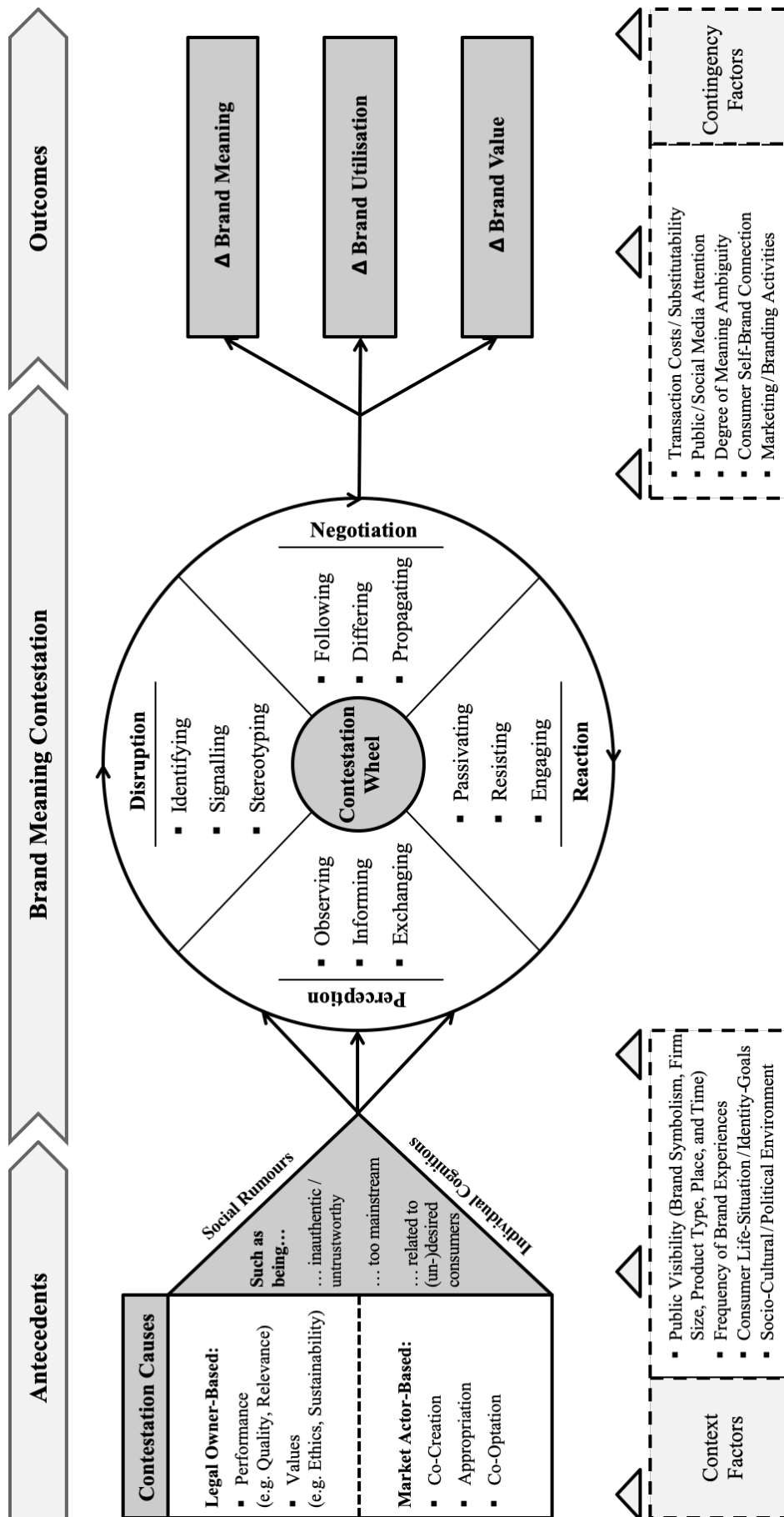


Figure 24: Process Model of Brand Meaning Contestation (own illustration).

3.4.3.1 Antecedents of Brand Meaning Contestation

In general, antecedents of brand meaning contestations relate to the stimuli, motives, and market discourses that trigger any kind of contestation practice. In this regard, the qualitative consumer data revealed three pivotal coding categories: (1) contestation causes, (2) social rumours and individual cognitions, and (3) context factors.

Contestation Causes

As seen within the theoretical foundations and the typology of contested brands (see figure 18), various reasons exist as to why a brand can become contested. Accordingly, the data analysis confirmed that the fundamental contestation causes can be subdivided into those based on (mis-)conducts by legal brand owners and those based on behaviours by sovereign market actors or social collectives. With regard to the causes attributed to legal owners, existing branding theories already offer diverse explanations (e.g. Aaker et al., 2004; Huber et al. 2009; Humphreys & Thompson, 2014). Commonly, the causes are related to brands' trustworthiness, reliability, and socio-cultural accountability (Fournier, 1998; Klein et al., 2004). Moreover, both interview and focus group participants substantiated the distinction of performance- and value-based contestation causes, as theorised by Kähr et al. (2016). On the performance side, major reasons for contestations are poor service or product quality, an unattractive or out-dated brand appearance, unprofessional interactions, or altered marketing strategies:

"[...] I rather focus on quality or performance. No matter whether it's clothes, shoes etc., if a brand repeatedly doesn't meet my quality standards, I would boycott it; or if I get mistreated by the company – poor service. It has to happen a couple of times in a row [...] eventually the tipping point is reached" (Stephan, FG-2, February 2, 2018).

On the contrary, from a value perspective, the participants highlighted non-ethical and non-sustainable brand behaviours as most critical triggers for a contested brand. In particular, they referred to inappropriate value statements or immoral business practices involving environmental pollution, mistreatment of animals, and child-labour abuse:

"Primark [...] I don't really know why they cannot have good quality products. I don't know where they produce it, only in super cheap countries and that's an issue 'cause you never know if children work for them or not. So, this would be a brand I would not consider" (Nadin, CI-3, March 2, 2017).

If such brand misconducts occur, they usually become directly attributed to the brand and often evoke serious contestations. Yet, these performance- and value-based stimuli fall under legal owners' responsibility and thus can principally be monitored and steered.

By contrast, sovereign market actors (e.g. consumers) can also cause a contested brand. This is the case if – detached from the legal owner’s conduct – individuals, collectives, or a societal majority adopt a brand for distinct identity purposes and, therefore, conflict the prevalent brand meanings as perceived by a brand’s target customers. Building on related theoretical concepts and the collected data, brand meaning co-creation (Allen et al., 2008; Echeverri & Skalen, 2011; Iglesias et al., 2013), appropriation (Arsel & Thompson, 2011; Escalas & Bettman, 2005; Thompson & Haytko, 1997), and co-optation (Schiele & Venkatesh, 2016; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007) were identified as the central driving forces for brand contestations that originate from market actors’ conduct. Co-creation relates to consumers being encouraged to shape a brand’s meaning, for instance through community engagement, idea contests, or product customisations. Apart from adding brand value, this can provoke a loss of companies’ brand control, since consumers claim co-created brands for their own utilisations:

“At L’Oréal, there are beauty products that people adapted differently, as it was meant. For example, mascaras or the like. People just don’t know how to use the products and it’s not communicated enough. Currently it was the trend to treat cheekbones with dark make-up, but the product wasn’t meant for this purpose, and people [broadly] adapted this usage [...]” (Tabea, CI-2, March 7, 2017).

Moreover, brand meaning appropriation refers to incidents where consumers exploit a brand for distinct identity purposes, independent of the legal owner’s intended brand positioning. This usually implies the decontextualisation and transfer of a brand from a company’s desired usage into new customer segments, new fields of application, or even new markets. Particularly, subcultures (e.g. hipsters, punks, or political extremists) were identified to have serious potential for brand meaning appropriation (Hebdige, 1979). If the associated individuals adopt brands into their extended self to construct or signal social identity (Belk, 1988), they transfer their personal associations towards the focal brands and thus often alienate target customers from brand consumption:

“Fixie [bikes] ... they’re made for couriers to be fast and agile [...] well, they became popular among hipsters, though they’re taken less seriously by other customer groups. Something like: ‘oh, that’s a hipster-bike.’ [...] the functional value becomes less relevant” (Irina, CI-12, March 13, 2017).

This goes in line with the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; see chapter 2.3.1), as consumers in general create major parts of their identity by assimilating themselves into social in-groups and distancing themselves from social out-groups or from undesired stereotypes. In addition, the qualitative data proved the phenomenon of mainstream co-optation to be a crucial trigger for meaning contestations. Accordingly,

niche brands loaded with distinct sub- or countercultural identity value become desired, commodified, and popular among a society's mainstream. The meaning-creating actors thus lose interest in the co-opted brand, as they do not benefit anymore from its identity appeal and in turn the brand can become irrelevant, diluted, or newly positioned:

“The Kånken [Fjällräven] backpack [...] I owned it right at the beginning, many years ago; and now you can buy it everywhere, and everyone has one. It's like, I only still use it [...] if I have to take lots of things [...] but I'd rather prefer not to carry it anymore” (Maria, CI-10, March 9, 2017).

In sum, these are the fundamental causes related to sovereign market actors. Next, the qualitative data evinced that all contestation stimuli create and spread market myths, which function as intermediary for triggering brand meaning contestation practices.

Social Rumours and Individual Cognitions

Based on the different contestation causes, diverse social rumours and individual brand cognitions were identified, which all facilitate the shift of a brand's meaning away from marketers' intentions. This relates to both the theoretical conception of a (hegemonic) brandscape (i.e. brand meanings that entail shared cultural cues of acting, thinking, and feeling; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007) and the brand gestalt continuum (i.e. a multilateral system of continuously interacting brand meanings; Tierney et al., 2016). Moreover, Holt (2004) refers to such rumours as brand identity myths, which, according to him, are an essential building block of iconic brands. Yet, the present research revealed that most of these rumours and cognitions are rather destructive to a brand's meaning and imply negative word-of-mouth. The most common myths denounce brands to be inauthentic or untrustworthy (usually related to misconducts by companies), to be associated with undesired consumers (usually related to brand meaning appropriations), and to be too mainstream (usually related to brand meaning co-optations):

“Gucci [...] they're not really like premium luxury brands. It's more like the cheapest luxury brand you can get [...]. Just an opinion, it's really yeah – I don't like that” (Maya, CI-14, March 13, 2017).

“[...] Mammüt. Because a teacher of mine, whom I didn't like, was wearing this stupid Mammüt [outfit] every day. Whenever I see the brand, I have to think of him” (Leni, CI-25, April 12, 2017).

“This Canada Goose jacket is very popular at the HSG [University of St. Gallen]. I also intended to buy it, but I preferred not to be one of them, because everyone has it. Typical HSG jacket, rather for those arrogant German people who can't behave” (Armin, FG-3, February 23, 2018).

Overall, in today's markets, individual brand cognitions tend to spread very fast, and quickly become social rumours. Yet, their dispersion underlies various context factors.

Contestation Context Factors

The identified context factors refer to the transition from contestation causes via brand rumours and individual cognitions towards actual contestation practices. Dependent on the type and extent of these context factors, the severity and reach of emerging contested brand cases highly differ. Thus, contestations underlie predetermined circumstances, which influence the conduct of legal brand owners and of sovereign market actors. In accordance with the qualitative data, one of the most important context factors is a brand's public visibility. For one thing, this relates to brands' identity signalling value (Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Ferraro et al., 2013; Üstüner & Thompson, 2010), and for another it also concerns a brand's symbolic, or semiotic, properties (Mick et al., 2004; Peirce, 1934; Puntoni et al., 2010). In this respect, it is crucial how visible a brand's logo or how distinct its design is (i.e. can a product or service be easily related to a specific brand); in which industry and markets a brand acts; what level of familiarity and market share a brand has; when the brand is consumed (e.g. every day or occasionally); and where a brand is usually utilised (i.e. in private or public settings):

"[...] it's product- and situation-dependent. Many [students] at the university own a MacBook [...] that's something you care for. But there are other things that are less cost-intensive, where you don't pay that much attention. If I meet friends, I dress differently compared to other situations, then I'd leave Ralph Lauren at home" (Sebastian, FG-5, March 2, 2018).

"If you're wearing a bikini and you're at the beach and two others are wearing the same bikini, I'd find that very unpleasant. [...] This particularly bothers me with swimming suits, I don't exactly know why. If someone wore the same On[-Running] shoe, I wouldn't care" (Celina, CI-18, March 20, 2017).

In addition to a brand's public visibility, further decisive context factors are the frequency of brand experiences (e.g. repeated negative touchpoints rise the likelihood of detrimental brand sabotage; Kähr et al., 2016) as well as consumers' individual life situations and identity goals (see chapter 2.3.1). In particular, the interviews indicated that, as consumer get older, brand preference drivers tend to shift from the need for social belonging and status consumption to social distinction and individualisation:

"When you're younger [...] then it's just about being on the wave, but now you have more like this is me and this is not me, so you have – some brands identify with them and some are just situational brands [...] now I'm 25 but I think the personality is more or less developed" (Alfred, CI-7, March 8, 2018).

Finally, the socio-cultural and political environment also delimits any sort of contestation practice. In this regard, McCracken (1986) has already highlighted the culturally constituted world as the essential source for the movement of brand meanings.

3.4.3.2 Brand Meaning Contestation Practices

The central part of the process model takes a practice-theoretical view (see chapter 2.4) and contains the contestation wheel. This wheel refers to an assemblage of brand-related contestation practices that designate routinised ways of consumer behaviours that are constitutive for the social phenomenon of contested brands. Most of these socio-material practices are strongly interconnected and interdependent. Moreover, the wheel symbolises that the identified practices are continuously exercised, which refers to their recursive nature (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). Brand meaning contestation is thus an ongoing process in which the actual manifestation of the practices involved refines the fundamental shape of their related meanings, doings, and material objects (Reckwitz, 2002). In accordance with Nicolini (2009), by zooming in and out on these contestation practices, an understanding of their individual structure and of their interdependencies was gained in order to draw implications on potential outcomes. Thus, in line with the pre-study findings (see chapter 3.2), four major categories of contestation practices were revealed to constitute the contestation wheel. These are practices related to consumers' (1) *perception*, (2) *disruption*, (3) *negotiation*, and (4) *reaction* to brand meanings.

Perception of Brand Meanings

Perception practices are subdivided into those of *observing*, *informing*, and *exchanging*. In general, these practices are linked to consumers' recurring bodily and mental modes of how they perceive contestation causes and social brand rumours. In line with Hirschman (1980, 1998a), such meaning perception can vary based on its degree of subjectivity and socialisation (see figure 2). Next to individual experiences with branded products or service touchpoints, socio-cultural forces (e.g. group norms or subcultural movements) are shown to determine brand-related thoughts, images, and associations. In conformity with the semiotic reader-response theory (see chapter 2.2.2), the intelligibility of perception practices strongly depends on whether the receiver of a brand meaning knows and applies the same socialised (de-)coding language as the sender (Izberk-Bilgin, 2010; Mick & Buhl, 1992; Scott, 1994). If this is not the case, brand meanings are often perceived as ambiguous, incomprehensible, and highly debatable. Moreover, perception practices are volatile and vary over time, since consumers' socialisation and knowledge-acquisition progress exercise great influence on how legal brand owners and other market actors are perceived. Based on this, the grounded theory analysis disclosed consumers' observations of other market actors' consumption habits

as the first perception practice. Hence, to understand the spread of individual cognitions and social rumours, it is crucial to trace how consumers observe brand-related market occurrences. The data showed that overserving other market actors is an autonomous, continuous, and often subconscious activity that is executed within offline (e.g. at public events) and online (e.g. via *Instagram*) environments. Moreover, observing others seems to be linked to consumers' prevalent striving for identity, self-reflection, individuality, up-to-dateness, group or class affiliation, and social confirmation or distinction:

“So, if you observe new things, how you'd like to dress yourself [...] or you see it at the university, uni peers, who wear this and that [...] and then you want it as well” (Tabea, CI-2, March 7, 2017).

“But if [I perceive] for example, the rumour, for example these Eastpak bags, I associate these bags with prostitutes, because in Hamburg all prostitutes carry these bags. If I observe this brand, I can't buy it anymore, since I know it's a prostitute bag” (Celina, CI-18, March 20, 2017).

Next, if consumers wish to obtain more information about a brand or a certain brand incident, they engage in the more active and conscious practice of informing. This primarily refers to the retrieval of brand-related knowledge from public and social media sources (e.g. news journals, brand communities, social networks, forums, or blogs), from social information providers (e.g. trustful peers or opinion leaders), and from their own brand experiences. Notably, companies' direct marketing and branding activities (e.g. websites or advertisements) were not mentioned as central information sources:

“[...] rather online, mainly online. New brands – Instagram is huge for that. I have to say that the most or the most new things are posted via Instagram: like a new brand for clothes or shoes that I saw somewhere and I liked; and I would somehow look for it online” (Tatja, CI-19, March 20, 2017).

The last perception practice characterises the mutual exchange of brand-related information between market actors. This exchanging practice manifests itself in different behaviours. Social peers, such as friends and families, tend to reciprocally share brand-related suggestions and disapprovals. This also includes trustworthy online peer reviews and public confrontations. Such exchanges often induce controversial debates about associated brand features, underlying motives of brand consumption, and dominant brand meanings in general. Thus, brand perceptions are commonly formed and adjusted by means of exchanging idiosyncratic opinions (i.e. by word-of mouth):

“The Alexa of Amazon [...]. I think I read a title of a newspaper once with an excerpt [...] and didn't investigate it on my own. And now it keeps [two friends] popping [Alexa] up and we keep talking about it, and [...] a friend of a friend has one at his place and he said it's quite interesting, it's not fully developed. It's also something I would like to try once” (Alfred, CI-7, March 8, 2017).

Disruption of Brand Meanings

Beyond the perception of contestation causes, disruption practices are consumers' essential ways of thinking and behaving that lead to a contested brand. What the three revealed practices – *identifying*, *signalling*, and *stereotyping* – have in common is that consumers are utilising brands to identify themselves and others. In line with the two cognitive process systems (Kahneman, 2011; see chapter 2.3.2), these practices arise from an interplay of associative reasoning (system 1) and logical decision making (system 2). On the one hand, based on subconscious perception cues and prototypical information, other market actors are judged and implicitly treated accordingly (e.g. assessing others on their clothing brands). This relates to Bourdieu's (1977) idea of the *habitus*: deeply internalised behavioural patterns and social structures. On the other hand, based on personal experiences and norm-based reasoning, explicit life choices are made (i.e. consuming brands in order to be part of specific social groups or to distance oneself from undesired individuals, collectives, social classes, or the mainstream). The disruptive character of the corresponding practices becomes evident through the linkage and transfer of consumers' characteristics, associations, and stereotypes towards brands. If these elements mismatch a brand's intended positioning, the brand becomes disrupted.

Firstly, the qualitative study uncovered the practice of identifying as a reoccurring pattern of brand meanings disruption. In accordance with both McCracken (1986) and Escalas and Bettman (2003), consumers were found to utilise brands for their individual self-construction. By incorporating brands into one's self-concept (e.g. the extended self; Belk, 1988), consumers either transfer desired association from social reference groups towards themselves or distance themselves from others by establishing own brand associations. In both ways, meanings are transmitted from or towards a brand. If such identification practices are performed by people outside of companies' target segments, or who are socially shunned, this can provoke momentous brand disruptions:

“Jewellery [...] that's kind of a good and subtle way to differentiate yourself from others a bit. But still, for me, the first reason to get a new bracelet is [...] I like it and I kind of identify myself with the brand, because just like the things they're doing and usually have celebrities or brand ambassadors, so I like those people and [...] I think, well I want to have this bracelet as well” (Nadin, CI-3, March 7, 2013).

“[...] it depends on the person who wears it and not just on the object. If it's a person I like, then I can also identify with it. If it's a person I don't like, I think I would rather not want to wear the same, or that he appears like me. [...] You do that straight away at a first sight, subconsciously – you classify a person, I think that's human nature, you meet a prejudice” (Simon, FG-5, March 2, 2018).

Secondly, the signalling practice implies consumers' engagement in brand-related public consumption behaviours to signal status, values, or affiliations to social groups. Here, it can be distinguished between the signalling of self- and collective-identities:

"I think you can recognise if someone does yoga because she likes it or because she likes the lifestyle. [...] in New York, it's really cool, you can see many who walk with yoga jackets through the city; maybe they already wear the Lululemon pant to signal that they're doing yoga" (Nela, CI-24, April 5, 2017).

In line with research by Ferraro et al. (2013), conspicuous brand usage in particular is carried out to gain public attention or to receive social recognition by showing off. In the course of such status-driven marketplace performances, brand meanings can become irreversibly altered or diluted (Elliott & Davies, 2006; Üstüner & Thompson, 2010). Yet, the disruptive potential of such brand-related signalling activities, or rather consumers' impression management, strongly depends on observers' brand attitude. In the case of weak self-brand connections, observers degrade both the brand and its user; by contrast, for strong self-brand connections, observers usually defend a brand's prevalent meaning and retain their positive attitude (Ferraro et al., 2013). The existence of such status consumption and signalling practices is proved by the collected data:

"[...] mostly like people from Romania or Bulgaria that are here and have a very distinct style. So, they wear [...] brands like Gucci and Louis Vuitton and Nike, and they are covered in brands. [...] because they are in a different environment maybe and not in their home country, I think they have to show that they need it [...] for them it's important to have a kind of status" (Maya, CI-14, March 13, 2017).

"I buy M-Budget, as I think it's a cool brand. [...] If I invited many [friends] for dinner, I maybe wouldn't only present M-Budget products. Then I would maybe buy [branded pasta by] Barilla, because I know guests are coming over. For me alone it doesn't matter" (Felicia, FG-6, March 2, 2018).

Thirdly, stereotyping was identified as another disruption practice. It designates both the cognitive habit of associating other market actors with certain characteristics – due to their public appearance – and the bodily habit of acting contingent on these associations. In particular, others are treated due to social prejudices. Lee et al. (2011) state that such negative stereotype threats provoke serious consumer anxieties and alter consumption habits. Here, data suggest that stereotypical judgments can also be transferred to brands. This may result in prejudiced brand perceptions and, thus, disrupt brand meanings:

"Stereotypes with Woolrich and Canada Goose parkas, so you spot HSG from far away [...] I also have parka jackets. So, I'm integrated too, so that you see where I belong" (Selin, CI-15, March 13, 2017).

"If I see people with Boxeur Des Rues, then I think: 'Oh, these are such aggressive guys.' [...] the logo, I think it's two clashing fists; and the people – somehow, I hold a certain stereotype. Usually they have short hair, a bit of an aggressive look, and I can't identify well with them" (Peter, CI-5, March 8, 2017).

Negotiation of Brand Meanings

Along with individuals' perception of disrupted brand meanings, social interactions inevitably evoke brand meaning negotiation practices. Since brand meanings are socially constructed, such negotiations can be seen as discursive (re-)interpretations and cognitive (re-)considerations of brand-related experiences by multiple market actors (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010). So, brand meanings are volatile constructs that develop progressively over time. Also, Ligas and Cotte (1999) highlight an interplay of multiple dimensions for the analysis of brand meaning negotiations: these include companies' marketing activities, individuals' brand usage, and socially symbolic interactions (see figure 8). The latter dimension, in particular, receives substantial importance by the present research, as the negotiation practices of *following*, *differing*, and *propagating* were revealed. In line with the social identity approach (Hogg & Reid, 2006; Turner et al., 1987), brands are either used to negotiate identity by being part of desired social in-groups (i.e. following) or by distancing oneself from undesired social out-groups (i.e. differing). Accordingly, the practice of following relates to the social need of fitting-in, which represents consumers' striving for assimilation to social peers by comparing and copying others' brand practices and reconsidering one's own self-brand relation:

"When I started in the consultancy, I bought like Tommy Hilfiger clothes for the first time. At work everyone has it and brands were in the foreground. In retrospect, it was cool, because that's how I grew up a bit. [...] These were nice things, but of course [I also bought them] to fit in [...]. I wouldn't have bought Moncler, that is less suitable" (Armin, FG-3, February 23, 2018).

By contrast, the practice of differing proved to have a two-sided character. On the one hand, consumers endeavour to differ from their social peers in order to form a distinct self-identity (Elliott & Davies, 2006). This reflects peoples' need for standing-out. On the other hand, consumers tend to differ from social out-groups with unwelcome traits (White & Dahl, 2006, 2007). Either way, brands are utilised for social differentiation. Thus, brands' market-dominant meanings become negotiated among multiple actors:

"For me personally it's like that I don't like it if there are lots of other people who wear the same as me. I'm currently thinking about buying a car. Many own a [VW] Golf, and that's somehow deterring. You want to be unique, [otherwise] it's nothing special anymore" (Sebastian, FG-5, March 2, 2018).

"[I associate Gucci] for men, more with the machos, wannabes, and somehow for women, with those who are very bitchy and who show off the luxurious glamour-queen. [...] maybe it's a personal dislike [...] maybe, because I don't like Italians in particular that much. [...] Michael Kors would also be such a brand, which I'd never wear" (Maria, CI-10, March 9, 2017).

Nevertheless, for most consumers it is a dynamic interplay of following and differing, or rather of fitting-in and standing-out, that paves the way for their identity construction and hence determines their brand meaning negotiation practices:

“It’s always kind of controversial. You want both – to belong and to differ. Most of whom I know wear VIU simply during the lecture, [but] not on the street or in groups” (Sabine, FG-5, March 2, 2018).

The third negotiation practice concerns the dissemination of idiosyncratic brand meanings. By publicly propagating individual or collective brand perceptions, consumers actively oppose the brand meanings of others. This gives rise to a meaning negotiation among antagonistic market actors and therefore the contestation of brands. Pursuant to the collected data, propagating practices include the sharing of disputable brand experience, social pressuring, endorsing or dissuading peers from brand usage, neglecting and teasing others’ brand opinions, or social status competitions:

“You don’t need more than a single person. I recently saw a Berlin girl on Instagram with many followers who [...] got upset in her story about a [cable provider] and tagged the firm; many followers shared similar experiences and she published these comments and always tagged the firm. If I were in Germany, I would also distance myself from it [the brand]” (Xantia, FG-1, February 22, 2018).

“Mouth-to-mouth propaganda: you rather share and discuss negative experiences than positive experiences. And then I have the need to share this opinion. I can imagine that I would also report this to the company and tell my friends. [Although] the reach may be limited within the circle of friends; but [...] these opinions rather stay in your mind” (Frida, FG-3, March 2, 2018).

Reactions to Disrupted Brand Meanings

The fourth section of the contestation wheel deals with practices related to consumers’ reactions to disrupted brand meanings. These designate consumers’ practical handling of brands that they perceived and negotiate to be disrupted. As seen in the theoretical cross-analysis of the first study (see chapter 3.3.3.1), existing branding literature reveals multiple practical ways of distinct brand contestations. Particularly consumer resistance, anti-branding, or brand sabotage (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010; Kähr et al., 2016; Penaloza & Price, 1993) can be very detrimental to a brand’s meaning. With regard to these specific ways of contestation, data confirmed a diverse range of reactions by consumers to disrupted brand meanings. However, the following findings characterise these reaction practices on a more abstract level. Thus, the identified practices of *passivating*, *resisting*, and *engaging* cluster consumers’ contestation activities by referring to higher-order behavioural patterns, which certain reactive actions have in common. In line with Escalas and Bettman (2003, 2005), it was found that consumers’

reaction practices depend heavily on their degree of self-brand connection. Accordingly, the first practice, passivating, is usually linked to low levels of self-brand connection. This suggests that consumers have a rather weak or functional brand relationship and do not incorporate the focal brand into their vital self-construct. Thus, passivating describes the practice of withdrawing from brand consumption in the event of disrupted brand meanings (e.g. undesired brand utilisation by other market actors). In particular, this contains distinct contestation activities, such as brand avoidance (Lee et al., 2009), brand divorce (Sussan, Hall, & Meamber, 2012), or consumer-brand disidentification (Wolter, Brach, Cronin, & Bonn, 2013). Also, passivating can occur if too many market actors consume a brand, for example in the case of brand meaning co-optation. The findings highlight passivating to be the most widespread reaction practice. If a brand becomes exposed to adverse social rumours, consumers tend to – at least temporarily – avoid its consumption in order to distance themselves from negative associations or inferences:

“New Balance [...] I would like consider myself if I should wear them or not, like probably, keep them at home and see how the wind is turning, so if it’s definitely identified as the right-wing brand, I would probably not wear it anymore” (Rudolf, CI-1, March 7, 2017).

“The [Swatch] watch isn’t gone [if undesired market actors start consuming it]. Yes, maybe I’d wait – so, I wouldn’t wear it anymore, and await if the entire situation relaxes” (Sabine, CI-4, March 7, 2017).

The next reaction practice, resisting, was shown to be associated with high levels of self-brand connection. If consumers integrate brands into their extended self in order to create identity, they are prompted to defend the brand against negative social rumours or other external shocks and thus resist meaning disruptions. In theory, this opposition to disliked brand meanings is present in concepts such as brand advocacy (Wallace, Buil, & de Chernatony, 2012), brand love (Batra et al., 2012), or psychological brand ownership (Pierce et al., 2001; see chapter 2.5). Interestingly, in some instances the data indicate a serious perception-action gap: although consumers disapprove disrupted brand meanings, they retain their prevailing consumption habits. In addition to strong consumer-brand relationships, this can also rest upon consumers’ idleness, distraction, assumption of temporary affairs, or on too high transaction costs for switching brands:

“I also like A&F, independent of what the CEO said. I kind of think it was a bit anti-social what he said – but the brand itself is actually ok, and I like the clothes, I’d wear them” (Peter, CI-5, March 8, 2017).

“Probably everyone [here] has an iPhone, although we all know that its production isn’t the most pleasant, e.g. child labour is a fact. Everyone knows it’s not good, but no one cares, because otherwise you’d have to get other products; and it’s also related to idleness” (Armin, FG-3, February 23, 2018).

Finally, upon brand meaning disruption, certain consumers actively contribute to oppositional activities or anti-brand movements by spreading social rumours and participating in rebellious behaviours. This reaction practice is termed engaging. In accordance with previous research, this includes contestation activities such as consumer boycotts (Klein et al., 2004), doppelgänger brand images (Thompson et al., 2006), customer retaliation (Grégoire & Fisher, 2008), anti-branding (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010), or consumer brand sabotage (Kähr et al., 2016). Clustering these, the practice of engaging characterises any behaviour that concerns the active support and promotion of disrupted brand meanings. The findings reveal that this is often linked to public brand rejections, to terminations of self-brand relations, and to consumers who propagandise their idiosyncratic brand perception in order to gain social attention:

“I’m anti-Candrian [...], actually I tell everyone not to go there” (Leni, CI-25, April 12, 2017).

“Who is really good in harming brands is of course Greenpeace. They are the masters in this. [...] I like the TV spots of Volkswagen [...] Greenpeace had the opportunity to change it easily and get a nice spot as well. So, it goes viral for sure [...] that’s a nice way to harm a brand. (Marcel, CI-9, March 9, 2017).

“I remember that guy who smashed his Samsung TV to get reach. For some brands with really bad customer service [...] over several months, this is understandable [...]. There are certainly people who want to achieve such reach and share it [their negative experience]” (Anna, FG-3, February 23, 2018).

Notably, several study participants indicated that the tipping point for actively engaging in such specific contestation activities is rather high. In most contested brand cases, the majority of consumers tend to passivate their consumption habits to wait and see how the market situation develops over time. Nevertheless, for a brand meaning to be profoundly altered or seriously damaged, it is often enough if a few influential market actors proactively react to contestation causes. By the use of digital communication technologies and social media, contested brands spread rapidly and become inevitably involved in public meaning negotiations. Yet, data suggest that contestation practices do not always provoke detrimental consequences for a brand, as there are also instances where a meaning disruption can be beneficial for a brand’s positioning and market share (e.g. the co-optation of *Birkenstock*). In any case, all the reaction practices identified entail renewed brand perceptions by observing market actors. Hence, the contestation wheel starts to spin again from the beginning. Overall, it becomes evident that the twelve revealed contestation practices organised in their four clusters all depend on and interact with each other. Accordingly, they reciprocally reinforce and dynamically reproduce themselves. This implicates an endlessly spinning brand meaning contestation wheel.

3.4.3.3 Outcomes of Brand Meaning Contestation

Considering the consequences of brand meaning contestations, the findings disclose three fundamental categories with substantial potential for change: (1) brand meanings, (2) brand utilisations, and (3) brand values. Additionally, diverse contingency factors seem to exert strong influence on the direction and degree of the possible outcomes.

Δ Brand Meaning

First and most obvious, contestation practices inevitably induce a change or dilution of brand meanings, particularly since the interpretation of a brand depends on consumers' interests, values, and the social-cultural environment (Puntoni et al., 2010). Moreover, this goes in line with the postmodern conceptualisation of brand meanings put forward by Tierney et al. (2016) and according to which a brand's meaning is constantly changing due to social negotiation processes and consumers' evolving emotional understanding. Referring to Peirce's (1934) theory of signs (see figure 10), market actors' communication through brands is determined by an ongoing (re-)interpretation and interplay of the sign (i.e. the symbolic brand), the signified object (i.e. the branded good), and the interpretant (i.e. the brand meaning). Building on this, the conception of the construction and interpretation of representations (Mohr, 2014, 2016) indicates that brand meanings necessarily depend on recipients' steadily shifting interpretations. This corresponds to the preliminary notion of contested brands (see chapter 3.3.2) and thus implies a recurring alteration of consumers' signifier-significate associations (SSAs). The magnitude of such alterations can differ, dependent on whether individuals, collectives, or a society's majority perceives and adopts the disrupted brand meanings:

"It's good for the brand [Birkenstock], since – at least how I perceive it – it is pretty outmoded, staid, and unaesthetic. When I see [fashionistas using it], then this becomes aesthetic, so [...] I perceive the aesthetic and sort of cooler, but at the same time I think, as it's more aesthetic, it's less good for my feet. Besides, it's rather a win for the brand and not a risk" (Herbert, CI-22, March 21, 2017).

Commonly, uncontrolled brand meaning changes are rather harmful to a brand. Especially if a social majority contests a brand, market prevalent meanings can become seriously transformed (Brown et al., 2003). Such meaning transformations are usually unintended by marketers and often irreversible. However, as the quote indicates, brand meaning alterations are not necessarily undesired, as sometimes favourable brand meaning arise and spread across the market (e.g. appealing revitalisations of outdated brands due to their appropriation by subcultures such as trendsetting hipsters).

Δ Brand Utilisation

In addition to a brand's meaning, the prevalent utilisation of a brand can also change as a result of contestations. Individuals may differently acquire, consume, shape, exchange, or even dispose of branded goods. This implies that consumption habits alter, which refers to shifts in consumers' market-practice performances (MPPs; see chapter 3.3.2). Notably, non-consumption is also a kind of brand utilisation. Existing research considers changes in brand usage in concepts such as brand hijacking (Wipperfurth, 2005), value co-creation (Payne et al., 2008), or cultural and lifestyle branding (Chernev, Hamilton, & Gal, 2011; Holt, 1997, 2004). Overall, the qualitative data analysis showed that brand utilisations are essentially related to perceived brand meaning disruptions:

“When the hipsters have it [a brand], people start to notice it and then they get it and the hipsters don't want to have it anymore. This is a continuous circle over time” (Maya, CI-14, March 13, 2017).

“The Lonsdale brand, a sports brand from England that mutated into a Nazi brand; [among] right-wing extremists it spread really fast. [...] It depends on how intense it is; if I was approached about it everywhere, I would stop wearing it” (Paula, FG-4, February 23, 2018).

Δ Brand Value

Moreover, any brand meaning contestation can have economic consequences for the legal owner. Alongside disrupted meanings and altered consumption habits, both existing brand users and other observing market actors become somehow affected in their (re-)purchase intention. Therefore, contestation practices may either shrink, expand, or reassemble a brand's user base, consisting of target and non-target customers. In any case, the focal brand's market share and, thus, also its value changes more or less. According to Raggio and Leone (2007), the brand value reflects a brand's worth for the legal owner in terms of its sales value. This not only relates to sales figures but also to brand awareness, public sentiment towards a brand (e.g. positive or negative social rumours), and the prospective market relevance of a brand. Furthermore, findings reveal that value changes depend heavily on whether the legal owner succeeds in retaining both alienated target customers and a brand's community support:

“The positive thing about it, I think, it's just the brand awareness is huge when you [Birkenstock] are at the fashion week and the people talk about it. And it's not that it's used in a bad way, I think people who bought them because of how they're made and like the functionality of the shoe itself, they will still buy them. With that, they now have a greater variance of different customers, [either people buy it] because of how comfortable they are or because of the brand” (Maya, CI-14, March 3, 2017).

Contestation Contingency Factors

As mentioned above, any transition from contestation practices to potential outcomes is subject to a variety of external circumstances. In the process model of brand meaning contestation, these are called contingency factors. Among others, the qualitative analysis found the following contingency factors to be most influential: (1) *transaction costs* – the cost to consumers, in terms of money and effort, for substituting branded products or services with others in the event of detrimental meaning contestations, (2) *public and social media attention* – how widely brand rumours have been dispersed in public media or on social media channels, and thus how many other market actors have perceived a brand to be contested or are performing practices on the contestation wheel, (3) *degree of meaning ambiguity* – the versatility of a brand’s prevalent meaning after it became disrupted and the extent to which market actors understand the publicly negotiated brand meanings, (4) *consumer self-brand connection* – the relevance of a specific brand for consumers’ identity construct, or the degree to which consumers have integrated the focal brand into their self-concept (Escalas & Bettman, 2003), and (5) *marketing and branding activities* – how the legal owner is intervening in the process of brand meaning contestation by implementing marketing measures and brand communications (e.g. adjustments to the marketing mix with regard to the 7Ps, namely product, price, placement, promotion, process, physical evidence, and people; Kotler et al., 2009):

“It depends on how much effort it takes and what the barriers are to change [a brand]. Clothes or shoes are rather easy to change, whereas a phone plan is pretty tough” (Frida, FG-3, February 23, 2018).

“If I’d noticed or experienced it on my own, it would have certainly changed me; like, if I’d seen it in the newspaper or online or on social media channels” (Herbert, CI-22, March 21, 2017).

The effects of the latter contingency factor on contestation outcomes are particularly relevant for marketers, since this is the primary way for legal owners to protect a brand from harmful consequences. The subsequent study therefore explores and discusses effective marketing measures that legal owners could apply to countervail undesired brand meaning contestations. Altogether, it holds true that the revealed process model of brand meaning contestation offers a comprehensive overview of the interplay between antecedents, practices, and outcomes of contested brands. The corresponding consumer insights allowed for an extensive integration of related theoretical concepts, the inductive exploration of distinct contestation practices, and a practical understanding of why and how antagonistic market actors contest brand meanings.

3.5 Study 3: Brand Protection Measures

The third study takes a more practical, company-centric perspective on the phenomenon of contested brands. Due to expert interviews and a quantitative follow-up investigation, legal owners' potential forecasting, prevention, and counteraction strategies against the public spread of undesired brand meanings are explored and evaluated.

3.5.1 Objectives and Design

The aim of the third study was to reveal implications for marketers on how to best deal with contested brand contingencies. This intention inevitably rests on the already gained insights on the different types of contested brands (see study 1) and the process of brand meaning contestation (see study 2). To begin with, the present study seeks to identify efficient ways of how to anticipate brand contestations at an early process stage so that marketers are able to initiate countermeasures in good time. Beyond this, it is important to position a brand in such a way that meaning contestations, in particular those with negative, harmful outcomes, can be prevented. Such prevention strategies should make a brand more robust against disruptions and more flexible in terms of initiating adequate counteraction activities. This relates to both a brand's degree of signifier control (see chapter 3.2) and the evaluation scheme for brand meaning contestability as discussed in the first study (see table 8). Ultimately, legal brand owners also need to be prepared for the actual occurrence of a contestation incident. Appropriate counteraction measures for different types of brand meaning contestations should therefore be revealed and tested with regard to their effectiveness. In general, a contested brand requires marketers to act immediately, systematically, and expediently. Taken as a whole, these brand protection objectives are contained in the third research question (see chapter 1.2):

Q₃: How can marketers effectively forecast, prevent, and counteract the public spread and negative consequences of undesired brand meanings?

In order to address this question, the applied research design has two parts. Firstly, a broad range of qualitative expert interviews was conducted to derive meaningful brand protection measures. Secondly, by means of an experimental follow-up investigation, some of the revealed counteraction measures were quantitatively tested and evaluated. Noteworthy, all the brand protection measures identified require to some extent legal owners' acceptance of shifting brand control in favour of other market actors.

3.5.2 Data Collection and Analysis

In contrast to the interpretative nature of the second study, data collection and analysis of the third study adopted a more pragmatic research perspective. By means of mixing inductive and deductive research methods, applicable brand protection measures were sought as practical contribution to marketing science (Feilzer, 2010). Accordingly, relevant theories and empirical methods were purposefully utilised in order to pursue the determined research question most effectively (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). More specifically, explorative interviews with marketing and branding experts from various renowned companies were carried out to identify useful measures capable of forecasting, preventing, and counteracting contested brands. Moreover, the interview data collected were analysed following Mayring's (2015) approach of qualitative content analysis with the purpose of deriving reasonable brand protection measures. Subsequently, in particular for those measures related to the counteraction of contestation contingencies, a quantitative follow-up investigation deduced informative hypotheses and tested them in an experimental setting.

3.5.2.1 Expert Interviews

Qualitative data were collected by means of 31 semi-structured interviews with senior industry experts. All participants were highly qualified marketing or branding professionals from renowned companies with job positions such as head of brand management, head of communications, or marketing director. With respect to the associated brands, the interviews focused on business-to-consumer brands from different industries. Expert sampling was applied in order to identify and contact appropriate participants (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013). Accordingly, the interview sample was drawn from experts in the field of study, including contacts established via the *Brand Excellence Circle* – an exclusive network of high-level marketing managers brought together by the *Institute for Customer Insight* at the *University of St. Gallen*. In sum, the final sample includes 31 experts from 25 different industries and 28 renowned brands such as *Adidas*, *Airbnb*, *B. Braun*, *Credit Suisse*, *DHL Group*, *Electrolux*, *GoPro*, *Hermès*, *Hilti*, *Porsche*, *Telekom*, *Uber*, *Vitra*, *VIU*, *Zalando*, and many more. Besides, almost all informants were located in the German-speaking area, although most of the brands involved operate internationally. For a detailed overview of all the interviewed experts, their companies, industries, and positions see appendix C1. The corresponding table also functions as list of references (note: EI designates expert interview).

Remarkably, all the industry experts participated voluntarily without financial rewards. Both an anonymous data analysis was assured and participants were asked for their approval to list their names, jobs, and company affiliations in the research's appendix. Moreover, for anonymity reasons and due to sensitive brand contents, the interviews are not quoted directly but instead indirectly by aggregating the essential interview findings (references to the revealed brand protection measures are provided in appendix C1). From an operational perspective, the interviews lasted between 15-70 min. (on average 50 min.) and were primarily conducted in German by telephone between April and June 2018. Interviews were carried out until data saturation was achieved, as new informants no longer added substantial insights. Contingent on participants' approval, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.* Field notes were also taken during the interviews. Data collection thus resulted in about 420 pages of interview transcript.

The expert interview guide was derived based on insights gained in the previous studies and on existing literature. To ensure the guide's suitability for pursuing the research objective, a pre-test was conducted that entailed minor adjustments. Appendix C2 presents the final guide with its five major sections: (1) practical contested brand experiences, (2) forecasting methods, (3) prevention strategies, (4) counteraction measures, and (5) further outlook and market trends. All these sections include at least one guiding question and a couple of explorative sub-questions. Yet, due to the interviews' semi-structured nature, questions were at times flexibly adjusted or added. As the main themes for data analysis – namely, the forecasting, prevention, and counteraction of contested brands – were determined prior to the exploration, Mayring's (2015) approach of qualitative content analysis was applied. Hence, the analysis procedure was to identify, aggregate, and abstract brand protection measures related to these analytical themes. For this purpose, the transcribed data were successively coded, categorised, compared with previous findings and theories, and interpreted in light of the research question (Mayring, 2010). The insights thus gained allowed for subsequent experimental verifications. In terms of the findings' validity and reliability, scientific trustworthiness was sought. So, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the results were ensured to be credible (e.g. self-reflections and expert feedback to achieve objectivity), transferable to different contexts (e.g. consideration of various brands and industries), and dependable (e.g. transparent research documentation that allows for replication).

*Anonymised audio files and interview transcripts are available electronically and can be provided on request.

3.5.2.2 Quantitative Follow-Up Investigation

In order to pave the way for future research that verifies the insights derived on brand protection measures, an experimental follow-up investigation was conducted (Black, 1999). This preliminary quantitative study focused on counteraction measures, or rather on how marketers should effectively react to contested brand contingencies. The three hypotheses to be examined were deduced from the qualitative expert interviews:

H₁: Being unreactive to a contested brand incident evokes a more unpleasant consumer-brand relationship compared to responding in a proactive way.

H₂: Emotional response strategies are more likely to avert negative consequences of brand meaning contestations compared to rational response strategies.

H₃: Releasing brand control improves a brand's resilience against contestation harm compared to solely communicating proactively.

An online experiment featuring a between-subject design was conducted in order to test these hypotheses. This experiment focused on the real-world contestation case of *New Balance* (2016, U.S.; see appendices A4 and A6). It involved a total of 228 consumers from the U.S. who were recruited via *Amazon's* online platform *Mechanical Turk* (MTurk) and randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions (i.e. a control group and three treatment groups). The experiment took around 10 minutes and each participant was financially compensated at the usual MTurk rate. After data processing (e.g. filtering out participants who failed the attention check), 163 participants remained in the final data sample (79 females; $M_{\text{age}} = 38$). Concerning the experimental procedure, participants' *brand familiarity* (three-item scale with $\alpha = .73$, drawn from Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden, 2003), *brand associations*, and *attitude towards New Balance* (three-item scale with $\alpha = .90$, drawn from Sengupta and Johar, 2002) were enquired prior to the manipulation, which confronted participants with the following contestation case:

After Donald Trump was elected U.S. president in 2016, *New Balance's* vice president declared that the company feels “things are going to move in the right [political] direction” (Maheshwari, 2016, November 15, p. 1). Although this statement had been issued for business reasons, consumers misinterpreted it as a distinct endorsement of President Trump and publicly denounced the brand in social media. Moreover, the *Daily Stormer*, a neo-Nazi blog known for its anti-Semitic, anti-foreigner, and homophobic content, took on this movement and declared *New Balance* to be “the official shoes of

white people” (Maheshwari, 2016, November 15, p. 2). So, more and more right-wing extremists started wearing *New Balance* to publicly symbolise their neo-Nazi affiliation through the ‘N’ brand logo (i.e. ‘N’ as a symbol for Nazi). This right-wing association deterred many target customers and made them not only stop wearing their *New Balance* shoes but also to trash or even burn them in protest (Ewen, 2017, March 2).

With regard to the contested brands typology developed (see figure 18), this contestation case corresponds to the type of a common revolt, as the contestation cause is an operative performance failure (i.e. the vice president’s misleading statement) and contestation occurs on a meso-level with political activists disrupting *New Balance*’s meaning. After the case outline, depending on their experimental group, participants were confronted with different counteractions executed by *New Balance* (illustrated via a *Twitter* post): (1) control group (n = 41) – ignorance and inactivity, (2) treatment group 1 (n = 44) – rational business justification, (3) treatment group 2 (n = 43) – empathy and emotional excuse, and (4) treatment group 3 (n = 35) – release of brand control (see appendix C3). Participants’ perception of the presented counteraction was subsequently enquired, and their attention checked. They were then asked for their post-manipulation view of *New Balance* based on the following dependent variables (see appendix C4): *self-brand connection* ($\alpha = .95$) with a seven-item scale from Escalas and Bettman (2003); *negative (hateful) consumer-brand relationship* ($\alpha = .96$) with a six-item scale from Johnson, Matear, and Thomson (2010); and *brand attachment* ($\alpha = .97$) with a five-item scale of Park, MacInnis, Priester, Eisingerich, and Iacobucci (2010). In addition, certain covariates were measured in order to control for consumers’ general stance towards brands. These covariates are consumers’ *brand engagement in self-concept* ($\alpha = .97$) with an eight-item scale from Sprott, Czellar, and Spangenberg (2009), as well as consumers’ general *branded product meaning* in terms of *self-identity* ($\alpha = .97$), *group-identity* ($\alpha = .96$), *social status* ($\alpha = .96$), *personal values* ($\alpha = .95$), and *national heritage* ($\alpha = .81$), each with a five-item scale from Strizhakova, Coulter, and Price (2008). All items were either measured on a five-point or seven-point Likert scale (e.g. ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree). Finally, participants’ prior knowledge about *New Balance*’s right-wing contestation as well as socio-demographic variables with regard to participants’ gender, age, education, income, ethnicity, nationality, and political ideology were investigated. It is worth noting that the experimental findings are included in a comprehensive discussion of the counteraction measures (see chapter 3.5.3.3).

3.5.3 Results: Brand Protection Measures

Building on in-depth insights from marketing experts, the key result of the third study is a brand protection strategy tree (see figure 25). This tree systematically illustrates how marketers should cope with any kind of brand meaning contestation. Moreover, it presents nine distinct brand protection measures grouped by three strategic topics: forecasting, prevention, and counteraction. These measures summarise the experts' essential propositions and recommendations concerning the question on how to best deal with a contested brand. Overall, the different stages of the brand protection strategy tree follow the thread of the present research. The first stage, *self-assessment*, requires marketers to assess their brand's general degree of contestability. For this purpose, the evaluation scheme of brand meaning contestability, which was revealed in study 1 (see table 8), ought to be utilised. Secondly, in case of an actual contested brand event, a *contestation analysis* is needed. According to the results from studies 1 and 2, this comprises both an identification of the contestation type (see figure 18) and an understanding of the current contestation process stage (see figure 24). Finally, marketers have to implement appropriate *brand protection measures*. The following subchapters thus provide a thorough discussion of the revealed measures.

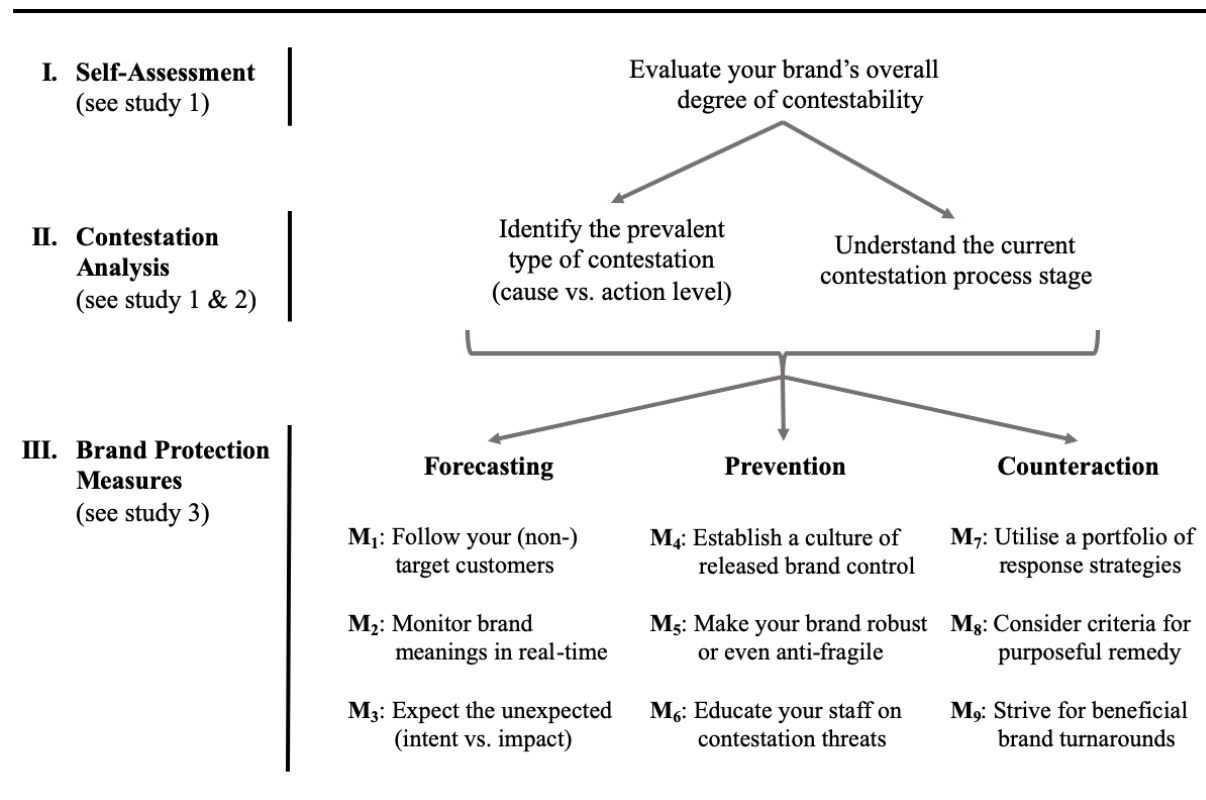


Figure 25: Brand Protection Strategy Tree (own illustration).

3.5.3.1 Forecasting

The first category of brand protection measures concerns the effective forecasting of contested brand contingencies. According to the conducted qualitative content analysis, the marketing experts revealed forecasting as one of the essential strategic instruments for handling today's uncertainty and the hazards of external brand shocks. Although this concerns any public brand, a subtle forecasting approach is particularly important for brands with a medium or high degree of contestability (see figure 20) and for those that are in an early stage of the contestation process (e.g. first antecedents or social rumours, see figure 24). Generally speaking, to protect a brand against unseen meaning disruptions, it is crucial for marketers to be highly aware of a brand's socio-cultural environment, of influential market actors, and of any kind of irregularities in a brand's usual habitat. Therefore, based on the data analysis, different anticipatory marketing activities were identified, coded, and assigned to the topic of forecasting. These marketing activities were then evaluated considering their impact and practicability, and clustered into three major brand protection measures (see figure 25).

M₁: Follow your (non-)target customers.

To begin with, marketers are urged to not only aggregate comprehensive knowledge about their target customers, but also to follow other market actors, in particular influential non-target customers. Here, the experts stated the need to observe traditional stakeholders, such as competitors, the political establishment, non-profit organisations, suppliers, and media houses. Yet, marketers should also pay attention to consumers who do not belong to a brand's primary target audience. Moreover, in the expert interviews it was primarily distinguished between three kinds of brand contestation scenarios: (1) conflicts between different target customers, (2) undesired, non-target customers who impair brand associations, and (3) non-customers who attack brands for individual objectives. This is in line with the findings from studies 1 and 2, which show that many contested brand incidents can be traced back to consumers who utilise brands for their idiosyncratic identity purposes (Belk, 1988; Elliott & Wattanasuwan, 1998; Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007) detached from legal brand owners' intentions. As these non-target customers are often antagonistic to a brand's target segment (e.g. young vs. old; rich vs. poor; politically left vs. right), they can exacerbate the risk of a contested brand. Allen et al. (2008) discuss this matter in their theoretical contribution on how to sensibly manage multiple brand meaning makers (e.g. co-creators, consumer collectives, internal

stakeholders, or cultural forces). Pursuant to this multi-stakeholder approach, many experts emphasised the importance of continuously getting in touch with anyone who consumes a brand or merely utilises it. Noteworthy, a brand can also be contested by non-consumption activities such as culture jamming (Lasn, 1999) or the spread of doppelgänger brand images (Thompson et al., 2006). Hence, the necessary collection of decisive brand information requires to seek in-depth contact with (non-)customers via offline and online touchpoints. Marketers have to conduct market research more widely than they currently do in order to gather data from all relevant customer segments. This will enable them to get a more holistic picture of a brand's public image (Aaker, 1996) and to understand market dynamics that may trigger a contested brand.

M₂: Monitor brand meanings in real-time.

The second brand protection measure recommends to monitor and audit public brand meanings in real-time. This proposition offers room for several calls to action. To begin with, cutting-edge brand management should integrate public and social media intelligence (Dutta & Pullig, 2011). The marketing experts revealed that, for many of their brands, they already have, or plan to implement, information technologies that enable them to monitor and assess brand-related online content in real-time. The related tools comprise social media listening, website analytics, public media monitoring, customer review audits, service quality tracing, or continuous measurements of the net-promoter score. On an abstract level, all these tools deal with the task of collecting, analysing, and presenting brand-related (online) media content generated by external stakeholders (Holt, 2016; Lipschultz, 2017). In doing so, brand managers should focus on both the identification of long-term customer trends and the short-term, or rather real-time, detection of irregularities in public brand discourses. Pursuant to the interviews, the latter sometimes takes place in so-called social media war rooms where all brand-related data are merged to detect potential brand shocks and trained marketers are alerted to react immediately if necessary. In line with theories on semiotics in consumer research, such as the reader-response theory (see chapter 2.2.; Mick et al., 2004; Scott, 1994), sentiment and discourse analyses provide a purposeful way of capturing and evaluating public brand rumours. More precisely, forms of computational language processing enable marketers to identify and categorise brand-related cognitions that market actors spread across the Web and potentially endanger a brand's intended meaning (e.g. the network analysis of brand publics by Arvidsson & Caliandro, 2016).

In addition, the experts stated that auditing a brand in real-time requires to consider stakeholders' active voice profoundly. This involves careful complaint management, openness for feedback, and the capacity to respond to each incident individually. In sum, a sophisticated approach of collecting and analysing real-time brand data is essential to forecast and countervail contestation events early on – in particular before detrimental brand rumours spread widely and seriously endanger a brand's intended positioning.

M₃: Expect the unexpected (intent vs. impact).

The third brand protection measure advises marketers to expect the unexpected. Several of the marketing managers interviewed emphasised the need to sensibly balance the intent and impact of every brand-related marketing activity. Such activities include advertisements, social media content, the public appearance of employees or brand ambassadors, customer service interactions, and other forms of brand communications (Tomczak et al., 2014). In this regard, *intent* refers to the legal owner's intended effects of a brand-related activity, whereas *impact* designates the actual effect. This corresponds with Kapferer's (2012) identified gap between brand identity (i.e. marketers' intended perception of a brand's meaning) and brand image (i.e. consumers' actually perceived brand meaning). In order to forecast potential misuses of a brand, the experts stress that marketers need to consider thoroughly how brand communications can be interpreted by their audience. Often marketers are convinced of their own judgments and neglect other possible interpretations or manipulations (Batey, 2016). However, research on advertising messages has shown that semiotic polysemy (i.e. brand messages that mean different things to different people) occurs more frequently than expected and can seriously harm a brand if consumers' miscomprehension leads to a reduction of brand awareness, anti-branding behaviours, or an alienation of target customers (Berthon et al., 2009; Puntoni et al., 2010). In order to avoid such ambiguity created by gaps between the intent and impact of marketing activities, it is crucial to foresee the scope of potential interpretations. This requires marketers to understand recipients' social backgrounds, the cultural circumstances under which marketing activities take place, as well as the prevailing political regulations, societal values, and ethical standards (Putnam, 1974; Tierney, 2016). Although brand-related activities usually have a certain target audience, marketers should always bear in mind that, in a globalised world, information spreads rapidly between regions and cultures. Thus, having a well-balanced intent and impact in one target area does not necessarily protect a brand from contestations elsewhere.

3.5.3.2 Prevention

Apart from the information-driven forecasting of contestation instances, it is just as important to position a brand in such a way that it offers the least possible room for meaning disruption. Hence, the second category of brand protection measures concerns primarily the active prevention of contestation contingencies, but also the prophylactic treatment of potentially negative contestation outcomes. The qualitative interviews evinced that, independent of a brands' current degree of contestability, preventive measures should be considered by any legal brand owner. These measures can be highly effective particularly if they are implemented prior to the onset of a potential brand contestation process. Moreover, prevention strategies should be integrated in such a way that their execution is informed by the forecasting activities. If the forecasting and prevention of contested brands work hand in hand, marketers may be less worried about unexpected, serious, and detrimental disruptions of their brands' meaning and value.

M₄: Establish a culture of released brand control.

In line with postmodern consumer research (Arnould & Thompson, 2005; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Holt, 1997), which stresses that consumers are increasingly making use of their emancipatory capabilities to shape markets in their own interests, most of the experts interviewed called for a radical rethink in today's marketing departments. Thus, the fourth brand protection measure asks legal owners to establish a culture of released brand control. This means to understand and accept the new marketing reality in which marketers do not exclusively control the meaning of their brands. Caused by game-changing innovations of digital communication technologies, the interaction between market actors has become highly dynamic, rapid, location-independent, anonymous, and multi-directional (Watts & Dodds, 2007). In turn, this has empowered consumers to actively form their socio-cultural environment by aggregating voices and joining together. Accordingly, brands have become a key source for independent identity work, socio-cultural integration, status consumption, expression of discontent, rebellion against the commercial system, or the exchange of values and opinions (Ferraro et al., 2013; Klein, 1999; Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Although marketers commonly recognise these developments, they do not sufficiently reflect on the consequences for their own brand management activities. According to several experts, future-oriented branding requires marketers to focus on a brand's core values, but also to let other market actors co-shape the public manifestation of these values. Marketers

should clearly define the guardrails of their intended brand positioning and thereupon take the role of moderators who steer the public brand discourse but do not ultimately determine a brand's meaning in every detail. Noteworthy, such a release of brand control means more than encouraging consumers to co-create a brand: it means to promote an internal branding culture of tolerance and acceptance for any meaning that complies with a brand's core values along the defined guardrails. In so doing, the contestation risk may be crucially reduced as consumers realise that their meaning-making activities are not being suppressed by the legal owner, but rather create a common discourse that leads to ongoing brand building. This again can evoke consumer-to-consumer self-regulation mechanisms that curtail the dissemination of broadly disapproved brand meanings. Recent marketing literature refers to this new role of consumers within concepts such as co-production or prosumption (Vargo & Lusch, 2008; Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010).

M₅: Make your brand robust or even anti-fragile.

For the fifth brand protection measure, marketing experts highlighted the necessity of making a brand robust or even anti-fragile against contestation shocks. In terms of a robust brand, three basic principles were identified: *consistency*, *transparency*, and *authenticity*. Consistency refers to the reliable delivery of a consistent core brand promise over time (Aaker, 1996). Yet, it also means to regularly adjust a brand to current market trends, industry changes, and innovations in order to not become obsolete. Transparency implies communicating simply, directly, and sincerely by informing stakeholders about any relevant business matters with verified information. If market actors do not perceive a concealment of performance- or value-driven misconducts, a brand does not offer a platform for public criticism or disparagement (Kähr et al., 2016). In addition, authenticity expects a brand to be trustworthy to its consumers and faithful towards itself. In general, a brand becomes credible if it preforms as advertised and sticks to its core values (for more details on brand authenticity, see Morhart, Malär, Guèvremont, Girardin, & Grohmann, 2015). According to the interview participants, an authentic brand can be created by establishing distinct visual and vocal identity cues, by ensuring high product quality and permanent availability, by building a brand slowly and respectably, by focusing on consumers' changing needs, and by going the extra mile in any brand service activity. Moreover, a brand's holistic public appearance (e.g. logo, slogan, or advertisements) should be designed in such a way that it offers the least possibility for ambiguity or misinterpretations. This relates to the idea of attaining a high

degree of signifier control (see figure 17; Mohr et al., 2015), since creating a robust brand means to increase the legal owner's ability to prevent non-target actors from engaging in undesired contestation practices. Particularly brands that do not make use of socio-cultural stereotypes or polarising values within their public appearance (e.g. *Coca Cola's* claim to be *The Real Thing* or *Apple's* slogan to *Think Different*) appear to be robust against contestation incidents such as doppelgänger brand images (Thompson et al., 2006). Building on this notion of a robust brand, the idea of an anti-fragile brand takes things even further. According to Taleb (2012), anti-fragility is characterised as a system's property to improve itself as a result of external shocks, internal failures, or other stressors. Transferred towards marketing systems, this means to establish a brand that learns from its failures and becomes stronger with each experienced contestation. Thus, it is crucial to turn negative incidents into lasting positive change, which can be achieved by sticking to simple principles, by utilising self-regulative market dynamics, by ensuring flexible and reactive marketing structures, and by considering randomness.

M₆: Educate your staff on contestation threats.

The last prevention measure concerns the need to sensitise internal stakeholders, particularly those working in marketing and branding departments, for contestation threats. This means ensuring employees' understanding of the different contestation causes and types (see figure 18), of potential vulnerabilities with regard to their own brand-related behaviours (for details on brand-specific leadership, see Morhart, Herzog, & Tomczak, 2009), and the need to envision harmful contestation consequences for a brand's meaning and value (Huber et al., 2009). In addition, the entire marketing staff should be thoroughly prepared on how to best react in case of a contested brand (see chapter 3.5.3.3). Moreover, the experts stated that, on the one hand, employees are a major trigger for contested brand incidents (e.g. due to inappropriate behaviours), yet on the other hand they are also the people who have to detect contestation threats early on and initiate appropriate countervailing procedures. With regard to the actual training of the employees, it is essential to have the entire staff internalise a brand's core values, to inform marketers about socio-cultural pitfalls of each operating market, to define clear communication rules, to ensure necessary capabilities for and a frequent usage of data-driven forecasting tools, to establish distinct decision structures and a well-defined crisis escalation process for the case of a contestation incident, to run an effective internal complaint management, and to share brand responsibility among all employees.

3.5.3.3 Counteractions

The last category of brand protection measures discusses how legal brand owners should handle actual contestation incidents. Whereas forecasting and prevention measures are more precautionary, counteraction measures have a reactive character. Evidently, this primarily concerns brands with a high degree of contestability that have become exposed to the brand contestation wheel (i.e. to grave brand contestation practices, see figure 24). Generally speaking, quick recovery is of utmost importance, since brand contestations are often associated with immediate reputational damage, persistent alterations of brand meanings, and momentous declines in sales and share prices. It is common knowledge among marketers that (re-)building a brand takes considerably longer and more resources than destroying it. Thus, reasonable handling of a contested brand is decisive for both the duration and the severity of any repercussions.

M₇: Utilise a portfolio of response strategies.

To this end, the qualitative data analysis evinced that it is essential to develop and utilise a well-grounded portfolio of response strategies. This portfolio should support marketers in deciding on how to best react in the case of different contestation incidents. So, dependent on a brand's strategy and the risk potential of a contestation cause, brand managers should be empowered to make quick and purposeful counteraction decisions. Appropriate response strategies could, for instance, be determined for each type of contested brands (see figure 18). Yet, the marketing experts emphasised that response strategies have to be defined for each brand individually and should not be standardised, as brands underlie distinct market dynamics, industry standards, customer expectations, value structures, and communication approaches. Nevertheless, the findings allow for the presentation of a set of potential counteraction measures that may be adopted in general and adjusted to particular brands. This relates to research by Aaker et al. (2004), Dutta & Pullig (2011), and Herhausen et al., (2019) on effective corporate responses to brand crises and the mitigation of online firestorms. Thus, the first counteraction strategy identified is to entirely ignore a contestation incident and not react at all. However, the experts clarified that this should only be applied if the contestation cause is far-fetched or if a brand is deliberately being tempted into a lose-lose situation (e.g. by public blackmailing). Next, legal owners can release an objective counterstatement that justifies the conduct that has caused concerns and explains the underlying business rationales. By contrast, marketers could also conceal an incident of misconduct, question

the veracity of the accusations, or aim to redirect stakeholders' attention towards other concerns or perspectives (Kähr et al., 2016). However, according to the experts, in most cases it may be more purposeful to appease the contesting actors by showing empathy, apologising, and offering generous compensation. In addition, it can also be an effective response strategy to utilise self-regulative market mechanisms by releasing brand control to enthusiastic and influential brand advocates who publicly defend a brand against undesired disruptions. Still, many of the marketing specialists agreed on the importance of quickly taking precarious debates with market actors out of the public (online) discourse and trying to find bilateral solutions. In sum, a universal counteraction approach is usually not expedient, since an effective treatment of contested brands often requires a case-specific interplay of appropriate response strategies.

M₈: Consider criteria for purposeful remedy.

The next counteraction measure deals with overarching criteria that marketers should consider while engaging in remedial activities. Purposeful remedy implies to react in an appropriate way by adhering to general rules of interacting with contesting market actors. In this respect, several requirements were suggested by the marketing experts interviewed and aggregated into five essential criteria. These criteria are largely in line with Davidow's (2003) analysis of factors affecting the effectiveness of organisational responses to customer complaints. Hence, the first criterium is the reaction time. As already mentioned, it is crucial to detect brand meaning contestations as early as possible in order to be able to respond rapidly. This lowers the risk of harmful consequences substantially. However, speeding up the reaction procedure must not happen at the expense of the response quality. This refers to the second criterium, namely to ensure a high content quality for any reactive activity (Aaker et al., 2004). With regard to intent-impact gaps (see measure M₃) it is necessary to consider all potential interpretations of a contestation response and thoroughly verify the information given out. In particular, if brands are already under public pressure, market actors are highly sensitive to further brand failures that they could capitalise on for additional contestation practices (Haig, 2005). Thirdly, it is fundamental to stay credible, trustworthy, and on brand (i.e. to comply with the core brand values) no matter how widespread, strained, and threatening the contestation situation may be. In addition, the experts emphasised case-specific attentiveness as the fourth criterium. Thus, marketers should consider each contested brand incident individually and show respect, empathy, and a personal understanding

for the concerns of all contesting actors. Finally, it is important to counteract consistently both over the duration of a contestation incident and with respect to the countervailing actions taken by different employees, departments, or regional business units. In case of a contested brand, an organisation should present itself as united and act uniformly. This requires transparently and continuously informing all internal stakeholders about the current state of affairs as well as encouraging marketers to bundle their capabilities. If the entire organisation acts in concert, a successful counteraction becomes more likely.

M₉: Strive for beneficial brand turnarounds.

Finally, the last brand protection measure is concerned with the endeavour to turn around a potentially harmful contestation incident and generate beneficial outcomes. The experts suggested that marketers should not only think about how they can defeat a contested brand but also how to take advantage of a hazardous event. This corresponds with the idea of the anti-fragile brand, which utilises external shocks and internal failures to become stronger (Taleb, 2012; see measure M₅). Research has shown that appropriate handling of disadvantageous circumstances offers considerable potential to thrive a brand by either demonstrating retributive performance capabilities or by allowing for opportune meaning change (Aaker et al., 2004). The latter, for instance, can manifest itself as a result of brand co-optation incidents (see chapter 2.1.3.3). If subcultural actors appropriate brands for individual identity purposes, they often load the brand with new meanings (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). As seen in the case of *Birkenstock* (see appendix A5), suitable handling of such a co-optation might attract the mainstream society and encourage a brand to flourish. Turning a contested brand around also corresponds with the notion of brand revitalisation, which implies either refreshing old or creating new sources of brand equity (Keller, 1999). Besides, an effective turnaround requires a proactive approach of taking failures seriously, not repeating them, but rather utilising them to gain proficiency and alter marketing practices in a favourable way. According to the professionals interviewed, excellent complaint management can create lasting, stronger, and more positive consumer-brand relationships compared to the situation before a contestation was caused. In addition, the findings urge marketers to think of clever contestation twists by not taking themselves too seriously and, if appropriate, displaying a subtle sense of humour. Overall, to strengthen a brand's market positioning in the long run, contestation responses should not only consider defending a brand's status quo but also remaining flexible and open to unexpected meaning changes.

Findings of the Quantitative Follow-Up Investigation

In the second part of the third study, some of the counteraction measures revealed were transferred into hypotheses and tested quantitatively. The focus rested on how to most effectively respond to a brand contestation caused by the legal owner (see measure M₇). Hence, the examined response strategies were (1) to stay inactive, (2) to react rationally, (3) to react emotionally, and (4) to release brand control (for the detailed hypotheses and the experiment procedure, see chapter 3.5.2.2). The experiment dealt with the right-wing contestation of *New Balance* (2016, U.S.), which was selected due to its broad public relevance, its socio-political topicality (i.e. a polit-brand as in O’Guinn & Muniz, 2005), the strong negative associations involved, and consumers’ severe contestation practices. To verify the hypotheses, the experimental data were statistically analysed by means of the software *SPSS*. Note that this experiment presents a preliminary investigation of the derived brand protection measures and intends to pave the way for further studies.

With regard to hypothesis H₁, the analysis focused on whether being unreactive or responding in a proactive way results in a more negative consumer-brand relation. To test for this, consumers’ perceived negativity towards *New Balance* was compared between the control group (i.e. *New Balance* does not react at all) and the aggregated results of the three treatment groups (i.e. *New Balance* reacts proactively). Therefore, a factorial analysis of variance (ANOVA) was executed with negative consumer-brand relationship as the dependent variable. This was done although the dependent variable was not outright normally distributed (i.e. significant Kolmogorov-Smirnov test), since ANOVAs are fairly robust against such normality deviations (Johnson & Christensen, 2017). The other necessary statistical assumptions for conducting an ANOVA were all met (e.g. independent measures and homogeneity of variance across groups verified by a non-significant Levene’s test). As shown in appendix C5, this basic ANOVA revealed a difference in means of the dependent variable across the control group and the merged treatment groups on an inconclusive significance level of $p < .10$ ($M_{CG} = 2.08$, $M_{TGs} = 1.73$; $F(1, 161) = 2.99$). Thus, to increase the accuracy of the univariate statistical model, covariates were included. The related analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) controlled for participants’ familiarity with *New Balance*, their pre-knowledge of the contestation case, their political orientation, and their general branded product meaning (with focus on self-identity, group-identity, and personal values). Demographic control variables also included participants’ age, gender, and ethnicity. In line with the qualitative findings,

this revised model resulted in a significant difference of the dependent variable means between the control group and the merged treatment groups ($M_{CG} = 2.08$, $M_{TGs} = 1.73$; $F(1, 161) = 4.86$; $p < .05$; see appendix C5). Notably, the mean was higher for members of the control group, which signals a more negative consumer-brand relation in the case of not reacting. Hence, hypothesis H_1 could be confirmed. For marketers, this implies, that a proactive response to contested brands is more effective than remaining inactive in order to curtail the emergence of unpleasant or even hateful consumer-brand relations.

Beyond that, hypothesis H_2 considers the different impacts of rational and emotional response strategies. According to the expert interviews, if marketers react emotionally and apologise with empathy to a contestation caused by the legal owner, consumers demonstrate less detrimental brand attitudes in contrast to rational responses with objective justifications. To test the related hypothesis, participants' brand attachment towards *New Balance* was utilised as the dependent variable and statistically compared between treatment group 1 (rational business justification) and treatment group 2 (empathy and emotional excuse). For this purpose, again an ANCOVA was carried out, since it is largely robust against the dependent variable's moderate deviation from the normal distribution. In respect of the integrated covariates, minor changes were made to the ANCOVA conducted for the first hypothesis. Merely consumers' brand engagement in self-concept was added as a covariate and the control of participants' branded product meaning now focused on group-identity and social status, as these dimensions are more relevant for socially endorsed response strategies. So, the ANCOVA revealed a very significant difference in means of the dependent variable between the emotional and rational response treatments ($M_{T1} = 2.15$, $M_{T2} = 2.43$; $F(1, 85) = 7.08$; $p < .01$; see appendix C5). Thus, hypothesis H_2 could also be confirmed. As participants' attachment towards *New Balance* was higher for the emotional counteraction, marketers are well advised to respond with empathy rather than with rationality in case of a contested brand.

Finally, the third hypothesis H_3 contemplates whether releasing brand control (i.e. let consumers willingly co-shape a brand's meaning) improves a brand's resilience against contestation harm compared to merely communicating proactively (i.e. responding in a rational or emotional manner). Therefore, participants' self-brand connection after the manipulation was regarded as the dependent variable and compared between treatment group 3 (releasing brand control) and an aggregation of treatment group 1 (rational response) and treatment group 2 (emotional response). Here again, the dependent

variable was not outright normally distributed. Even though the conducted ANOVA is reasonably robust against such normality deviations, in this case it did not yield significant results. Thus, a nonparametric, independent-sample Mann-Whitney U test was conducted, which also did not exhibit significant differences of consumers' self-brand connection across the treatment conditions. Moreover, a revised ANCOVA, which incorporated essential covariates (i.e. the same covariates as for hypothesis H₂), improved the analysis, but also did not result in significant differences of the dependent variable ($M_{T1} = 2.56$, $M_{T2} = 2.78$; $F(1, 120) = 2.41$; $p > .1$; see appendix C5). Therefore, hypothesis H₃ could not be confirmed. However, descriptive statistics indicate a slightly higher mean value of participants' self-brand connection with *New Balance* for releasing brand control (treatment group 3; $M_{T3} = 2.78$) compared to merely communicating proactively (treatment group 1 and 2; $M_{T12} = 2.56$). Several possible reasons exist as to why this difference is not significant: firstly, the sample size of the experimental conditions could be larger in order to add statistical explanatory power; secondly, different contested brand cases could be considered to avoid a one-sided manipulation that merely focuses on political stereotypes; thirdly, a release of brand control might require a more longitudinal investigation, as consumers need to actually be involved in the shaping of a brand's meaning and not just confronted with the possibility to do so. These issues also relate to the general limitations of the present experimental study. In sum, it cannot be argued that giving away brand control significantly improves a brand's resilience against contestation harm compared to solely reacting through proactive communication. Yet, neither the opposite can be verified, as the findings on hypothesis H₃ were insignificant. Further experiments are therefore required to investigate the effects of released brand control across different cases and longitudinally in the field.

Overall, the experimental findings (i.e. confirmation of H₁ and H₂; rejection of H₃; see appendix C5 for R-squared measures) largely validate experts' qualitative insights on response strategies. Hence, marketers are well advised to counteract legal owner-caused brand contestations in a proactive and empathic way, since the risk of lasting brand harm might thus be reduced most effectively. This also relates to how *New Balance* actually reacted to their right-wing contestation. The marketers in charge quickly responded to the public by stating that *New Balance* does not support any form of bigotry, hate, or racism; instead, the brand welcomes all races, cultures, and sexual orientations. Yet, owing to the strong negative meanings associated with right-wing extremists, it took *New Balance* quite a while to fully recover from this contested brand incident.

4 General Discussion

In the fourth chapter, the findings of the three conducted studies are consolidated and discussed with respect to the research questions initially posed. This includes both a review of the theoretical contributions gained as well as an outline of the implications for the marketing practice. Moreover, the research findings are critically reflected upon with regard to prevalent limitations of both the overall mixed method approach and the three separate research studies. The discussion ends with an outlook on future research opportunities that arise from the present investigation of contested brands.

4.1 Consolidated Research Findings

To gain a comprehensive understanding of contested brands and how antagonistic market actors disrupt brand meanings, the main findings of the three conducted research studies are aggregated and presented below. In doing so, the thread follows the three consecutive research questions (see chapter 1.2.). Accordingly, the first study revealed both a definition and a typology of contested brands. These laid the foundations for the subsequent investigations. The second study then qualitatively derived a theoretical process model of brand meaning contestations. Finally, the third study explored and quantitatively verified how marketers should deal with contested brand incidents in order to reduce the risk of detrimental consequences most effectively. Altogether, the fundamental research findings are summarised below:

Q1: How are contested brands defined and what determines a comprehensive typology?

Considering the first research question, in study 1 an extensive theoretical cross-analysis was carried out in order to understand and categorise existing marketing concepts that substantially relate to the idea of contested brands. This analysis entailed an aggregation of three theoretical categories: (1) brand meaning (co-)creation, (2) consumer resistance and brand sabotage, and (3) cultural appropriation and co-optation (see table 6). A profound understanding of these categories was decisive to defining contested brands as an overarching theoretical concept. In addition, in order to ensure a broad practical applicability of the contested brands definition, secondary data of 30 actually occurred contested brand cases were collected and analysed comparatively. Thus, for a systematic conceptualisation both the theoretical foundations and the practical case data were merged under Gallie's (1956) interpretative frame of essentially contested concepts.

Accordingly, by analysing the associated five necessary and two justifying conditions, it was determined what a contested brand precisely is and how a brand's degree of meaning contestability can be assessed (see table 8). As result, a contested brand was defined as a brand that is utilised by antagonistic market actors with disparate brand perceptions to serve heterogeneous purposes. Moreover, the existence of a contested brand requires these actors to publicly engage in controversial market practices that influence both the focal brand's prevalent meaning and value. Based on this definition, subsequently a typology of contested brands was developed that classifies different contingencies of brand meaning contestations. For this, existing theoretical notions, such as the conceptual framework on consumer brand sabotage (Kähr et al., 2016), were integrated and complemented with insights from the analysed contested brand cases. This yielded a comprehensive typology, which fulfils the needs of being mutually exclusive and collectively exhaustive (MECE) by differentiating between nine distinct types of contested brands (see figure 18). Therefore, classification takes place based on two dimensions: (1) the contestation cause, which can either be legal owner-based (i.e. performance- or value-related) or market actor-based (i.e. idiosyncratic brand appropriation) and (2) the level of action, which refers to the social extent of contestation (i.e. micro-, meso-, or macro-level). Finally, to verify its practicability, the typology was applied to evaluate the contested brand cases gathered (see figure 19). Combined with a multi-level case cluster analysis of the brands' degree of contestability (see figure 21), the study revealed a clear case discrimination that provides insights on the cases' structural nature as well as on their level of contestation threat.

Q₂: What theoretical model, grounded in qualitative data, can explain the emergence and negotiation of contested brand meanings by antagonistic market actors?

The second study addressed the challenge of how to theoretically capture the emergence and negotiation of contested brand meanings by antagonistic market actors. Therefore, a grounded theory analysis was executed by means of triangulated, qualitative data collected via consumer interviews, focus groups, and netnographic investigations. This analysis resulted in a comprehensive theoretical process model on the structural course of brand meaning contestations (see figure 24). Hence, the brand meaning contestation process can be subdivided into three successive parts: (1) antecedents, (2) contestation practices, and (3) outcomes. Firstly, antecedents comprise the contestation causes, social triggers, and context factors that initiate brand meaning contestation practices. In line

with the typology, both legal owners and market actors can trigger individual cognitions and social rumours (e.g. being inauthentic, being too mainstream, or being related to (un-)desired consumers) that lead to behaviours that oppose a brand's prevalent meaning. In addition, these triggers are influenced by context factors such as a brand's public visibility, consumers' frequency of brand touchpoints, and the socio-cultural environment. The second part of the process model follows a practice theoretical perspective (see chapter 2.4) and emphasises the different ways market actors contest a brand by means of the so-called contestation wheel. Grounded in data and theory, this wheel outlines twelve essential contestation practices grouped into four categories: (1) perception (practices of observing, informing, and exchanging), (2) disruption (practices of identifying, signalling, and stereotyping), (3) negotiation (practices of following, differing, and propagating), and (4) reaction (practices of passivating, resisting, and engaging). These practices were revealed to be interdependent and recursive in nature, since their execution elicits further practices and continuously refines themselves. Finally, the model's third part deals with the outcomes of brand meaning contestations. Influenced by different contingency factors (e.g. transaction costs, media attention, or marketing activities), contestation practices were identified to essentially affect three central outcome dimensions: brand meanings, brand utilisations, and brand values. Notably, brand meaning contestations do not always result in a deterioration of these dimensions but can also advance a brand's overall market positioning.

Q3: How can marketers effectively forecast, prevent, and counteract the public spread and negative consequences of undesired brand meanings?

Finally, the third study took up a more practical position by investigating how marketers should best deal with contested brand contingencies in order to avoid momentous harm to their brands. For this purpose, a broad range of semi-structured interviews with marketing experts from different industries, brands, and fields of duty was conducted. Building on a qualitative content analysis, these interviews yielded nine aggregated brand protection measures that are subdivided by their direction of impact into forecasting, prevention, and counteraction measures. Moreover, these determined brand protection measures were integrated into a holistic brand protection strategy tree (see figure 25). This tree calls for legal owners' self-assessment of a brand's general degree of contestability, a contestation analysis to classify and evaluate a current contested brand incident, and finally the implementation of appropriate brand protection measures.

While forecasting measures (e.g. real-time monitoring of brand meanings) concern the early stage detection of potentially harmful contested brand contingencies, prevention measures (e.g. making a brand robust or anti-fragile) focus on preparing a brand so that it offers no room for contestations. Lastly, counteraction measures (e.g. striving for beneficial brand turnarounds) emphasise purposeful approaches regarding how marketers should react if a contested brand incident actually occurs. Moreover, in the second part of study 3, the effectiveness of some of the counteraction measures was tested by means of a quantitative follow-up investigation. Accordingly, an online experiment was conducted to analyse the (negative) impacts of a contested brand incident with regard to different responses by the legal brand owner (i.e. not reacting, rational or emotional response, releasing brand control). The results indicate that it is most effective to counteract a contested brand in a proactive and empathic way, since this elicits the least negative brand attitudes among consumers. The third study thus completes the holistic investigation of the contested brands phenomenon by offering profound practical advice and providing room for future research opportunities.

4.2 Theoretical Contributions

The present work contributes theoretically to different research streams within the fields of consumer behaviour, marketing, and brand-oriented semiotics. Furthermore, by using a practice theoretical approach, it adds to the prevalent understanding of what practice theory is and how it enables an understanding of socio-cultural dynamics in consumer research. Foremost, the revealed conceptualisation of contested brands provides an overarching theoretical concept that unifies the heterogeneous landscape of consumer research concerning the manifold forms and courses of brand meaning alterations (see figure 6 and table 6). The common characteristic of all contemplated theories – the fact that brand meanings change due to disruptions and negotiations by antagonistic market actors – constitutes the essential core of the contested brands concept. Brands are exploited by their legal owners, by consumers, by non-profit organisations, and by many other market actors with clashing interests, in order to construct identities, fight power struggles, or to (re-)structure socio-cultural environments. In today's technologically mediated and interconnected marketplaces, brands are no longer private but common goods whose utilisation cannot be restricted (see figure 13). Thus, the idea of contested brands presents a novel concept that allows for a comprehensive analysis of various constellations of antagonistic market actors and contestation causes that trigger shifting

brand meanings. In addition, the idea of contested brands refers to a dynamic process that resides in social negotiations, which give rise to steadily evolving brand meanings (see figure 24). This procedural perspective extends existing analytical frameworks on brand meaning negotiations that tend to take more static viewpoints (e.g. Ligas & Cotte, 1999; see figure 8). Therefore, the contested brands process model integrates individual, social, cultural, and marketing perspectives into a coherent path of analysis that focuses on the antecedents, market practices, and outcomes of brand meaning contestations.

More precisely, the branding-related research streams that the work at hand consolidates and contributes to are brand meaning (co-)creation, consumer resistance and brand sabotage, as well as cultural appropriation and co-optation. Firstly, the notion of brand meaning (co-)creation considers a joint development of brand meanings by legal owners and sovereign market actors (Allen et al., 2008; Iglesias et al., 2013; Payne et al., 2008). This can occur either through consumers who cultivate strong personal connections to a focal brand (e.g. in brand communities; Muniz & O’Guinn, 2001) or through legal owners’ active empowerment of consumers to collaborate (cf. the idea of prosumption; Humphreys & Grayson, 2008). Here, the contested brands concept adds that (co-)created brand meanings also underlie contestation dynamics driven by antagonistic market actors. Co-creators have their own diverse and often detached objectives in shaping a brand’s meaning. These ambitions inevitably evoke contestation practices and meaning negotiations between co-creators and other market actors (e.g. uninvolved customers). Yet, suchlike contestation practices usually have the potential to coin favourable brand meanings and thus increase a brand’s value. Secondly, the research stream of consumer resistance and brand sabotage is concerned with consumer behaviours that threaten or deteriorate a brand’s meaning. These include behaviours such as anti-branding activities (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2010), brand hijacking (Wipperfurth, 2005), consumer boycotts (Klein et al., 2004), or the public spread of doppelgänger brand images (Thompson et al., 2006). In this regard, the contested brands concept integrates all kinds of offensive behavioural manifestations into an abstracted analysis of disruption practices that focuses on consumer stereotypes, reference groups, and identity signalling. Moreover, existing research commonly ascribes the causes for disruptive behaviours to value- or performance-based misconducts of the legal brand owner (Kähr et al., 2016). However, the present research reveals that sovereign market actors can also trigger contestation practices isolated from legal owners’ conduct by their appropriation

of brands for idiosyncratic identity purposes and thus by opposing, offending, or alienating the brand perception of other (target) customers. This additional cause of contestation is also reflected in the derived contested brands typology (see figure 18). Accordingly, the contested brands model presents an integrated approach for explaining the broad variety of consumer resistance, anti-branding, and brand sabotage behaviours. Thirdly, the contested brands concept contributes to brand-related cultural appropriation and co-optation theories. The notion of co-optation focuses on brands that are contested via the mainstream society after being adopted by sub- or countercultures for identity creation (Thompson & Coskuner-Balli, 2007). Considering a society's majority as a macro-level market entity allows the contested brands theory to likewise explain this kind of brand meaning contestation. This is facilitated as the contested brands typology follows a socially cascaded structure by differing between individual (micro), collective (meso), and societal (macro) levels of contestation actions. Notably, the findings show that properly managed co-optations often cause positive contestations outcomes.

Moreover, the three conducted research studies contribute to the overall understanding of signs and symbols in consumer research. Building on Ferdinand de Saussure's dyadic concept of a sign (see figure 9) and Charles Sanders Peirce's notion of the triadic semiosis (see figure 10), the present findings reveal brands as semiotic meaning entities that are subject to both irresistible transformations and multilateral transmissions. Brand meanings continuously shift within socio-cultural systems as market actors engage in encoding, transmitting, observing, decoding, and interpreting practices. In line with the reader-response theory (Mick et al. 2004; Scott, 1994), the research reveals that ambiguity and misinterpretations within the transfer of meanings are a key source for contested brands. Particularly differences in market actors' social backgrounds, identity stances, and socio-cultural circumstances determine the transfer of meanings decisively and thus also the contestation processes, practices, and types. Furthermore, the findings expand McCracken's (1986) theoretical model of meaning movement (see figure 11) by stating that meaning transfer nowadays happens multi-directionally between the cultural system and diverse market actors. Therefore, it is not only the culturally constituted world that is a pivotal source for brand meanings (cf. cultural branding; Holt, 2004), but also the execution of contestation practices by certain markets actors. This emphasises an inverse path of meaning transfer originating from individual consumers who utilise brands and hence transmit personal meanings into their socio-cultural environment.

In addition, the research at hand refines the scientific understanding and application scope of practice theory (Reckwitz, 2002), which was partly applied as epistemological foundation. Amongst others, Bourdieu's (1977, 1990) theory of practice enabled the analyses and interpretations of the second study to in-depth reveal how market actors contest brand meanings in routinised and reoccurring ways. This led to the identification of twelve distinct contestation practices that were assembled in the contestation wheel and supplemented by associated triggers and outcomes (see figure 24). Overall, the findings indicate that brands act as a substantial, socio-material basis for practices that embed doings, sayings, and meanings and thus constitute social reality. The breakdown of these interconnected practices allowed for an understanding of both the behavioural patterns of individual consumers and interactive social structures. This highlights the still underestimated potential for applying practice-theoretical considerations within the field of consumer research. The investigation of brand-related practices offers a seminal gateway to gain depth in the theoretical sense-making of consumption behaviours.

Overall, the concept of contested brands presents a novel, theoretical approach to comprehensively explain brand meaning alterations provoked by antagonistic market actors. The notion of contested brands moreover extends existing theories through its dynamic, integrated, and socially cascaded approach. The conducted research thus contributes a new meaning paradigm to table 1, which can be specified as follows: brand meanings continuously alter due to contestation practices by antagonistic market actors.

4.3 Practical Implications

The practical implications of the revealed findings can be summarised by three essential directions of managerial impact: (1) self-assessment of brand meaning contestability, (2) contestation analysis, and (3) brand protection measures (see figure 25). To begin with, the concept of contested brands provides marketers and brand managers with an understanding of what contestation instances are and the criteria by which they can be identified. The conception illustrates what causes a brand to become contested and the momentous consequences this can entail. But most importantly, the notion of contested brands highlights that, in today's marketing reality, legal owners no longer exert exclusive control over their brands' meaning; instead, multiple, often antagonistic and uncontrollable market actors determine the process of brand meaning making. This fact needs to be considered on a strategic and operative level for any brand-related decision.

Therefore, the contested brands concept offers marketers a tool to self-assess their brand's degree of contestability. In line with the brand gestalt continuum (Tierney et al., 2016), different kinds of contested brands exist and call for different managerial treatments. Hence, the developed evaluation scheme of brand meaning contestability (see table 8) allows marketers to assess their brand's threat of contestation by means of seven analytical criteria (i.e. five necessary and two justifying criteria). The insights so gained give marketers both the possibility to compare their situation with similar cases from other brands and the opportunity to undertake the necessary brand adjustments that reduce the degree of contestability and, thus, the risk of detrimental contestations.

Next, the research implicates managerial instruments that facilitate an analysis of actually occurring contested brand incidents. On the one hand, the revealed contested brands typology allows marketers to classify arising contested brand situations based on the contestation cause and the social action level (see figure 18). Such a classification provides the basis for appropriate managerial decisions on effective countermeasures. Moreover, the conducted analysis of multiple elapsed contested brand cases allows marketers to draw decisive parallels on worst and best practice scenarios for the distinct contested brand types (see figure 19). Apart from classifying a contested brand, it is also crucial to evaluate the current stage and magnitude of a contestation incident. This is made possible by considering the contested brand process model, which outlines the interplay of contestation causes, practices, and effects (see figure 24). Hence, marketers can subsume their particular situation under the overarching contestation process in order to understand the prevailing contestation dynamics thoroughly and counteract thoughtfully. Besides, a profound consideration of the related context and contingency factors can also provide substantial support for managerial decision-making.

Finally, the third study predominantly focused on practical implications with regard to appropriate ways of how to handle contested brand incidents. An analysis of qualitative data from multiple interviews with marketing experts resulted in nine particular brand protection measures grouped into the categories of forecasting, preventing, and counteracting contested brands (see figure 25). Implementing these measures allows marketers to approach contested brands contingencies effectively in order to either avert momentous brand harm or even to convert contestations into beneficial outcomes that strengthen a brand and create value. Accordingly, forecasting measures focus on the early detection of contested brands. To this end, an essential advice for brand managers

is to not only follow one's target customers but also to thoroughly monitor non-target actors who utilise the focal brand. In order to forecast contested brands effectively, it is necessary to trace the public manifestations, trends, and sentiments of brand meanings in real-time. In addition, marketers need to consider the trade-off between intent and impact of their brand-related activities. This implies to always expect unintentional brand meaning interpretations or orchestrations across all socio-cultural fields of operation. Furthermore, preventive brand protection measures claim to a priori guard brands from becoming contested. Accordingly, by releasing brand control, by educating employees on contestation threats, and by purposefully designing a brand's public appearance, a brand can be made robust or even anti-fragile against harmful disruptions. Lastly, counteraction measures advise marketers on how to react reasonably in the case of arising contestations. In this regard, the findings show that it is important to specify a portfolio of potential countermeasures with precise criteria for when and how to apply them. To this, an online experiment revealed proactive and emotional response strategies to be most effective for repelling negative contestation threats. Moreover, marketers should not only engage in defensive responses but also strive for shrewd turnarounds of contestations into desirable brand meanings and beneficial marketing outcomes.

4.4 Limitations

Generally speaking, the present research underlies two kinds of limitations: on the one hand, limitations regarding the overall mixed method approach; on the other hand, limitations that are attributed to the three specific research studies. More specifically, the combination of inductive and deductive, or rather of conceptual, qualitative, and quantitative research methods is limited by the complexity of transferring, aggregating, and generalising findings across the consecutive investigations. In particular, this becomes evident, as the different methodologies at hand integrated diverging research paradigms. Accordingly, the qualitative grounded theory analysis embraced rather an interpretative perspective (see study 2), whereas the quantitative analysis took a more positivistic perspective (see study 3). Yet, a reasonable integration of these perspectives into the mixed method design was enabled by the overarching paradigm of pragmatism (Feilzer, 2010). Pragmatists implement different research approaches in a goal-oriented way with the intention of answering determined research questions comprehensively, profoundly, and efficiently. In addition, in contrast to single method studies, any mixed method approach is limited by the procedural and analytical depth of its applied research

methods. However, the present work compensates for this limitation through groundbreaking and comprehensive findings on a complex phenomenon, which required an interplay of conceptual analyses, qualitative explorations, and quantitative verifications.

Beyond these general limitations, each study bears its individual constraints. Although several of these specific limitations have already been discussed in the course of the particular studies, the following summarises the most restrictive aspects to be considered for both the interpretation and application of the research findings. Thus, study 1 is based on existing theories and secondary case data from public and social media sources but does not incorporate a collection of primary data. This conceptual character limits the reliability of the gained insights due to the possibility of a subjective analysis and biased case assessments. However, this limitation was countered by including a diverse spectrum of multiple contested brand cases with constant and critical reflection. Besides, both the typology application and the case clustering are limited to an analysis of product-oriented brands from business-to-consumer contexts. Next, the second study is constrained in its grounded theory analysis in terms of the demographics of the study participants. As informants were predominantly university students from the German-speaking area, the results can be somewhat lopsided. Yet, by means of a multilateral data triangulation (i.e. data from in-depth interviews, focus groups, and netnographic research), this weakness was diligently addressed and balanced out. In addition, study 2 underlies the usual concerns of qualitative work (e.g. context specific findings; small sample size; no statistical representation; subjectivity of data and analysis; hard to replicate procedures), which might limit both the results' generalisability and practical usability. Finally, study 3 also entails some restrictions, in particular since it combines qualitative expert interviews with a quantitative follow-up investigation. Hence, the experts interviewed are drawn from a limited population (i.e. marketers from renowned consumer brands located in the German-speaking area). Furthermore, the transfer of qualitative insights (i.e. the brand protection measures) into verifiable hypotheses was constrained by reducing complexity and focusing on specific aspects (i.e. counteraction measures). Thus, the follow-up experiment was incapable of verifying the effectiveness of all derived brand protection measures. Besides, the quantitative research was subject to common restrictions of online experiments, such as limitations of the sample (e.g. only U.S. participants), statistical limitations (e.g. normality deviations), and limitations of the experimental set-up (e.g. unilateral focus on a single contestation case).

4.5 Future Research Opportunities

Based on both the present findings and the abovementioned limitations, a range of opportunities for future research can be outlined. First of all, the developed conceptualisation and typology of contested brands should be challenged by other researchers in respect of their general applicability across different markets, industries, cultures and social structures. Therefore, it is crucial to deepen the analysis of similarities and differences between the disclosed contestation types, contestation clusters, and contestation cases. In doing so, special attention should be paid to the counteractions implemented and the related outcomes of elapsed contested brand cases. Such insights could be compared with the results of the third study in order to refine the derived brand protection measures. Moreover, the contested brands meaning paradigm should be embedded into postmodern consumer research by applying it to analyse heterogeneous brands used for various purposes on different social hierarchy levels (e.g. individual identity construction, collective identification, or socio-cultural structuring).

This also relates to an advancement of the determined contested brands process model. In particular, future research should deepen the understanding of both the process elements and their mutual interplay. This can be done, for example, by integrating netnographic data more extensively. In addition, to test for causalities and consistencies in the inductively derived process model, the procedural relations revealed could be transferred into verifiable hypotheses. Accordingly, deductive follow-up studies could quantitatively validate the qualitative insights and ensure the generalisability of the related findings (e.g. the transferability of the contestation wheel to different types of brands). Due to structural equation modelling, for instance, causal relationships between the contestation antecedents, practices, and outcomes could be analysed. Finally, with respect to the brand protection measures disclosed, future studies could follow on from the preliminary experimental investigation, since so far only the effectiveness of a few response strategies to counteract contested brands has been examined. Hence, further experiments ought to broaden this examination and prove the suitability of other brand protection measures (e.g. forecasting and prevention measures). In doing so, particularly factors that make brands robust against meaning contestations as well as strategies that allow for brand contestations to be turned around to produce beneficial outcomes should be considered thoroughly. This would not only strengthen the theoretical depth but also the practical applicability of the identified brand protection measures.

5 Conclusion

Returning to the introductory quote, the research at hand prominently demonstrates that Scott Cook, board member of P&G, was right in stating that brands are no longer what marketers tell consumers, but rather what consumers tell each other. Yet, based on the present findings, this claim could be somewhat refined. Firstly, apart from intended target customers there are many other market actors involved in the process of brand meaning making. These often follow arbitrary objectives and engage in antagonistic behaviours. Moreover, actors frequently aggregate themselves to larger social units in order to exhibit greater signalling power and market influence. Secondly, consumers not only tell each other verbally what a brand is, they also engage in diverse interdependent, often non-verbal contestation practices. Due to such recursive practices, brand meanings are continuously transferred, disrupted, and negotiated among market actors. Thirdly, although legal owners have lost their immediate control over brands, they are not entirely excluded from the creation of brand meanings. By accepting the new market rules and brand dynamics, marketers have the opportunity to co-shape the formation process of brand meanings. Accordingly, the implementation of appropriate brand protection measures empowers marketers either to reduce the threat of contested brands or even to benefit from favourable brand meaning contestations.

These insights are founded on a comprehensive analysis of the contested brands phenomenon. As a result, contested brands are conceptualised as brands that are utilised by antagonistic market actors for heterogeneous purposes. In doing so, these actors publicly engage in controversial market practices that influence both the focal brand's prevalent meaning and its value. Building on this definition, the three research studies conducted successively revealed an integrated typology of contested brands (study 1), a contested brands process model (study 2), and brand protection measures to forecast, prevent, and counteract contested brand contingencies (study 3). For this purpose, a pragmatic mix of different qualitative and quantitative research methods was applied. On the one hand, the findings contribute to the emerging theoretical understanding of a participative branding paradigm that focuses on a dynamic, collective, and consumer-centric creation of brand meanings; in particular, since contested brands present an overarching theoretical concept which merges the fragmented consumer research landscape of brand meaning (co-)creation, consumer resistance and brand sabotage, as

well as of cultural appropriation and co-optation. On the other hand, the present results offer profound practical implications for marketers on how to identify, classify, and handle contested brand incidents. This was especially accomplished by analysing a broad variety of actually occurred contested brand cases and by consulting a multitude of experienced marketing experts. Thus, with regard to the present research findings both their theoretical rigour and practical relevance were thoroughly considered.

In conclusion, the concept of contested brands is decisive for understanding the current and future marketing reality. In line with the unstoppable trend of markets becoming more interconnected, more dynamic, more digital, and more volatile, the occurrence of contested brands will steadily increase. Brand meaning contestations will no longer be rare exceptions but the new normality. With regard to the progressive socio-cultural integration underway, consumers' need for self-fulfilment and personal expression will inevitably grow. Empowered by modern communication technologies, brands provide an ideal basis for consumers to meet this need and to rebel against formerly dominating market structures. Therefore, the impacts of contested brands for legal owners will also become more intense and threatening. Overall, to cope with this new marketing reality, it is crucial for theorists and practitioners to internalise the contested brands meaning paradigm revealed here. This will not only give rise to a postmodern awareness of brand meaning alterations, but also enable the implementation of forward-looking branding strategies. In any case, nowadays it is indispensable to accept consumers and other sovereign market actors as the true owners of a brand. Knowing that brands are socially constructed thus constitutes the essence of the contested brands concept.

References

- Aaker, D. A. (1991). *Managing brand equity*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Aaker, D. A. (1996). *Building strong brands*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Aaker, J., Fournier, S., & Brasel, S. A. (2004). When good brands do bad. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(1), 1–16.
- Achrol, R. S., & Kotler, P. (1999). Marketing in the network economy. *Journal of Marketing*, 63(Special Issue), 146–163.
- Aguinis, H., & Glavas, A. (2012). What we know and don't know about corporate social responsibility: A review and research agenda. *Journal of Management*, 38(4), 932–968.
- Akerlof, G. A., & Kranton, R. E. (2000). Economics and identity. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 115(3), 715–753.
- Albert, N., Merunka, D., & Valette-Florence, P. (2013). Brand passion: Antecedents and consequences. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(7), 904–909.
- Algesheimer, R., Dholakia, U. M., & Herrmann, A. (2005). The social influence of brand community: Evidence from European car clubs. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(3), 19–34.
- Allen, C., Fournier, S., & Miller, F. (2008). Brands and their meaning makers. In C. Haugtvedt, P. Herr, & F. Kardes (Eds.), *Handbook of Consumer Psychology* (pp. 781–822). New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Antorini, Y. M., Muniz Jr., A. M., & Askildsen, T. (2012). Collaborating with customer communities: Lessons from the Lego Group. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 53(3), 73–79.
- Arnould, E. J., & Thompson, C. J. (2005). Consumer culture theory (CCT): Twenty years of research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 868–882.
- Arrow, K. J. (1994). Methodological individualism and social knowledge. *The American Economic Review*, 84(2), 1–9.

- Arsel, Z., & Bean, J. (2013). Taste regimes and market-mediated practice. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(5), 899–917.
- Arsel, Z., & Thompson, C. J. (2011). Demythologizing consumption practices: How consumers protect their field-dependent identity investments from devaluing marketplace myths. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(5), 791–806.
- Arvidsson, A., & Caliandro, A. (2016). Brand public. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 42(5), 727–748.
- Ashforth, B. E., & Mael, F. (1989). Social identity theory and the organization. *Academy of Management Review*, 14(1), 20–39.
- Askegaard, S. (2006). Brands as a global ideoscape. In J. E. Schroeder, & M. Salzer-Mörling (Eds.), *Brand Culture* (pp. 91–102). London: Frank Cass.
- Ayres, C. (2009, July 22). Revenge is best served cold – on YouTube. *The Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/revenge-is-best-served-cold-on-youtube-2dhbsh6jtp5>
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Bailey, K. D. (1994). *Typologies and taxonomies: An introduction to classification techniques*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Batey, M. (2016). *Brand meaning: Meaning, myth and mystique in today's brands* (2nd ed.). New York: Routledge.
- Batra, R., Ahuvia, A., & Bagozzi, R. P. (2012). Brand love. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(2), 1–16.
- Baudrillard, J. (1998). *The consumer society: Myths and structures*. London: Sage.
- Bearden, W. O., & Etzel, M. J. (1982). Reference group influence on product and brand purchase decisions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(2), 183–194.
- Belk, R. W. (1988). Possessions and the extended self. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15(2), 139–168.
- Bellezza, S., & Keinan, A. (2014). Brand tourists: How non-core users enhance the brand image by eliciting pride. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(2), 397–417.

- Bengtsson, A., & Firat, F. (2006). Brand literacy: Consumers' sense-making of brand management. In C. Pechmann, & L. Price (Eds.), *NA – Advances in Consumer Research* (pp. 375–380). Duluth: Association for Consumer Research.
- Berger, J., & Heath, C. (2007). Where consumers diverge from others: Identity signaling and product domains. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(2), 121–134.
- Berry, L. L. (2000). Cultivating service brand equity. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 28(1), 128–137.
- Berthon, P., Holbrook, M. B., Hulbert, J. M., & Pitt, L. (2007). Viewing brands in multiple dimensions. *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 48(2), 37–45.
- Berthon, P., Pitt, L. F., & Campbell, C. (2009). Does brand meaning exist in similarity or singularity? *Journal of Business Research*, 62(3), 356–361.
- Black, T. R. (1999). *Doing quantitative research in the social sciences: An integrated approach to research design, measurement and statistics*. London: Sage.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990). *The logic of practice*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Bowles, S. (2004). *Microeconomics: Behavior, institutions, and evolution*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brown, S. (2006). Ambi-brand culture: On a wing and a swear with Ryanair. In J. E. Schroeder & M. Salzer-Mörling (Eds.), *Brand Culture* (pp. 50–66). London: Frank Cass.
- Brown, S., Kozinets, R. V., & Sherry Jr., J. F. (2003). Teaching old brands new tricks: Retro branding and the revival of brand meaning. *Journal of Marketing*, 67(3), 19–33.
- Brown, W. (1997, November 12). Mercedes recalls minicar after it flunks 'moose' test. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/business/1997/11/12/mercedes-recalls-minicar-after-it-flunks-moose-test/d3166c93-016b-45a9-b2d6-4756b42157ba/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.4a0f738eed2f

- Bryant, J., & Miron, D. (2004). Theory and research in mass communication. *Journal of Communication*, 54(4), 662–704.
- Chandler, J. D., & Vargo, S. L. (2011). Contextualization and value-in-context: How context frames exchange. *Marketing Theory*, 11(1), 35–49.
- Chen, A. C. (2001). Using free association to examine the relationship between the characteristics of brand associations and brand equity. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 10(7), 439–451.
- Chernev, A., Hamilton, R., & Gal, D. (2011). Competing for consumer identity: Limits to self-expression and the perils of lifestyle branding. *Journal of Marketing*, 75(3), 66–82.
- Cherrier, H., & Murray, J. B. (2007). Reflexive dispossession and the self: Constructing a processual theory of identity. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 10(1), 1–29.
- Clancy, K. J., & Trout, J. (2002). Brand confusion. *Harvard Business Review*, 80(3), 22.
- Clarke, B. (1979). Eccentrically contested concepts. *British Journal of Political Science*, 9(1), 122–126.
- Clark, D. (2003). The death and life of punk: The last subculture. In D. Muggle, & R. Weinzierl (Eds.), *The Post-Subcultures Reader* (pp. 223–236). Oxford: Berg.
- Clark, H. H. (1978). Inferring what is meant. In W. Levelt, & G. Flores d’Arcais (Eds.), *Studies in the Perception of Language* (pp. 295–322). London: Wiley.
- Cova, B., & Cova, V. (2002). Tribal marketing: The tribalisation of society and its impact on the conduct of marketing. *European Journal of Marketing*, 36(5/6), 595–620.
- Cova, B., & Dalli, D. (2009). Working consumers: The next step in marketing theory? *Marketing Theory*, 9(3), 315–339.
- Cova, B., Kozinets, R. V., & Shankar, A. (2007). *Consumer tribes*. Oxford: Elsevier.
- Cova, B., & Pace, S. (2006). Brand community of convenience products: New forms of customer empowerment – the case “my Nutella The Community”. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(9/10), 1087–1105.

- Craig, R. T. (1999). Communication theory as a field. *Communication Theory*, 9(2), 119–161.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, V. L. P. (2011). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Dalli, D., Romani, S., & Gistri, G. (2006). Brand dislike: The dark side of consumer preferences. In C. Pechmann, & L. Price (Eds.), *NA – Advances in Consumer Research* (pp. 87–95). Duluth: Association for Consumer Research.
- Darke, P. R., & Ritchie, R. J. (2007). The defensive consumer: Advertising deception, defensive processing, and distrust. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 44(1), 114–127.
- Daugherty, T., Eastin, M. S., & Bright, L. (2008). Exploring consumer motivations for creating user-generated content. *Journal of Interactive Advertising*, 8(2), 16–25.
- Davidow, M. (2003). Organizational responses to customer complaints: What works and what doesn't. *Journal of service research*, 5(3), 225–250.
- Dawar, N., & Pillutla, M. M. (2000). Impact of product-harm crises on brand equity: The moderating role of consumer expectations. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 37(2), 215–226.
- De Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- De Chernatony, L., & Dall'Olmo, R. F. (1998). Defining a "brand": Beyond the literature with experts' interpretations. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 14(5), 417–443.
- De Matos, C. A., & Rossi, C. A. V. (2008). Word-of-mouth communications in marketing: A meta-analytic review of the antecedents and moderators. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(4), 578–596.
- De Saussure, F. (1916). *Cours de linguistique générale (Course in general linguistics)*. Trans. Baskin, W. (2011). New York: Columbia University Press.

- Demsetz, H. (1967). Towards a theory of property rights. *The American Economic Review*, 57(2), 347–359.
- Diamond, N., Sherry Jr., J. F., Muniz Jr., A. M., McGrath, M. A., Kozinets, R. V., & Borghini, S. (2009). American Girl and the brand gestalt: Closing the loop on sociocultural branding research. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(3), 118–134.
- Dietrich, D. (2018). Digital brand disruption: How opinion leaders evoke unexpected brand meanings. *Marketing Review St. Gallen*, 35(2), 66–72.
- Dobscha, S. (1998). The lived experience of consumer rebellion against marketing. In J. Alba, & J. Hutchinson (Eds.), *NA – Advances in Consumer Research*, (pp. 91–97). Provo: Association for Consumer Research.
- Doty, D. H., & Glick, W. H. (1994). Typologies as a unique form of theory building: Toward improved understanding and modeling. *Academy of Management Review*, 19(2), 230–251.
- Dutta, S., & Pullig, C. (2011). Effectiveness of corporate responses to brand crises: The role of crisis type and response strategies. *Journal of Business Research*, 64(12), 1281–1287.
- Echeverri, P., & Skalen, P. (2011). Co-creation and co-destruction: A practice-theory based study of interactive value formation. *Marketing Theory*, 11(3), 351–373.
- Ehrenberg, A. S., Goodhardt, G. J., & Barwise, T. P. (1990). Double jeopardy revisited. *Journal of Marketing*, 54(3), 82–91.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, 14 (4), 532–32.
- Elliott, R., & Davies, A. (2006). Symbolic brands and the authenticity of identity performance. In J. Schroeder, & M. Salzer-Mörling (Eds.), *Brand Culture* (pp. 155–170). London: Frank Cass.
- Elliott, R., & Wattanasuwan, K. (1998). Brands as symbolic resources for the construction of identity. *International journal of Advertising*, 17(2), 131–144.
- Eriksen, T. H., & Nielsen, F.S. (2013). *A history of anthropology* (2nd ed.). London: Pluto Press.

- Escalas, J. E. (2004). Narrative processing: Building consumer connections to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 14(1/2), 168–179.
- Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2003). You are what they eat: The influence of reference groups on consumers' connections to brands. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13(3), 339–348.
- Escalas, J. E., & Bettman, J. R. (2005). Self-construal, reference groups, and brand meaning. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 32(3), 378–389.
- Etzioni, A. (1991). The socio-economics of property. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 6(6), 465–468.
- Evans, J. S. B. (2003). In two minds: Dual-process accounts of reasoning. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 7(10), 454–459.
- Ewen, L. (2017, March 2). Brands in crisis: A practical guide for regaining control. *Retail Dive*. Retrieved from <https://www.retaildive.com/news/brands-in-crisis-a-practical-guide-for-regaining-control/436586/>
- Feldman, M. S., & Orlikowski, W. J. (2011). Theorizing practice and practicing theory. *Organization Science*, 22(5), 1240–1253.
- Feilzer, Y. M. (2010). Doing mixed methods research pragmatically: Implications for the rediscovery of pragmatism as a research paradigm. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*, 4(1), 6–16.
- Ferraro, R., Kirmani, A., & Matherly, T. (2013). Look at me! Look at me! Conspicuous brand usage, self-brand connection, and dilution. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 50(4), 477–488.
- Firat, A. F., & Venkatesh, A. (1995). Liberatory postmodernism and the reenchantment of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(3), 239–267.
- Fournier, S. (1998). Consumers and their brands: Developing relationship theory in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(4), 343–353.
- Fournier, S., & Avery, J. (2011). The uninvited brand. *Business Horizons*, 54(3), 193–207.

- Foxman, E. R., Berger, P. W., & Cote, J. A. (1992). Consumer brand confusion: A conceptual framework. *Psychology & Marketing*, 9(2), 123–141.
- Froschauer, U., & Lueger, M. (2003). *Das qualitative Interview*. Wien: Facultas.
- Funches, V., Markley, M., & Davis, L. (2009). Reprisal, retribution and requital: Investigating customer retaliation. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(2), 231–238.
- Gallie, W. B. (1956). Essentially contested concepts. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56, 167–198.
- Gardner, B. B., & Levy, S. J. (1955). The product and the brand. *Harvard Business Review*, 33(2), 33–39.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York: Basic Books.
- Giddens, A. (1979). Agency, structure. In A. Giddens (Ed.), *Central Problems in Social Theory* (pp. 49–95). London: Macmillan.
- Giesler, M. (2012). How doppelgänger brand images influence the market creation process: Longitudinal insights from the rise of Botox Cosmetic. *Journal of Marketing*, 76(6), 55–68.
- Gladwell, M. (2000). *The tipping point: How little things can make a big difference*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago: Aldine.
- Glazek, C. (2013, June 19). The story behind ‘fitch the homeless’. *The New Yorker*. Retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-story-behind-fitch-the-homeless>
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Doubleday.
- Goulding, C., & Saren, M. (2007). Gothic entrepreneurs: A study of the subcultural commodification process. In B. Cova, R. V. Kozinets, & A. Shankar (Eds.), *Consumer Tribes* (pp. 227–242). Oxford: Elsevier.

- Gregor, S. (2006). The nature of theory in information systems. *MIS Quarterly*, 30(3), 611–642.
- Grégoire, Y., & Fisher, R. J. (2008). Customer betrayal and retaliation: When your best customers become your worst enemies. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(2), 247–261.
- Grégoire, Y., Laufer, D., & Tripp, T. M. (2010). A comprehensive model of customer direct and indirect revenge: Understanding the effects of perceived greed and customer power. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 38(6), 738–758.
- Grégoire, Y., Tripp, T. M., & Legoux, R. (2009). When customer love turns into lasting hate: The effects of relationship strength and time on customer revenge and avoidance. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(6), 18–32.
- Haig, M. (2005). *Brand failures: The truth about the 100 biggest branding mistakes of all time*. London: Kogan Page.
- Hair, J., Black, W., Babin, B., & Anderson, R. (2010). *Multivariate Data Analysis* (7th ed.). Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
- Hall, S. (1986). On postmodernism and articulation: An interview with Stuart Hall. L. Grossberg (Ed.), *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 10(2), 45–60.
- Hall, S. (2006). Encoding/decoding. In M. G. Durham, & D. M. Keller (Eds.), *Media and Cultural Studies* (Rev. ed., pp. 163–173). Malden: Blackwell.
- Hardin, G. (1968). The tragedy of the commons. *Science*, 162(3859), 1243–1248.
- Health, J. (2001). The structure of hip consumerism. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 27(6), 1–17.
- Hebdige, D. (1979). *Subculture: The meaning of style*. London: Methuen.
- Heding, T., Knudtzen, C. F., & Bjerre, M. (2008). *Brand management: Research, theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- Heller, M. (Ed.). (2009). *Commons and anticommons*. Cheltenham: Elgar Publishing.
- Heller, M. (2006). The rose theorem? *Yale Journal of Law & the Humanities*, 18(3), 29–48.

- Hennink, M. M. (2014). *Focus group discussions*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Herhausen, D., Ludwig, S., Grewal, D., Wulf, J., & Schoegel, M. (2019). Detecting, preventing, and mitigating online firestorms in brand communities. *Journal of Marketing*, 83(3), 1–21.
- Hiott, A. (2012). *Thinking small: The long, strange trip of the Volkswagen Beetle*. New York: Random House.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1980). Attributes of attributes and layers of meaning. In J. C. Olson (Ed.), *NA – Advances in Consumer Research* (pp. 7–12). Ann Arbor: Association for Consumer Research.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1981). Community and idiosyncrasy in popular culture: An empirical examination of the layers of meaning concept. In E. Hirschman, & M. Holbrook (Eds.), *Symbolic Consumer Behavior* (pp. 29–34). New York: Association for Consumer Research.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1998a). Afterwords: Some reflections on the mind's eye. In B. Stern (Ed.), *Representing Consumers: Voices, Views and Visions* (pp. 384–393). London: Routledge.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1998b). When expert consumers interpret textual products: Applying reader-response theory to television programs. *Consumption, Markets & Culture*, 2(3), 259–309.
- Hirschman, E. C., & Holbrook, M. B. (1982). Hedonic consumption: Emerging concepts, methods and propositions. *Journal of Marketing*, 46(3), 92–101.
- Hogg, M. A., & Reid, S. A. (2006). Social identity, self-categorization, and the communication of group norms. *Communication Theory*, 16(1), 7–30.
- Hogg, M. A., & Terry, D. I. (2000). Social identity and self-categorization processes in organizational contexts. *Academy of Management Review*, 25(1), 121–140.
- Hogg, M. K., & Banister, E. N. (2001). Dislikes, distastes and the undesired self: conceptualising and exploring the role of the undesired end state in consumer experience. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 17(1/2), 73–104.

- Hollander, J. A., & Einwohner, R. L. (2004). Conceptualizing resistance. *Sociological Forum*, 19(4), 533–554.
- Hollebeek, L. D. (2011). Demystifying customer brand engagement: Exploring the loyalty nexus. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(7/8), 785–807.
- Hollenbeck, C. R., Peters, C., & Zinkhan, G. M. (2008). Retail spectacles and brand meaning: Insights from a brand museum case study. *Journal of Retailing*, 84(3), 334–353.
- Hollenbeck, C. R., & Zinkhan, G. M. (2006). Consumer activism on the internet: The role of anti-brand communities. In C. Pechmann, & L. Price (Eds.), *NA – Advances in Consumer Research* (pp. 479–485). Duluth: Association for Consumer Research.
- Hollenbeck, C. R., & Zinkhan, G. M. (2010). Antibrand communities, negotiation of brand meaning, and the learning process: The case of Wal-Mart. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 13(3), 325–345.
- Holt, D. B. (1995). How consumers consume: A typology of consumption practices. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1), 1–16.
- Holt, D. B. (1997). Poststructuralist lifestyle analysis: Conceptualizing the social patterning of consumption in postmodernity. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 23(4), 326–350.
- Holt, D. B. (1998). Does cultural capital structure American consumption? *Journal of Consumer Research*, 25(1), 1–25.
- Holt, D. B. (2002). Why do brands cause trouble? A dialectical theory of consumer culture and branding. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(1), 70–90.
- Holt, D. B. (2003). What becomes an icon most? *Harvard Business Review*, 81(3), 43–49.
- Holt, D. B. (2004). *How brands become icons: The principles of cultural branding*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Holt, D. B. (2016). Branding in the age of social media. *Harvard Business Review*, 94(3), 40–50.

- Houle, D., & Shapiro, O. (2014). *Brand Shift: The Future of Brands and Marketing*. Chicago: David Houle and Associates.
- Huber, F., Vogel, J., & Meyer, F. (2009). When brands get branded. *Marketing Theory*, 9(1), 131–136.
- Humphreys, A., & Grayson, K. (2008). The intersecting roles of consumer and producer: A critical perspective on co-production, co-creation and prosumption. *Sociology Compass*, 2(3), 963–980.
- Humphreys, A., & Thompson, C. J. (2014). Branding disaster: Reestablishing trust through the ideological containment of systemic risk anxieties. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(4), 877–910.
- Iglesias, O., Ind, N. and Alfaro, M. (2013). The organic view of the brand: A brand value co-creation model. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(8), 670–688.
- Ind, N. (2014). How participation is changing the practice of managing brands. *Journal of Brand Management*, 21(9), 734–742.
- Interbrand (2018). Best Global Brands 2018. *Interbrand*. Retrieved from https://www.interbrand.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Interbrand_Best_Global_Brands_2018.pdf
- Izberk-Bilgin, E. (2010). An interdisciplinary review of resistance to consumption, some marketing interpretations, and future research suggestions. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 13(3), 299–323.
- Izberk-Bilgin, E. (2012). Infidel brands: Unveiling alternative meanings of global brands at the nexus of globalization, consumer culture, and Islamism. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 39(4), 663–687.
- Jacoby, J., & Hoyer, W. D. (1982). Viewer miscomprehension of televised communication: Selected findings. *Journal of Marketing*, 46(4), 12–26.
- Jervell, E. E. (2015, May 11). Birkenstock doesn't care if fashionistas stop wearing its sandals. *The Wall Street Journal*. Retrieved from <https://www.wsj.com/articles/birkenstock-doesnt-care-if-fashionistas-stop-wearing-its-sandals-1431301523?mod=e2tw>

- John, A., & Klein, J. (2003). The boycott puzzle: Consumer motivations for purchase sacrifice. *Management Science*, 49(9), 1196–1209.
- Johnson, A. R., Matear, M., & Thomson, M. (2010). A coal in the heart: Self-relevance as a post-exit predictor of consumer anti-brand actions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(1), 108–125.
- Johnson, B., & Christensen, L. (2017). *Educational Research: Quantitative, Qualitative, and Mixed Approaches* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Johnson, R. B., & Onwuegbuzie, A. J. (2004). Mixed methods research: A research paradigm whose time has come. *Educational Researcher*, 33(7), 14–26.
- Jussila, I., Tarkiainen, A., Sarstedt, M., & Hair, J. F. (2015). Individual psychological ownership: Concepts, evidence, and implications for research in marketing. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 23(2), 121–139.
- Kähr, A., Nyffenegger, B., Krohmer, H., & Hoyer, W. D. (2016). When hostile consumers wreak havoc on your brand: The phenomenon of consumer brand sabotage. *Journal of Marketing*, 80(3), 25–41.
- Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Kapferer, J. N. (2012). *The new strategic brand management: Advanced insights and strategic thinking* (5th ed.). London: Kogan Page.
- Kates, S. M. (2004). The dynamics of brand legitimacy: An interpretive study in the gay men's community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(2), 455–464.
- Kates, S. M., & Goh, C. (2003). Brand morphing: Implications for advertising theory and practice. *Journal of Advertising*, 32(1), 59–68.
- Kates, S. M., & Shaw-Garlock, G. (1999). The ever entangling web: A study of ideologies and discourses in advertising to women. *Journal of Advertising*, 28(2), 33–49.
- Katz, J. J., & Postal, P. M. (1964). *An integrated theory of linguistic descriptions*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

- Kay, M. J. (2006). Strong brands and corporate brands. *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7/8), 742–60.
- Keller, K. L. (1993). Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing*, 57(1), 1–12.
- Keller, K. L. (1999). Managing brands for the long run: Brand reinforcement and revitalization strategies. *California Management Review*, 41(3), 102–124.
- Keller, K. L. (2003). Brand synthesis: The multidimensionality of brand knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(4), 595–600.
- Keller, K. L. (2013). *Strategic brand management: Building, measuring, and managing brand equity* (4th ed.). Harlow: Pearson.
- Kjellberg, H., & Helgesson, C. F. (2007). On the nature of markets and their practices. *Marketing Theory*, 7(2), 137–162.
- Klein, J. G., Smith, N. C., & John, A. (2004). Why we boycott: Consumer motivations for boycott participation. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(3), 92–109.
- Klein, N. (1999). *No logo: Taking aim at the brand bullies*. New York: Picador.
- Kleine, R. E., & Kernan, J. B. (1991). Contextual influences on the meanings ascribed to ordinary consumption objects. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 18(3), 311–324.
- Kotler, P., Keller, K. L., Brady, M., Goodman, M., & Hansen, T. (2009). *Marketing Management*. Harlow: Pearson.
- Kozinets, R. V. (1999). E-tribalized marketing? The strategic implications of virtual communities of consumption. *European Management Journal*, 17(3), 252–264.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2001). Utopian enterprise: Articulating the meanings of Star Trek's culture of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(1), 67–88.
- Kozinets, R. V. (2002). Can consumers escape the market? Emancipatory illuminations from burning man. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(1), 20–38.

- Kozinets, R. V., & Handelman, J. M. (2004). Adversaries of consumption: Consumer movements, activism, and ideology. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(3), 691–704.
- Krishnamurthy, S., & Kucuk, S. U. (2009). Anti-branding on the internet. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(11), 1119–1126.
- Krishnan, H. S. (1996). Characteristics of memory associations: A consumer-based brand equity perspective. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 13(4), 389–405.
- Kucuk, S. U. (2015). A semiotic analysis of consumer-generated antibranding. *Marketing Theory*, 15(2), 243–264.
- Kucuk, S. U. (2016). *Brand hate: Navigating consumer negativity in the digital world*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Langley, A., & Abdallah, C. (2011). Templates and turns in qualitative studies of strategy and management. In D. Bergh, & D. Ketchen (Eds.), *Building Methodological Bridges* (Vol. 6, pp. 201–235). Bingley: Emerald Group.
- Lasn, K. (1999). *Culture jam: The uncooling of America*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Lastovicka, J. L., & Fernandez, K. V. (2005). Three paths to disposition: The movement of meaningful possessions to strangers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 813–823.
- Law, J. (2009). Actor-network theory and material semiotics. In B. S. Turner (Ed.), *The New Blackwell Companion to Social Theory* (pp. 141–158). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lee, K., Kim, H., & Vohs, K. D. (2011). Stereotype threat in the marketplace: Consumer anxiety and purchase intentions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(2), 343–357.
- Lee, M. S., Motion, J., & Conroy, D. (2009). Anti-consumption and brand avoidance. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(2), 169–180.
- Levy, S. J. (1959). Symbols for sale. *Harvard Business Review*, 37(4), 117–124.

- Ligas, M., & Cotte, J. (1999). The process of negotiating brand meaning: A symbolic interactionist perspective. In E. J. Arnould, & L. M. Scott (Eds.), *NA – Advances in Consumer Research* (pp. 609–614). Provo: Association for Consumer Research.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park: Sage.
- Lipschultz, J. H. (2017). *Social media communication: Concepts, practices, data, law and ethics* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- Maheshwari, S. (2016, November 15). Statement on Trump puts New Balance shoe company in cross hairs. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/16/business/statement-on-trump-puts-new-balance-shoe-company-in-cross-hairs.html>
- Martineau, E., & Arsel, Z. (2017). Managing communities of co-creation around consumer engagement styles. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 2(2), 179–195.
- Mayring, P. (2010). Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse. In G. Mey, & K. Mruck (Eds.), *Handbuch qualitative Forschung in der Psychologie* (pp. 601–613). Wiesbaden: Springer.
- Mayring, P. (2015). *Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse: Grundlagen und Techniken* (12th ed.). Weinheim: Beltz.
- McAlexander, J. H., Schouten, J. W., & Koenig, H. F. (2002). Building brand community. *Journal of Marketing*, 66(1), 38–54.
- McCracken, G. (1986). Culture and consumption: A theoretical account of the structure and movement of the cultural meaning of consumer goods. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(1), 71–84.
- McCracken, G. (1988). *Culture and consumption: New approaches to the symbolic character of consumer goods and activities*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- McCracken, G. (1989). Who is the celebrity endorser? Cultural foundations of the endorsement process. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 16(3), 310–321.

- McCracken, G. (2005). *Culture and consumption II: Markets, meaning, and brand management*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Meadows, R. (1983). They consume advertising too. *Admap*, 19(7/8), 408–413.
- Meyer, R. (2007). *Mapping the mind of the strategist: A quantitative methodology for measuring the strategic beliefs of executives*. Rotterdam: Haveka.
- Mick, D. G. (1986). Consumer research and semiotics: Exploring the morphology of signs, symbols, and significance. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 13(2), 196–213.
- Mick, D. G., & Buhl, C. (1992). A Meaning-based model of advertising experiences. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(3), 317–338.
- Mick, D. G., Burroughs, J. E., Hetzel, P., & Brannen, M. Y. (2004). Pursuing the meaning of meaning in the commercial world: An international review of marketing and consumer research founded on semiotics. *Semiotica*, 152(4), 1–74.
- Miller, D. T., & Ross, M. (1975). Self-serving biases in the attribution of causality: Fact or fiction? *Psychological Bulletin*, 82(2), 213–225.
- Mitchell, W. T. (1995). *Picture theory: Essays on verbal and visual representation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Mohr, E. (2014). *Ökonomie mit Geschmack: Die postmoderne Macht des Konsums*. Hamburg: Murmann.
- Mohr, E. (2016). *Punkökonomie: Stilistische Ausbeutung des gesellschaftlichen Randes*. Hamburg: Murmann.
- Mohr, E., Tomczak, T., & Holzer, D. (2015). Umkämpfte Marken: Neue Wege im Brand Management [Lecture slides]. Retrieved from [https://fronter.com/unisg/links/files.phtml/1342998116\\$1067119127\\$/Archiv/Unterlagen+FS15/FS2015-Contested+Brands-Lecture+presentation-Main+part-STUDYNET.pdf](https://fronter.com/unisg/links/files.phtml/1342998116$1067119127$/Archiv/Unterlagen+FS15/FS2015-Contested+Brands-Lecture+presentation-Main+part-STUDYNET.pdf)
- Morhart, F., Herzog, W., & Tomczak, T. (2009). Brand-specific leadership: Turning employees into brand champions. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 122–142.

- Morhart, F., Malär, L., Guèvremont, A., Girardin, F., & Grohmann, B. (2015). Brand authenticity: An integrative framework and measurement scale. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 25(2), 200–218.
- Morgan, D. L. (1997). *Focus groups as qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Morgan, D. L. (2014). Pragmatism as a paradigm for social research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 20(8), 1045–1053.
- Muniz Jr., A. M., & O’Guinn, T. C. (2001). Brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 27(4), 412–432.
- Muniz Jr., A. M., & Schau, H. J. (2005). Religiosity in the abandoned Apple Newton brand community. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(4), 737–747.
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (7th ed.). Harlow: Pearson.
- Nicolini, D. (2009). Zooming in and out: Studying practices by switching theoretical lenses and trailing connections. *Organization Studies*, 30(12), 1391–1418.
- Niedenthal, P. M., Cantor, N., & Kihlstrom, J. F. (1985). Prototype matching: A strategy for social decision making. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 48(3), 575–584.
- O’Guinn, T. C., & Muniz Jr., A. M. (2005). Communal consumption and the brand. In Ratneshwar, S. & Mick, D. G. (Eds.), *Consumption: Frontiers of Research on Consumer Motives* (pp. 252–272). New York: Routledge.
- O’Reilly, D. (2005). Cultural brands/branding cultures. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 21(5/6), 573–588.
- Osgood, C. E. (1952). The nature and measurement of meaning. *Psychological Bulletin*, 49(3), 197–237.
- Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. (1985). A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research. *Journal of Marketing*, 49(4), 41–50.

- Park, C. W., Jaworski, B. J., & MacInnis, D. J. (1986). Strategic brand concept-image management. *Journal of Marketing*, 50(4), 135–145.
- Park, C. W., MacInnis, D. J., Priester, J., Eisingerich, A. B., & Iacobucci, D. (2010). Brand attachment and brand attitude strength: Conceptual and empirical differentiation of two critical brand equity drivers. *Journal of Marketing*, 74(6), 1–17.
- Parmentier, M. A., & Fischer, E. (2014). Things fall apart: The dynamics of brand audience dissipation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 41(5), 1228–1251.
- Payne, A. F., Storbacka, K., & Frow, P. (2008). Managing the co-creation of value. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(1), 83–96.
- Peirce, C. S. (1934). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* (4th ed.). C. Hartshorne, & P. Weiss (Eds.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Penaloza, L., & Price, L. L. (1993). Consumer resistance: A conceptual overview. In L. McAlister, & M. Rothschild (Eds.), *NA – Advances in Consumer Research* (pp. 123–128). Provo: Association for Consumer Research.
- Pierce, J. L., Kostova, T., & Dirks, K. T. (2001). Toward a theory of psychological ownership in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*, 26(2), 298–310.
- Pierce, J. L., Kostova, T., & Dirks, K. T. (2003). The state of psychological ownership: Integrating and extending a century of research. *Review of General Psychology*, 7(1), 84–107.
- Pollay, R. W. (1986). The distorted mirror: Reflections on the unintended consequences of advertising. *Journal of Marketing*, 50 (2), 18–36.
- Poster, M. (1992). The question of agency: Michel de Certeau and the history of consumerism. *Diacritics*, 22(2), 94–107.
- Prahalad, C. K., & Ramaswamy, V. (2004). Co-creation experiences: The next practice in value creation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing*, 18(3), 5–14.
- Puntoni, S., Schroeder, J. E., & Ritson, M. (2010). Meaning matters. *Journal of Advertising*, 39(2), 51–64.

- Puntoni, S., Vanhamme, J., & Visscher, R. (2011). Two birds and one stone: Purposeful polysemy in minority targeting and advertising evaluations. *Journal of Advertising*, 40(1), 25–42.
- Putnam, H. (1974). Meaning and reference. *The Journal of Philosophy*, 70(19), 699–711.
- Raggio, R. D., & Leone, R. P. (2007). The theoretical separation of brand equity and brand value: Managerial implications for strategic planning. *Journal of Brand Management*, 14(5), 380–395.
- Ransdell, J. (1977). Some leading ideas of Peirce's semiotic. *Semiotica*, 19 (3/4), 157–178.
- Reckwitz, A. (2002). Toward a theory of social practices: A development in culturalist theorizing. *European Journal of Social Theory*, 5(2), 243–263.
- Richins, M. L. (1994). Valuing things: The public and private meanings of possessions. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(3), 504–521.
- Ries, A., & Trout, J. (2001). *Positioning: The battle for your mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Ritzer, G., & Jurgenson, N. (2010). Production, consumption, prosumption: The nature of capitalism in the age of the digital 'prosumer'. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 10(1), 13–36.
- Rook, D. W. (1985). The ritual dimension of consumer behavior. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 12(3), 251–264.
- Rose, C. M. (2000). Left brain, right brain and history in the new law and economics of property. *Oregon Law Review*, 79, 479–492.
- Rumbo, J. D. (2002). Consumer resistance in a world of advertising clutter: The case of Adbusters. *Psychology & Marketing*, 19(2), 127–148.
- Salzer-Mörling, M., & Strannegård, L. (2007). Ain't misbehavin' – consumption in a moralized brandscape. *Marketing Theory*, 7(4), 407–425.

- Saunders, M., Lewis P., & Thornhill A. (2009). *Research methods for business students* (5th ed.). Harlow: Pearson.
- Savin-Baden, M., & Major, C. H. (2013). *Qualitative research: The essential guide to theory and practice*. New York: Routledge.
- Schau, H. J., & Gilly, M. C. (2003). We are what we post? Self-presentation in personal web space. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 30(3), 385–404.
- Schau, H. J., Muniz Jr., A. M., & Arnould, E. J. (2009). How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 30–51.
- Schembri, S., & Latimer, L. (2016). Online brand communities: Constructing and co-constructing brand culture. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32(7/8), 628–651.
- Schiele, K., & Venkatesh, A. (2016). Regaining control through reclamation: How consumption subcultures preserve meaning and group identity after commodification. *Consumption Markets & Culture*, 19(5), 427–450.
- Schlenker, B. R. (1980). *Impression management: The self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations*. Monterey: Brooks/Cole.
- Schouten, J. W., & McAlexander, J. H. (1995). Subcultures of consumption: An ethnography of the new bikers. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(1), 43–61.
- Scott, L. M. (1994). The bridge from text to mind: Adapting reader-response theory to consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(3), 461–480.
- Sen, S., Gürhan-Canli, Z., & Morwitz, V. (2001). Withholding consumption: A social dilemma perspective on consumer boycotts. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 28(3), 399–417.
- Sengupta, J., & Johar, G. V. (2002). Effects of inconsistent attribute information on the predictive value of product attitudes: Toward a resolution of opposing perspectives. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 29(1), 39–56.
- Sherry Jr., J. F. (1983). Gift giving in anthropological perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10(2), 157–168.

- Sirgy, M. J. (1982). Self-concept in consumer behavior: A critical review. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 9(3), 287–300.
- Sirgy, M. J., Johar, J. S., Samli, A. C., & Claiborne, C. B. (1991). Self-congruity versus functional congruity: Predictors of consumer behavior. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 19(4), 363–375.
- Sloman, S. A. (1996). The empirical case for two systems of reasoning. *Psychological Bulletin*, 119(1), 3–22.
- Sneath, P.H., & Sokal, R.R. (1973). *Numerical taxonomy: The principles and practice of numerical classification*. San Francisco: Freeman.
- Soller, K. (2014, June 26). Birkenstocks are still ugly – but at least now they're cool. *Bloomberg*. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-06-26/birkenstocks-are-fashionable-as-sales-rise-celebrities-wear-them>
- Solomon, M. R. (1983). The role of products as social stimuli: A symbolic interactionism perspective. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 10(3), 319–329.
- Solomon, M. R. (1988). Mapping product constellations: A social categorization approach to consumption symbolism. *Psychology & Marketing*, 5(3), 233–258.
- Spiggle, S. (1994). Analysis and interpretation of qualitative data in consumer research. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(3), 491–503.
- Sprott, D., Czellar, S., & Spangenberg, E. (2009). The importance of a general measure of brand engagement on market behavior: Development and validation of a scale. *Journal of Marketing Research*, 46(1), 92–104.
- Steenkamp, J. B. E., Batra, R., & Alden, D. L. (2003). How perceived brand globalness creates brand value. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 34(1), 53–65.
- Stratton, G., & Northcote, J. (2016). When totems beget clans: The brand symbol as the defining marker of brand communities. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 16(2), 493–509.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

- Strizhakova, Y., Coulter, R. A., & Price, L. L. (2008). The meanings of branded products: A cross-national scale development and meaning assessment. *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, 25(2), 82–93.
- Sussan, F., Hall, R., & Meamber, L. A. (2012). Introspecting the spiritual nature of a brand divorce. *Journal of Business Research*, 65(4), 520–526.
- Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behaviour. *Social Science Information*, 13(2), 65–93.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey: Brooks/Cole.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (pp. 7–24). Chicago: Nelson-Hall.
- Taleb, N. N. (2012). *Antifragile: Things that gain from disorder*. New York: Random House.
- Tanner, R. J., Ferraro, R., Chartrand, T. L., Bettman, J. R., & Baaren, R. V. (2007). Of chameleons and consumption: The impact of mimicry on choice and preferences. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(6), 754–766.
- Thompson, C. J., & Arsel, Z. (2004). The Starbucks brandscape and consumers' (anticorporate) experiences of glocalization. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 31(3), 631–642.
- Thompson, C. J., & Coskuner-Balli, G. (2007). Countervailing market responses to corporate co-optation and the ideological recruitment of consumption communities. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(2), 135–152.
- Thompson, C. J., & Haytko, D. L. (1997). Speaking of fashion: Consumers' uses of fashion discourses and the appropriation of countervailing cultural meanings. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 24(1), 15–42.

- Thompson, C. J., Pollio, H. R., & Locander, W. B. (1994). The spoken and the unspoken: A hermeneutic approach to understanding the cultural viewpoints that underlie consumers' expressed meanings. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(3), 432–452.
- Thompson, C. J., Rindfleisch, A., & Arsel, Z. (2006). Emotional branding and the strategic value of the doppelgänger brand image. *Journal of Marketing*, 70(1), 50–64.
- Tierney, K. D., Karpen, I. O., & Westberg, K. (2016). Brand meaning cocreation: Toward a conceptualization and research implications. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice*, 26(6), 911–932.
- Tomczak, T., Kuß, A., & Reinecke, S. (2014). *Marketingplanung: Einführung in die marktorientierte Unternehmens- und Geschäftsfeldplanung* (7th ed.). Wiesbaden: Gabler.
- Torelli, C. J., Özsomer, A., Carvalho, S. W., Keh, H. T., & Maehle, N. (2012). Brand concepts as representations of human values: Do cultural congruity and compatibility between values matter? *Journal of Marketing*, 76(4), 92–108.
- Trope, Y., & Liberman, N. (2010). Construal-level theory of psychological distance. *Psychological Review*, 117(2), 440–463.
- Trusov, M., Bucklin, R. E., & Pauwels, K. (2009). Effects of word-of-mouth versus traditional marketing: Findings from an internet social networking site. *Journal of Marketing*, 73(5), 90–102.
- Turner, J. C. (1985) Social categorization and the self-concept: A social cognitive theory of group behavior. In E. J. Lawler (Ed.), *Advances in Group Processes: Theory and Research* (pp. 77–121). Greenwich: JAI Press.
- Turner, J. C., Hogg, M. A., Oakes, P. J., Reicher, S. D., & Wetherell, M. S. (1987). *Rediscovering the social group: A self-categorization theory*. Cambridge: Basil Blackwell.
- Tversky, A., & Kahneman, D. (1974). Judgment under uncertainty: Heuristics and biases. *Science*, 185(4157), 1124–1131.

- Üstüner, T., & Thompson, C. J. (2010). How marketplace performances produce interdependent status games and contested forms of symbolic capital. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 38(5), 796–814.
- Vallaster, C., & von Wallpach, S. (2013). An online discursive inquiry into the social dynamics of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Business Research*, 66(9), 1505–1515.
- Van Waterschoot, W., & van den Bulte, C. (1992). The 4P classification of the marketing mix revisited. *Journal of Marketing*, 56(4) 83–93.
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2004). Evolving to a new dominant logic for marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68(1), 1–17.
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2008). Service-dominant logic: Continuing the evolution. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(1), 1–10.
- Vargo, S. L., & Lusch, R. F. (2016). Institutions and axioms: An extension and update of service-dominant logic. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 44(1), 5–23.
- Wallace, E., Buil, I., & de Chernatony, L. (2012). Facebook ‘friendship’ and brand advocacy. *Journal of Brand Management*, 20(2), 128–146.
- Ward, J. C., & Ostrom, A. L. (2006). Complaining to the masses: The role of protest framing in customer-created complaint web sites. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 33(2), 220–230.
- Warde, A. (2005). Consumption and theories of practice. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 5(2), 131–153.
- Watts, D. J., & Dodds, P. S. (2007). Influentials, networks, and public opinion formation. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(4), 441–458.
- Wetzer, I. M., Zeelenberg, M., & Pieters, R. (2007). “Never eat in that restaurant, I did!”: Exploring why people engage in negative word-of-mouth communication. *Psychology & Marketing*, 24(8), 661–680.

- White, K., & Dahl, D. W. (2006). To be or not be? The influence of dissociative reference groups on consumer preferences. *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 16(4), 404–414.
- White, K., & Dahl, D. W. (2007). Are all out-groups created equal? Consumer identity and dissociative influence. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 34(4), 525–536.
- Whittler, T. E., & Spira, J. S. (2002). Model's race: A peripheral cue in advertising messages? *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 12(4), 291–301.
- Winter, S., & Neubaum, G. (2016). Examining characteristics of opinion leaders in social media: A motivational approach. *Social Media & Society*, 2(3), 1–12.
- Wipperfurth, A. (2005). *Brand hijack: Marketing without marketing*. New York: Portfolio.
- Wolter, J. S., Brach, S., Cronin, J. J., & Bonn, M. (2013). Symbolic drivers of consumer-brand identification and disidentification. *Journal of Business Research*, 69(2), 785–793.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Zavestoski, S. (2002). The social-psychological bases of anticonsumption attitudes. *Psychology & Marketing*, 19(2), 149–165.
- Zhang, Y., Feick, L., & Mittal, V. (2014). How males and females differ in their likelihood of transmitting negative word of mouth. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(6), 1097–1108.
- Zwick, D., Bonsu, S. K., & Darmody, A. (2008). Putting consumers to work: Co-creation and new marketing govern-mentality. *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 8(2), 163–196.

Appendices

Appendix A: Study 1 – Concept and Typology of Contested Brands

Appendix A1: Overview of Brand Meaning (Co-)Creation Theories

Theoretical Concept	Fundamental Idea	Contested Brands Relevance	Example	Source
Brand Endorsement	Brand endorsement is considered as a marketing tool by which influential consumers (e.g. celebrities) transfer favourable meanings towards brands subject to their public brand consumption.	- Endorsers have signalling power to alter brand meanings - Customers trust and adopt endorsers' values/opinions - Unintentional brand endorsement can harm a brand	Jessica Simpson's endorsement of the luxury brand Céline	McCracken (1989)
Brand Double Jeopardy	Brand double jeopardy describes the effect that, <i>ceteris paribus</i> , smaller brands attract less loyalty among their customers just because of their lower market shares compared to large brands.	- Diverging customer loyalty for small and large brands - Negative double jeopardy occurs in the internet, as smaller brands attract less anti-branding online activities	Double jeopardy issues related to the newspaper readership	Ehrenberg et al. (1990)
Brand Confusion	"Consumer brand confusion consists of one or more errors in inferential processing that lead a consumer to unknowingly form inaccurate beliefs about the attributes or performance of a less-known brand based on a more familiar brand's attributes or performance" (p. 125).	- Brands are confused with other, similar brands (initiators) - Unintentional brand interpretation due to perception bias - Brand meanings get kindred, ambiguous, or diluted	Brand confusion between Visa- and Mastercard	Foxman et al. (1992)
Subculture of Consumption	A subculture of consumption is "a distinctive subgroup of society that self-selects on the basis of a shared commitment to a particular product class, brand, or consumption activity" (p. 43).	- Subcultural cohesion via shared consumption activities - Consumer grouping around products, brands, or practices - Transfer of subcultural values to brand meanings	Harley Owners Group as subculture of consumption	Schouten & McAlexander (1995)
Consumer-Brand Relationship	Consumer-brand relationship conceptualises brands as active relation partners for consumers. Suchlike relationship forms include arranged marriages, casual and best friends, kinships, or secret affairs.	- Consumers form different relationships to brands that determine their loyalty, affection, and bond strength - Viable and solid relations enhance a brand's meaning	Household cleaning brands (e.g. Vanish) as casual friends	Fournier (1998)
Brand Revitalisation	Brand revitalisation characterises the process of renewing socio-cultural outdated or destabilised brands (i.e. neg. associations) by changing their identity and repositioning them for desired consumers.	- Disruption of narratives threatens a brand's image/value - Product design, uniqueness, as well as user and usage imagery are key levers to reinforce and revitalise a brand	Lean Cuisine revitalised from a diet to a delicious image	Keller (1999)
Brand Community	"A brand community is a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on a structured set of social relationships [e.g. values, rituals, hierarchy] among admirers of a brand" (p. 412).	- Consumer collectives aggregated around a focal brand - Identity creation via membership in a brand community - Brand communities often claim ownership over a brand	Brand communities of BMW's Mini Cooper or LEGO	Muniz & O'Guinn (2001)
Psychological Brand Ownership	Psychological brand ownership describes the effect that consumers feel brands to be theirs, although they do not hold legal property rights. Such a feeling of possession enfolds "thoughts, beliefs, and awareness, coupled with an emotional or affective sensation" (p. 299).	- Individuals integrate owned brands into their identity work - Brand meanings are adapted for personal life purposes - Marketers lose the immediate control over their brands	Psychological ownership of car brands like VW	Pierce et al. (2001)
Consumer Tribe	A consumer tribe is defined "as a network of heterogeneous persons - in terms of age, sex, income, etc. - who are linked by a shared passion or emotion; a tribe is capable of collective action, its members are not simple consumers, they are also advocates" (p. 602).	- Tribes are formed around consumers' shared experiences with focus on feelings and affects, rather than on a brand - Tribal marketing is a way to deal with crowds by guiding them towards shared consumption experiences	Consumer tribe on yoga experiences related to Lululemon	Cova & Cova (2002)

Theoretical Concept	Fundamental Idea	Contested Brands Relevance	Example	Source
Brand Legitimacy	Brand legitimacy denotes the “generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity [e.g. a brand] are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions” (p. 456, as cited in Suchman, 1995).	- Legitimation as a socio-cultural brand acceptance process - Legitimised brands are considered as desirable and feature shared interpretations in distinct social interaction systems	Brand legitimacy in the North American gay community	Kates (2004)
Brand Co-Creation	“Co-creation is about joint creation of value and meaning by the company and the customer [due to dialogue, access, transparency, and risk taking]. It is not the firm trying to please the customer” (p. 8).	- Co-creation of value and meaning requires control release - Individuals co-construct a personalised brand experience - Triggers deep brand engagement and responsibility	LEGO consumers’ brand co-creation	Prahalad & Ramaswamy (2004)
Brandscape	“Brandscape generally refers to consumers’ active constructions of personal meanings and lifestyle orientations from the symbolic resources provided by an array of brands” (p. 632).	- Brandscape as negotiation space for brand meanings - Discursive, symbolic, and competitive relations to a dominant, experiential brand link a hegemonic brandscape	Brandscape of Starbucks	Thompson & Arsel (2004)
Self-Brand Construal	Self-brand construal evinces a distinction between consumers’ brand-related self construction goals subject to an independent (i.e. self focus) versus an interdependent (i.e. social focus) self-construal.	- Social reference groups as source for brand perceptions - Self-brand relation and psychological distance to in- and out-groups crucially influence brand meaning creations	Banana Republic is more neg. for ind- vs. interdependent hippies	Escalas & Bettman (2005)
Brand Literacy	Brand literacy is defined as “the ability of the consumer to decode the strategies used in marketing practices in introducing, maintaining and reformulating brands and brand images, which then, further enables the consumer to engage with these processes within their cultural settings” (p. 375).	- Consumers’ ability for decoding brand symbols/practices - Brand literacy affects consumer behaviours of interpreting, appropriating, negotiating, or creating of brand meanings	Lacoste’s literate consumers know the tennis background	Bengtsson & Firat (2006)
Customer Empowerment	Consumer empowerment can be described “as letting consumers take control of variables that are conventionally pre-determined by marketers; one of these variables is brand meaning” (p. 1090).	- Technical, economical, social, or legal empowerment - Consumer (collectives) take control over marketers’ roles - Shift of consumption experiences and brand meanings	‘my Nutella’ as an empowered brand community	Cova & Pace (2006)
Identity Signalling	Identity signalling specifies the phenomenon that “consumers often make choices that diverge from those of others [i.e. majorities or social groups] to ensure that they effectively communicate desired identities” (p. 121).	- Consumers choose and avoid brands to signal identity and distance themselves from social groupings or majorities - Alienation of target consumers by unwelcomed signalling	Watch or car brands hold great identity signalling value	Berger & Heath (2007)
Brand Gestalt	A brand gestalt designates strong brands as “the product of a complex system, or gestalt, whose component parts are in continuous interplay and together constitute a whole greater than their sum” (p. 118).	- Brand gestalt is a brand manifold, wherein all elements are in continuous interaction/negotiation with each other - Market actors and the cultural system are co-creators	Brand gestalt of American Girl	Diamond et al. (2009)
Customer Brand Engagement	Customer brand engagement is defined as “the level of an individual customer’s motivational, brand-related and context-dependent state of mind characterized by specific levels of cognitive, emotional and behavioral activity in direct brand interactions” (p. 790).	- Psychological state caused by cognitive, interactive, co-creative, and affective customer experiences - High levels of customer brand engagement increase self-brand connections and intentional brand usages	Mercedes-Benz’s social media customer brand engagement	Hollebeek (2011)

Theoretical Concept	Fundamental Idea	Contested Brands Relevance	Example	Source
Brand Love	The brand love prototype captures consumers' "self-brand integration, passion-driven behaviors, positive emotional connection, long-term relationship, positive overall attitude valence, attitude certainty and confidence (strength), and anticipated separation distress" (p.1).	- Satisfied consumers with strong emotional brand attitudes - Brand lovers advocate/defend brands publicly and exhibit brand loyalty, pos. WOM, and resistance to neg. rumours	Apple, Nike, or Victoria's Secret as loved brands	Batra et al. (2012)
Brand Advocacy	"Consumer become 'brand advocates' when they are highly involved with a brand, and offer invaluable positive word of mouth (WOM) about the brand to others" (p. 129).	- Active advocates establish deep emotional bonds to brands and utilise brands in public as intended by marketers - Advocates spread beneficial brand meanings (pos. WOM)	Brands with many advocates are Apple, Google, or Mercedes	Wallace et al. (2012)
Brand Passion	"Brand passion is a primarily affective, extremely positive attitude toward a specific brand that leads to emotional attachment and influences relevant behavioral factors" (p. 905, as cited in Bauer et al., 2007).	- Passionate consumers idealise brands and engage in an emotional relationship which evokes desirable behaviours - Favourable attitude creates purchase intention/pos. WOM	Brand passion of Manolo Blahnik's female customers	Albert et al. (2013)
Brand Dilution	Brand dilution occurs when observers with low self-brand connection experience others who engage in conspicuous brand usage with the ulterior motive of impression management (i.e. social approval).	- Consumers' perception of conspicuous brand usage - Observers' self-brand connection affects their reaction - Brand dilution can either tarnish or blur a brand's meaning	Wearing Gucci sunglasses indoors evokes brand dilution	Ferraro et al. (2013)
Brand Tourism	Brand tourism denotes non-core consumers who adopt a foreign brand and either intensify its prestige (i.e. brand tourists) or generate a backlash (i.e. brand immigrants) among the brand's core customers.	- Effect commonly occurs for brand downward extensions - Brand meanings alteration by non-core consumers - Threat to target customers' pride and brand patriotism	Downward extensions by Tiffany, Gucci, or Pierre Cardin	Bellezza & Keinan (2014)
Brand Authenticity	Brand authenticity is defined as "the extent to which consumers perceive a brand to be faithful towards itself (continuity), true to its consumers (credibility), motivated by caring and responsibility (integrity), and able to support consumers in being true to themselves (symbolism)" (p. 203).	- Indexical, iconic, existential cues lead to authentic brands - Consumers feel sincere and honest brands to be authentic - Authentic brands are included in self-creation processes	Nivea is an authentic brand due to its constant high quality	Morhart et al. (2015)
Brand Public	A brand public is an organised (online) media-space, which is composed of a multitude of isolated, market-related statements connected by enduring practices of mediation (e.g. hashtags).	- Brand publics are formed by social media discourses - Actors join brand public to gain publicity, not identity - Brand meanings are negotiated without personal contact	Brand public around the Twitter hashtag #LouisVuitton	Arvidsson & Caliendo (2016)

Appendix A2: Overview of Consumer Resistance and Brand Sabotage Theories

Theoretical Concept	Fundamental Idea	Contested Brands Relevance	Example	Source
Consumer Resistance	Consumer resistance describes “the way individuals and groups practice a strategy of appropriation [e.g. boycotts or culture-jamming] in response to structures of domination” (p. 123).	• Low customer satisfaction results in consumer resistance • Individual and collective resistance behaviours • Avoidance and opposition to marketplace structures	Adbusters magazine as tool for resistance	Penaloza & Price (1993)
Brand Appropriation	Consumers’ appropriation (i.e. adaption, combination, and transformation) of public (fashion) brand “discourses to fit the circumstances of their immediate social settings and their sense of personal history, interests, and life goals” (p. 18).	• Adoption of brands for individual personalisation purposes • Creation of new brand associations by customers • Dilution or deterioration of intended brand meanings	Chavs’ appropriation of Burberry in the early 2000s	Thompson & Haytko (1997)
Brand Bullying	Brand bullying or trademark bullying refers to the practice of companies who bully other (often smaller) firms for allegedly misusing or copying their brand symbols, logos, or meanings.	• Results from legal actions to protect a brand’s meaning • Legal owners who bully other brands for their marketing • Attacking competitors to ensure uniqueness/distinctiveness	Apple bullied brands that included ‘i’ or ‘pod’ in their names	Klein (1999)
Consumer Boycott	“Attempt by one or more parties to achieve certain objectives by urging individual consumers to refrain from making selected purchases in the marketplace” (p. 92, as cited in Friedman, 1984).	• Purchase rejection due to firms’ social/ethical misconduct • Mobilisation of public crowds by individuals and groups • Alteration of brand perceptions and firm behaviours	British boycott of the bank Barclays	Klein et al. (2004)
Consumer Activism	Consumer activism denotes the rebellion against institutionalised social structures and is concerned with the effects of capitalism and marketing on global economics, politics, cultures, and the environment.	• Consumers who seek ideological and cultural change • Deliberate individual or collective movements • Activism by artifice, avoidance, cynicism, or manipulation	Anti-advertising, anti-Nike, or anti-food waste activists	Kozinets & Handelman (2004)
Brand Hijacking	Brand hijacking occurs when consumers takes a brand away from its marketing professionals to enhance its evolution. A distinction is made between serendipitous and co-created hijacks.	• Brand fanatics or consumer tribes (re-)appropriate brands to take away control from marketing professionals • Consumers seek to shape a brand’s use and ideology	Greenpeace hijacked Nestlé’s KitKat ‘Take a Break’ advertising	Wipperfurth (2005)
Brand Dislike	“Negative judgment [owing to inequity, product failures, negative stereotypes, or immoral firm conduct] expressed by the consumer and/or implied in the choice not to buy” (p. 87).	• Public brand aversion based on ideological resistance, self-identity construction, or disloyal brand conducts • Personal and social forms of brand dislike exist • Social interactions create distance to the focal brand	Disney is disliked for its commercialisation	Dalli et al. (2006)
Doppelgänger Brand Image	“Disparaging images and stories about a brand that are circulated in popular culture by a loosely organized network of consumers, anti-brand activists, bloggers, and opinion leaders” (p. 50).	• Undesired brand images that spread publicly • Contestants: consumer collectives, activists, opinion leader • Threat to authentic and emotional branding strategies	Doppelgänger brand images of Starbucks	Thompson et al. (2006)
Customer Retaliation	“Retaliation is defined as a customer’s actions [e.g. physical aggression, neg. WOM, complaining] that are designed to punish and cause inconvenience to a firm for the damages the customer felt it caused [i.e. perceived betrayal]” (p. 247).	• Perceived betrayal means customers’ belief of firms’ intentional violation of normative relationship principles • Customer retaliation as a (in-)direct actions to restore fairness, demand reparation, and vent negative emotions	Complaint websites or agency-enabled retaliations, such as https://bbb.org	Grégoire & Fisher (2008)

Theoretical Concept	Fundamental Idea	Contested Brands Relevance	Example	Source
Brand Avoidance	Brand avoidance specifies “the incidents in which consumers deliberately choose to reject a brand” (p. 170).	- Active rejection of brands due to negative experiences, identity betrayal, immoral values, political barriers, etc. - Act of defining one's self by choosing what not to consume	Avoidance of capitalistic/unethical brands as Levi's/Nike	Lee et al. (2009)
Anti-Branding	Consumers engage in anti-branding acts to transform their self, to gain autonomy, or to radicalise modernised values. Anti-brand activists seek “change within the marketplace, or otherwise ‘go against’ mainstream consumption patterns” (p. 330).	- Public demonstration of marketplace inequalities (e.g. environmental, social, political, or ethical) - Commonly driven by online anti-brand communities - Criticism and negotiation of mainstream brand meanings	Anti-McDonald's online community (mcspotlight.org)	Hollenbeck & Zinkhan (2010)
Brand Co-Destruction	“Co-destruction refers to the collaborative destruction, or diminishment, of value by providers and customers [due to an inappropriate or unexpected use of the available resources within market interactions]” (p. 355).	- Failed collaboration between marketers and customers - Evocation of emotions like anger, disappointment, regret and behaviours as brand shifting, complaining, neg. WOM	Public bus service co-destruction	Echeverri & Skalen (2011)
Infidel Brands	Religions, myths, and ideologies (e.g. the Islam) construct brands to be infidel. Radicals denoted certain markets “as devoid of social equality, morality, and justice. Their critique culminates in a consumer jihad against global brands” (p. 663).	- Brands are tabooed to realise myths and ideologies - Radical informants use brands for (religious) propaganda - Consumer jihad against modernity and global brands	Nestlé or Coca-Cola are designated as infidel brands	Izberk-Bilgin (2012)
Brand Divorce	Brand divorce results from consumers' self-transformation and manifests itself as an “unintentional, consumer-initiated, brand-person relationship dissolution” (p. 520).	- Brand divorce due to extrinsic brand failures and intrinsic self-brand incongruence after self-identity transformations - Brand divorce leads to brand avoidance and neg. meanings	Starbucks brand marriage dissolution	Sussan et al. (2012)
Consumer-Brand Disidentification	Consumer brand disidentification is “a cognitive rejection of a brand wherein a consumer consciously views a brand as misrepresenting his or her self and impeding self-motives” (p. 786).	- Perceived mismatch between brand and personal values - Deliberate exclusion of a brand from one's self-definition - Emergence of oppositional brand attitudes/intentions	Dos Equis' branding strategy evoked men's disidentification	Wolter et al. (2013)
Brand Audience Dissipation	Brand are heterogeneous assemblages “fans, who contribute to the destabilization of a brand's identity and fuel the dissipation of audiences of which they have been members of” (p. 1228).	- Due to changes in brand assemblages fan dissipate from the audience and generate negative brand imagery - Brand-related reframing, remixing, and rejecting practices	America's Next Top Model caused a brand audience dissipation	Parmentier & Fischer (2015)
Consumer Brand Sabotage	“Deliberate behavior by customers or noncustomers who have the dominant objective of causing harm to a brand through the impairment of the brand-related associations of other consumers” (p. 26).	- Sabotage caused by repeatedly failed brand interactions - Saboteurs are unsatisfied consumers with neg. emotions - Hostile aggressions aim to seriously harm a focal brand	United Airlines breaks a guitar and triggers brand sabotage	Kähr et al. (2016)
Brand Hate	Consumers' detachment from a brand due to deeply rooted negative emotions such as disgust, anger, contempt, enmity, or alienation. “Brand hate indicates consumers' negativity toward a brand, its associations and its identity” (p. 19).	- Caused by transactional or ideological brand misconduct - Individuals with strong negative feelings towards a brand - Results in complaints, neg. WOM, boycott, anti-branding	Brand hate online forums against Volvo or Exxon	Kucuk (2016)

Appendix A3: Overview of Cultural Appropriation and Co-Optation Theories

Theoretical Concept	Fundamental Idea	Contested Brands Relevance	Example	Source
Culture Jamming	Culture jammers (or brand jammers) intend to disrupt media culture and mainstream structures (e.g. corporate advertising) by re-figuring logos, product images, or fashion statements in an ironic or satirical way and spread them via mass media.	- Positioned against social conformity and capitalism - Anti-consumerism movements by social collectives - Shed a critical light on marketing practices	Adbusters jammed Joe Camel campaigns	Lasn (1999)
Brand Morphing	Brand morphing is “the ways that brand meanings change among different groupings of consumers as facilitated by ad practitioners’ efforts to accommodate, reinforce, and create diverse cultural meanings across different international markets” (p. 59).	- Based on heterogeneous or inconsistent brand positionings - Brand perceptions morph among consumer groupings - Entails brand meaning alterations and ambiguities across national, social, and cultural contexts	Absolute Vodka morphed due to ads for diverse social communities	Kates & Goh (2003)
Cultural Branding	Iconic brands have high identity-value and symbolic meanings. Cultural branding means a “set of axioms and strategic principles that guide the building of brands into cultural icons” (p. 11).	- Cultural values, ideologies, and social norms often determine the creation of brand meanings - Brand identity myths are narratives that built iconic brands	Apple, Coca Cola, Levi’s, and Marlboro are iconic brands	Holt (2004)
Brand Religiosity	Brand religiosity is conceptualised as the extent to which market actors perceive brand meanings equal to religious meanings in life subject to their provision of desirable identity value.	- Religious brands enable the expression of self-identities - Brand evangelists influence non-users in favour of a brand - Creation of iconic brand status or intrusive fanaticism	Brand religiosity in the abandoned Apple Newton Community	Muniz & Schau (2005)
Brand Manifest	“The notion of a brand manifold suggests that brands have multiple dimensions: their meaning varies over time and according to a multiplicity of constituencies [e.g. various stakeholder]” (p. 41).	- Brands meaning are generated by dynamic discourses of multiple stakeholders and change over time - Controlling brand meanings demands an internal and external, as well as a past and future perspective	Brand manifold of Pontiac and Mercury	Berthon et al. (2007)
Co-Optation	Co-optation describes the process of mainstream consumers who adopt symbols/brands, tastes, and practices of sub- or countercultures and, therefore, commodify them into the market dominant logic of consumption.	- Co-optation of subcultural symbols for identity creation - Mainstream society as the co-opting market entity - Brand meanings become altered, diluted, or impaired	Co-optation of Birkenstock or Dr. Martens	Thompson & Coskuner-Balli (2007)
Lifestyle Branding	Lifestyle branding describes the marketing strategy of focusing on how brands fit into a target consumer’s lifestyle, instead of focusing on functional product attributes.	- Brand consumption for individuals’ self-expression - Lifestyle brands adopt meanings from their consumers - Cross-category competition for consumers’ identity share	Ralph Lauren or Martha Stewart as lifestyle brands	Chernev et al. (2011)
Uninvited Brand	Online branding activities are often not invited in social media networks. This evokes web-based power struggles among firms and consumers about branding truths and principles.	- Brands entering online social media brandscapes - Consumers show reluctance against uninvited brands - Marketers need to release control and flexible cope with volatility, uncertainty, and reactive stances	Ferrero’s Nutella as uninvited brand on Facebook	Fournier & Avery (2011)
Stereotype Threat	Stereotype threat is “the situational predicament caused by the awareness that one might be treated differently because of a negative stereotype about one’s group” (p. 343).	- Consumer in- and out-groups are loaded with stereotypes - Brand perception is subject to other consumers’ traits - Unwelcomed out-groups evoke distaste and neg. meanings	Gender stereotypes for car brands	Lee et al. (2011)
Branding Disaster Myth	Brand-centric disasters (e.g. oil spills) become ideologically contained by a discursive structure, called disaster myth, “which is propagated by a powerful cultural influence on consumer beliefs and opinions: the national news media” (p. 879).	- Media coverage influences consumers to re-establish trust in experts and insulates firms from systematic critiques - Mass-mediated process of ideological containment via cultural branding of marketplace myths	Disaster myths of the Exxon Valdez oil spill in 1989 and the BP Gulf spill in 2010	Humphreys & Thompson (2014)

Appendix A4: Summary of Contested Brand Cases *

Brand Case	Target Customers/ Intended Brand Meanings	Contesting Actors/ Unintended Brand Meanings	Contestation Practice	Outcomes
Dr. Martens (1970s, Europe)	Working class (e.g. postmen, police)/ Robust, functional working boots	Diverse subcultures (e.g. skinheads)/ Violent, rebellious, stylish footwear	<i>Co-optation</i> : different subcultures utilised Dr. Martens as public identification symbol	Popularity in subcultures; brand dilution; later, brand growth and mainstream adoption
Coca-Cola (1985, U.S.)	General public/ Delightful, authentic, refreshing drink (slogan 'the real thing')	Brand lovers (U.S. southerners)/ Disgusting and spurious 'new Coke'	<i>Consumer resistance</i> : 'old Coke' drinkers publicly expressed anger or disappointment; protests, boycotts, and consumer activism	Coke meaning got diluted; loss of market share to Pepsi; forced to return to the classic Coke
Lonsdale (1990s, Europe)	Boxers and athletes/ Professional, passionate boxing brand	Right-wing extremists (neo-Nazis)/ 'loNSDAle' as Nazi identification symbol	<i>Brand appropriation</i> : wearing Lonsdale to express Nazi sympathy/affiliation and bypass anti-Nazi laws	Strong right-wing image; brand bans and boycotts by athletes; German sale reduction by 35%
Louis Vuitton (1990s, France)	Wealthy, high-class travellers/ Exclusive, high-quality, crafted, luxury	Hip-hop subculture (artists and imitators)/ Ghetto-style, swanky, faked status brand	<i>Identity signalling</i> : hip-hop artists (e.g. Jay-Z) used Louis Vuitton as status symbol and inspired imitators to conspicuously consume counterfeits	Spread of showy hip-hop brand meanings and illegal counterfeits; alienation of wealthy customers
Red Bull (1990s, Europe)	Young urban students and professionals (explorer, reformer, achiever)/ Giving wings to people and ideas	General public (early customers)/ Noxious, unappetising, aphrodisiac drink	<i>Doppelgänger brand images</i> : disparaging stories why the drink is illegal spread in society and the media culture (e.g. made from bull's testicles)	Negative brand designations: liquid cocaine or Viagra; death rumours; mothers boycott; later, iconic status
Tommy Hilfiger (1990s, U.S.)	Preppy scene (American upper-class)/ Classy and cool designer lifestyle brand	Hip-hop artists (e.g. Snoop Dogg)/ Young, urban, hip-hop brand	<i>Brand hijacking</i> : famous hip-hop artists' (e.g. Snoop Dogg) used Hilfiger for their looks and performances; subcultural brand appropriation	Takeover of hip-hop meanings; alienation of preppies; growth due to mainstream brand adoption
Camel (1996, U.S.)	American smoker/ Smooth, flavourful, finest ('Joe Camel')	Adbusters (Kalle Lasn)/ Unhealthy, unattractive, carcinogenic, unethical, kids-seducing ('Joe Chemo')	<i>Culture jamming</i> : Adbusters created doppelgänger brand images and a website (joechemo.org) on 'Joe Chemo' to parody Camel's mascot 'Joe Camel'	Anti-smoking movement; ironic and disparaging WOM; public criticism for targeting children
BMW (2000s, Germany)	Ambitious male achiever/ Dynamic, innovative, sporty, premium	One angry customer (Pourmohseni Hadi)/ Defective, rigid, incompressible, fraudulent	<i>Customer retaliation</i> : disgruntled BMW owner publicly smashed and burned his cars to protest against production faults and mistreatment	Critical media attention; limited reach of related YouTube videos; not taken seriously by the public
Burberry (2000s, U.K.)	Wealthy upper class/ Iconic British luxury brand	Chavs (anti-social U.K. youth subculture)/ Lower class, sleazy, flashy uniform	<i>Brand appropriation</i> : chavs use of counterfeits, Burberry check to construct a collective identity	Neg. brand associations; deterred target customers; lowered sales
Feldschlösschen (2000, Switzerland)	Beer drinking Swiss traditionalists/ Local, traditional, joyful, connective	Young Swiss modernists/ Outmoded, cheap, boring, industrial	<i>Brand avoidance</i> : young Swiss people publicly refused and socially disdained Feldschlösschen due to its acquisition by Carlsberg	Loss of 'Swissness'; dissipation of customers; public rumours; decline of sales and market shares

*More detailed data and the related case references are available electronically and can be provided on request.

Brand Case	Target Customers/ Intended Brand Meanings	Contesting Actors/ Unintended Brand Meanings	Contestation Practice	Outcomes
Lego (2000s, Global)	Playful children/ Creative, qualitative, educational	Adult brand fans (Lego user groups)/ Inspiring, innovative, collective	<i>Brand co-creation</i> : adult Lego fans formed online user groups to develop designs and share ideas; fan conventions (e.g. Brickworld)	Co-creation of meaning and value (e.g. Lego ideas); pos. WOM; Lego brand ambassador program
Pabst Blue Ribbon (2001, U.S.)	Traditional American beer drinker/ Classic American-style lager	Urban hipsters (e.g. bike messenger)/ Trendy, alternative, organic, retro beer	<i>Co-optation</i> : urban hipsters publicly consumed the brand to construct their identity as opposed to the big beer labels favoured by their parents	Hipster brand image; strong pos. WOM; huge sales increase; later, mainstream adoption
Starbucks (2003, U.S.)	Quality-minded coffee drinkers/ Relaxing, joyful, individual experiences	Social activists (e.g. Naomi Klein)/ Capitalistic, unethical, discriminatory	<i>Sceptical brandscape</i> : brand avoidance and boycotts due to poor labour conditions and capitalistic exploitation; political brand rumours	Harmful doppelgänger brand images (e.g. 'Frankenbucks'); declining emotional brand awareness
Dell (2005, U.S.)	Price-sensitive high-tech lovers/ Premium, service-oriented, customised	One upset customer (blogger Jeff Jarvis)/ Unreliable, ignorant, low-quality ('Dell Hell' or 'Dell lies. Dell sucks.')	<i>Brand sabotage</i> : Jeff Jarvis founded the blog 'Dell Hell' due to his ongoing customer service troubles (i.e. Dell as an uninvited brand)	Viral (social) media shitstorm; decline of customers' satisfaction; market shares, and Dell's stock price
Rolex (2007, U.S.)	Wealthy male achiever/ Exclusive, luxury, prestige status symbol	One convicted criminal (O. J. Simpson)/ Pretentious, spurious, frivolous, showy	<i>Stereotype threat</i> : Rolex received broad public attention as the criminal O. J. Simpsons wore a fake Rolex watch as a pretentious status symbol	Rolex became perceived as a misleading status symbol; public brand distrust due to counterfeits
United Airlines (2009, U.S.)	Global air travellers/ Thoughtful, modern, innovative airline	One disappointed customer (Dave Carroll)/ Careless, rude, incontinent airline	<i>Customer retaliation</i> : viral YouTube protest songs under the title 'United Breaks Guitars'	Lasting impairment of United's brand image; negative rumours; stock price decline by about 10%
BP (2010, U.S.)	General petroleum customers/ Sustainable, 'beyond petroleum'	Public and environmental activists/ Pollutive, inauthentic, harmful	<i>Anti-branding</i> : BP boycott spread via Facebook; doppelgänger brand images and brand disaster myths due to the Deepwater Horizon oil spill	Noxious brand associations; about \$1 bn. brand value drop; broad negative media attention
Engadin St. Moritz (2010s, Switzerland)	Wealthy Swiss locals and tourists/ Prestigious, noble, sporty, modern	Super-rich from emerging countries/ Expansive, decadent, arrogant, aloof	<i>Brand audience dissipation</i> : Swiss locals and tourists are distracted by super-rich from BRIC countries and their status signalling behaviours	Stereotype threat of super-rich; brand avoidance by traditional tourists; decadent brand meanings
Nestlé (2010, Global)	Broad public/ Good food, good life	Anti-brand activists (Greenpeace)/ Unethical, polluting, unsustainable	<i>Anti-brand activism</i> : parody of the KitKat ad 'Take a Break' on YouTube; public accuse to destroy the rainforest and endanger orang-utans	Viral social media shitstorm; public boycotts; negative brand images; Nestlé changed its suppliers
Henkel (Pril) (2011, Germany)	General consumers/ Value-driven, qualitative, service-oriented	Disappointed co-creators/ Inauthentic, mendacious, untrustworthy	<i>Brand hate</i> : deceived co-creators publicly offended Henkel due to its manipulation of a Facebook idea contest for Pril's product design	Facebook and Twitter shitstorm; public relations disaster; later Pril adopted the 'Rage Guy' design

Brand Case	Target Customers/ Intended Brand Meanings	Contesting Actors/ Unintended Brand Meanings	Contestation Practice	Outcomes
McDonald's (2011, Finland)	Global fast food enthusiasts/ Family, joy, love, youthful	Cultural activists (Food liberation army)/ Unsustainable, unhealthy, capitalistic	<i>Culture jamming</i> : acted terroristic kidnapping of a Ronald McDonald figure and publicly posing ethical questions to McDonald's on YouTube	Broad media coverage; social media debates and critics; no brand reaction to the ethical queries
Abercrombie & Fitch (2013, U.S.)	Attractive all-American youth/ Exclusive brand for cool and popular kids	One non-customer (Greg Karber)/ Brand for homeless people	<i>Brand sabotage</i> : creation of a viral YouTube video and Twitter campaign under the hashtag #FitchTheHomeless	Public controversy about A&F's unethical business practices; saboteur was partially criticised
Birkenstock (2014, Europe)	Elderly and professionals; later, also hippies and hipster (anti-establishment)/ Orthopaedic health-sandals brand	Fashionistas (e.g. Heidi Klum)/ High-end, desirable fashion symbol	<i>Co-optation</i> : fashionistas wearing Birkenstocks in public; appearance on fashion weeks, in exclusive boutiques, and in lifestyle magazines	Birkenstock became an eligible fashion brand; market share growth; alienation of the anti-establishment
P&G (Ariel) (2014, Germany)	Global detergent consumers/ Reliable, pleasant, innovative, sustainable	German brand audience/ Right-wing oriented, ambiguous, careless	<i>Brand dislike</i> : Twitter shitstorm due to P&G's promotion of Ariel with an '88' symbol, which equals an illegal neo-Nazi code of 'HH'	Broad media coverage; slight public brand aversion; adverse Ariel user stereotypes
Hermès (2015, U.K.)	Affluent luxury consumers/ High-quality, sophisticated, luxurious	One celebrity (Jane Birkin) and environmental activists (PETA)/ Unethical, cruel, animal-torturing	<i>Brand co-destruction</i> : Hermès Birkin bag's namesake publicly demanded to rename the bag due to a PETA-video on crocodile cruelty	Adverse social media attention and protests (#killedforhermes); loss of Birkin bags' status symbolism
Weight Watchers (2015, U.S.)	Overweight people/ Healthy, inspiring, active	One opinion leader (Oprah Winfrey)/ Benevolent, trustworthy, faithful	<i>Brand endorsement</i> : Oprah endorsed the brand by her personal weight story, by acquiring 10% of the brand shares, and by acting as a brand ambassador	Oprah effect: media boost for Weight Watchers popularity and sales; creation of a trustful brand
Adidas (2016, Germany)	Traditional football players (team sport)/ Team spirit, performance, quality, passion	Modern creators (street football)/ Cool, bold, individual, creative, streetstyle	<i>Brand audience dissipation</i> : Adidas's novel targeting of egoistic street football players (e.g. 'here to create' ads) dissipated the brand audience	Alienation of the team players; neg. images (haters); destabilisation and dilution of the brand identity
New Balance (2016, U.S.)	Athletes and sporty lifestyle consumers/ High quality sports brand	Right-wing extremists (Daily Stormer)/ 'N' as brand symbol for neo-Nazis	<i>Consumer-brand disidentification</i> : New Balance as polit-brand used for right-wing propaganda due to the brand's alleged support of Donald Trump	Anti-brand aggressions and loss of target customers; strong negative meanings; social media shitstorm
Victoria's Secret (2016, China)	Middle-class women (gift-giving men)/ Feminine, glamorous, sensational	Traditional Chinese women/ Exploitive, appropriative, presumptuous	<i>Infidel brand</i> : Chinese women publicly accused the brand for appropriating Chinese cultural symbols for their fashion shows	Harmful media coverage; alienation and irritation of Chinese customers; loss of cultural brand control
Nivea (2017, Global)	Self-empowered consumers/ Diversity, tolerance, equal opportunities ('world's no. 1 skin care brand')	Social media brand audience/ Racist, intolerant, discriminatory ('white is purity')	<i>Consumer resistance</i> : viral social media hatred/condemnation for a unethical-discriminatory Facebook post by Nivea; propaganda by alt-rights	Racist connotation to Nivea's brand image; adoption by the alt-right movement; neg. WOM

Appendix A5: In-Depth Case Study – Birkenstock

Case 1: Birkenstock

Birkenstock, an orthopaedic health-sandals brand, was founded in 1774. The German shoemaker primarily produces slabs with a rubber-cork-mix sole and leather straps, often grasped as the antithesis of fashion (Jervell, 2015, May 11). The traditional brand audience is composed of elderly people looking for comfortable home slippers, professionals (e.g. nurses), and the anti-establishment (Soller, 2014, June 26). Yet, due to Birkenstocks vast lack of coolness new customer groups were attracted to the brand. Accordingly, it became a countercultural identification symbol for both the hippie and the hipster movement (Jervell, 2015, May 11).



Figure A5-1: Birkenstock sandals (<https://www.michaelablog.com/?s=birkenstock>).

Netnographic results revealed that five years ago Birkenstock sandals suddenly started to appear on international fashion weeks, in exclusive boutiques, and in lifestyle magazines. Today, fashionistas all around the world publicly enjoy the former unaesthetic slippers and even substitute their high heels with Birkenstocks. Notably, this boost of popularity was not triggered by Birkenstock's marketers. As the company's CEO states, Birkenstock's marketing strategy is highly rudimental with a budget close to nothing (Jervell, 2015, May 11). However, fashion lovers (e.g. Heidi Klum's Birkenstock collection) took psychological ownership over the homely brand and made it a desirable fashion symbol. As the legal owner had initially no interest to position the brand within the high-fashion market, this unexpected progress constitutes a brand disruption. The outcome of the related brand meaning contestation is favourable for Birkenstock, as the brand meanings changed in an eligible way, traditional customers are not deterred, and the global market share increased.

The contestation of Birkenstock was also revealed by the consumer interviews. Participants affirmed having experienced a transition in the brand's meaning since the last years' fashion weeks. More and more fashionistas in their social environment are consuming and debating the Birkenstock brand. Often this led interviewees reconsider their attitude towards the former unattractive and disfavoured shoes. Observing celebrities or friends wearing Birkenstocks in public, made them change their brand awareness and give the comfortable sandals a try. Interestingly, some informants declared that despite of the prevalent fashion trend, they still consider Birkenstock as highly unaesthetic and, at most, wear the sandals at home. They argued for a momentary hype, which is short-lived and therefore does not affect their consumption behaviours (Dietrich, 2018).

Appendix A6: In-Depth Case Study – New Balance

Case 2: New Balance

New Balance, an American sport footwear manufacturer, was founded in 1906. After a slow growth the company expanded globally in the 1980s and became a leading brand for high performance athletic and active lifestyle footwear. Notably, New Balance differs from its competitors (e.g. Nike) by still producing an essential part of its footwear in the United States.

The netnographic findings revealed that this circumstance was likewise the cause of a serious brand disruption. After Donald Trump's election for president in the end of 2016, New Balance's vice president declared that "we feel things are going to move in the right direction" (Maheshwari, 2016, November 15, p. 1). The rationale behind this statement was Trump's opposition against the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which hurts New Balance's U.S. production strategy. Yet, consumers misinterpreted the statement as a distinct endorsement of President Trump and denounced the brand in social media. Moreover, the Daily Stormer, a neo-Nazi blog, known for its anti-Semitic, anti-foreigner, and homophobic content, took on this movement and declared New Balance as "the official shoes of white people" (Maheshwari, 2016, November 15, p. 2). Although the brand explicitly distanced itself from these proclamations, consumers' brand perception changed radically. Former New Balance enthusiasts not only stopped wearing, but also publicly trashed or even burned their shoes (Ewen, 2017, March 2). Hence, consumers practiced their psychological brand ownership by offending New Balance's meaning to express their protest against the right-wing affiliation.

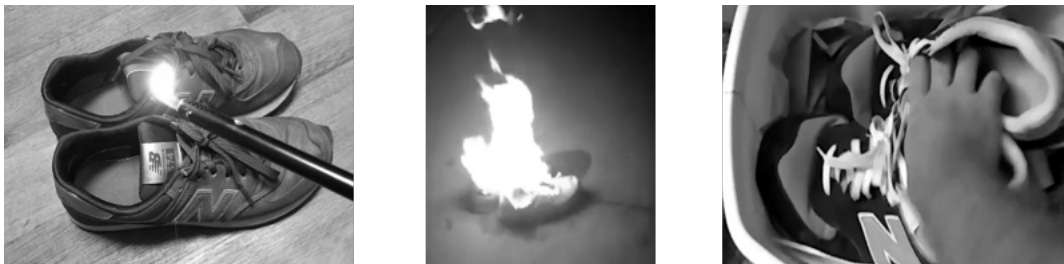


Figure A6-1: New Balance Brand Disruption (<https://twitter.com/SoleCollector>).

In addition, the consumer interviews showed a limited reach of the U.S. brand incident to Europe. However, after being confronted with the fact that right-wing extremists favour New Balance, most participants questioned their own brand perception. Concerned about being associated with the right-wing movement, interviewees reconsidered wearing New Balance shoes in public and stated to spread the word. Moreover, several participants mentioned parallels to New Balance's German contestation case in the early 2000s. Back then, the brand suffered under serious public pressure due to neo-Nazis' usage. The trigger was the relation between the brand symbol 'N' and the term 'Nazi'. This history makes the risky statement of New Balance's vice president even more incomprehensible. In sum, this case illustrated a harmful contestation, since brand meanings became deteriorated, which was undesired by the legal brand owner and alienated target customers (Dietrich, 2018).

Appendix A7: Contested Brand Case Evaluation*

Contested Brand Case	Brand Meaning Contestability – Evaluation Criteria						
	Appraisiveness	Internal Complexity	Diverse Describability	Openness	Reciprocal Recognition	Original Exemplar	Progressive Competition
Dr. Martens (1970s, Europe)	🟰	🟰	🟢	🟢	🟰	🟢	🟰
Coca-Cola (1985, U.S.)	🟢	🟰	🟰	🟢	🟰	🟢	🟰
Lonsdale (1990s, Europe)	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟢	🟰	🟢	🟢
Louis Vuitton (1990s, France)	🟢	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟢	🟰
Red Bull (1990s, Europe)	🟢	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟢	🟰
Tommy Hilfiger (1990s, U.S.)	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟢	🟰
Camel (1996, U.S.)	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟢	🟡
BMW (2000s, Germany)	🟢	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟡	🟢	🟰
Burberry (2000s, U.K.)	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟢	🟰
Feldschlösschen (2000, Switzerland)	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟰	🟢	🟰

*Harvey Balls symbolise the criteria evaluation from strongly disagree (1 = ○) to strongly agree (5 = ●).

Contested Brand Case	Brand Meaning Contestability – Evaluation Criteria						
	Appraisiveness	Internal Complexity	Diverse Describability	Openness	Reciprocal Recognition	Original Exemplar	Progressive Competition
Lego (2000s, Global)	●	◐	◐	●	◐	●	●
Pabst Blue Ribbon (2001, U.S.)	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
Starbucks (2003, U.S.)	●	○	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
Dell (2005, U.S.)	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
Rolex (2007, U.S.)	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
United Airlines (2009, U.S.)	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
BP (2010, U.S.)	◐	●	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
Engadin St. Moritz (2010s, Switzerland)	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
Nestlé (2010, Global)	●	◐	●	◐	●	●	◐
Henkel (Pril) (2011, Germany)	◐	○	◐	◐	◐	●	○

Contested Brand Case	Brand Meaning Contestability – Evaluation Criteria						
	Appraisiveness	Internal Complexity	Diverse Describability	Openness	Reciprocal Recognition	Original Exemplar	Progressive Competition
McDonald's (2011, Finland)	●	◐	◐	◐	○	●	◐
Abercrombie & Fitch (2013, U.S.)	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
Birkenstock (2014, Europe)	●	◐	◐	●	●	●	●
P&G (Ariel) (2014, Germany)	◐	○	○	◐	○	●	○
Hermès (2015, U.K.)	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
Weight Watchers (2015, U.S.)	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
Adidas (2016, Germany)	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
New Balance (2016, U.S.)	◐	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐
Victoria's Secret (2016, China)	◐	○	◐	◐	○	●	◐
Nivea (2017, Global)	●	◐	◐	◐	◐	●	◐

Appendix A8: Contested Brand Case Cluster Analysis

Explorative Cluster Analysis – Statistical Procedure (SPSS)

Objective: identification and characterisation of contested brand case clusters

Clustering variables: the clustering variables are based on conceptual considerations regarding Gallie's (1956) idea of essentially contested concepts. Thus, the following seven variables were quantitatively assessed on a ordinal, five-point Likert scale (anchored by 'strongly disagree' and 'strongly agree') according to the brand meaning contestability evaluation scheme: (1) appraisiveness, (2) internal complexity, (3) diverse descriptability, (4) openness, (5) reciprocal recognition, (6) original exemplar, and (7) progressive competition. Noteworthy, all contested brand cases definitely have an original exemplar. Hence, the related variable was evaluated identical for all instances and had no explanatory power. Yet, for the sake of completeness this variable was also included in the clustering algorithms. Variable standardisation was not required as an identical scale was applied for all variables.

Sample size: a total of 30 contested brand cases (over different times and regions) were identified to be representative for the study's population. These cases were profoundly explored and evaluated along a variety of secondary case data (see appendix A4-A7).

Data preparation and verification of clustering prerequisites: Based on a graphical profile diagram no outliers could be detected among the included cases. A correlation analysis of the clustering variables revealed multicollinearity in some instances. Significantly correlating variables could be merged to increase the efficiency of the clustering algorithms. However, all variables were included separately to gain a comprehensive result with detailed cluster references for all seven criteria. In addition, the squared Euclidean distance measure was applied to compensate for multicollinearity.

		Correlations						
		Appraisiveness	Internal Complexity	Diverse Describability	Openness	Reciprocal Recognition	Original Exemplar	Progressive Competition
Appraisiveness	Pearson Correlation	1	.223	-.167	.157	.047	. ^a	-.045
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.237	.377	.406	.806	.	.812
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Internal Complexity	Pearson Correlation	.223	1	.619**	.702**	.781**	. ^a	.623**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.237		.000	.000	.000	.	.000
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Diverse Describability	Pearson Correlation	-.167	.619**	1	.601**	.673**	. ^a	.547**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.377	.000		.000	.000	.	.002
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Openness	Pearson Correlation	.157	.702**	.601**	1	.676**	. ^a	.660**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.406	.000	.000		.000	.	.000
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Reciprocal Recognition	Pearson Correlation	.047	.781**	.673**	.676**	1	. ^a	.726**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.806	.000	.000	.000		.	.000
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Original Exemplar	Pearson Correlation	. ^a	. ^a	. ^a	. ^a	. ^a	. ^a	. ^a
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Progressive Competition	Pearson Correlation	-.045	.623**	.547**	.660**	.726**	. ^a	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.812	.000	.002	.000	.000	.	
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table A8-1: Correlation Table of Clustering Variables (own illustration).

Step 1 – Application of Ward’s clustering method to determine the optimal cluster number:

Ward’s minimum variance method is an agglomerative, hierarchical clustering approach that aims to minimise the total within-cluster variance (Hair et al., 2010). So, a recursive algorithm merges individual cases, respectively clusters, into pairs with the aim of minimal increases of the total within-cluster variance. This optimisation rests on a calculation of the squared Euclidean distances between the cases:

$$\text{Euclidean distance: } d_e(x, y) = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - y_i)^2}$$

$$\text{Squared Euclidean distance: } d_{e,squared}(x, y) = [d_e(x, y)]^2$$

with
 x_i = value of variable i for case x
 y_i = value of variable i for case y
and $i = \{1, \dots, 7\}$

This agglomerative procedure revealed the following SPSS outputs: (1) agglomeration schedule (table A8-2), (2) an elbow screen plot (figure A8-1), and (3) a dendrogram using Ward linkage (figure A8-2). In the agglomeration schedule the coefficient indicates the step-wise increase of the total within-cluster variance, which is graphically illustrated by the elbow screen plot. The optimal number of clusters is determined by the first major jump of the agglomeration coefficient between the algorithmic stages. This jump can also be detected in the elbow screen plot as the substantial inflexion point of the curve. Accordingly, the optimal number of clusters was determined to be three (stage 27). Besides, the dendrogram presents a hierarchical relationship tree of the clustered cases based on their similarity.

Agglomeration Schedule						
Stage	Cluster Combined		Coefficients	Stage Cluster First Appears		Next Stage
	Cluster 1	Cluster 2		Cluster 1	Cluster 2	
1	4	17	.000	0	0	11
2	11	29	.500	0	0	22
3	21	23	1.000	0	0	13
4	12	22	1.500	0	0	18
5	3	6	2.000	0	0	6
6	1	3	2.833	0	5	21
7	24	27	3.833	0	0	19
8	18	25	4.833	0	0	23
9	16	19	5.833	0	0	15
10	8	15	6.833	0	0	24
11	4	30	8.167	1	0	26
12	14	28	9.667	0	0	22
13	21	26	11.167	3	0	17
14	9	13	12.667	0	0	16
15	2	16	14.333	0	9	19
16	7	9	16.167	0	14	20
17	10	21	18.167	0	13	18
18	10	12	20.833	17	4	21
19	2	24	24.367	15	7	26
20	5	7	28.283	0	16	24
21	1	10	32.894	6	18	28
22	11	14	37.894	2	12	23
23	11	18	43.561	22	8	27
24	5	8	49.478	20	10	25
25	5	20	55.883	24	0	28
26	2	4	63.349	19	11	27
27	2	11	74.683	26	23	29
28	1	5	100.875	21	25	29
29	1	2	178.467	28	27	0

Table A8-2: Agglomeration Schedule (own illustration).

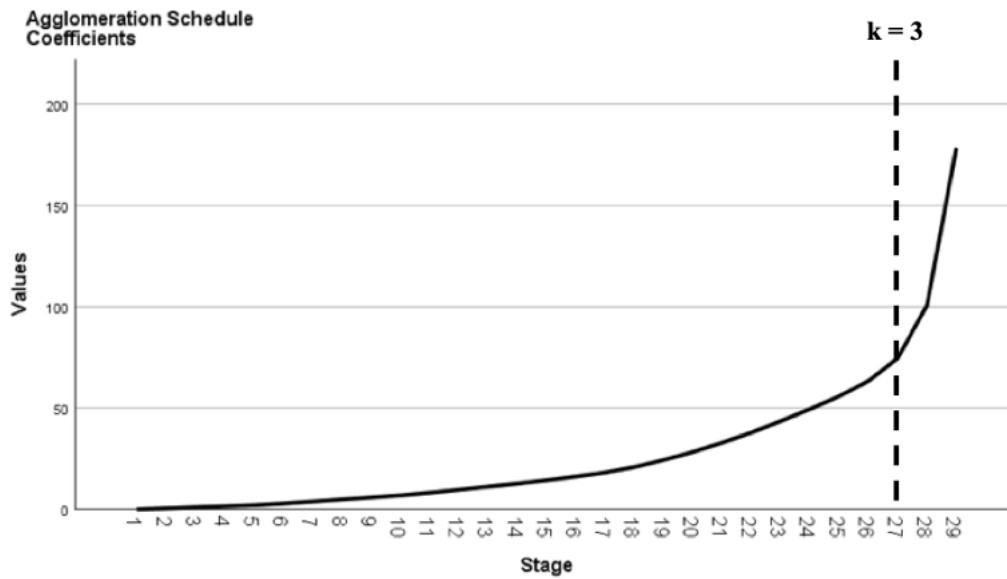


Figure A8-1: Elbow Screen Plot (own illustration).

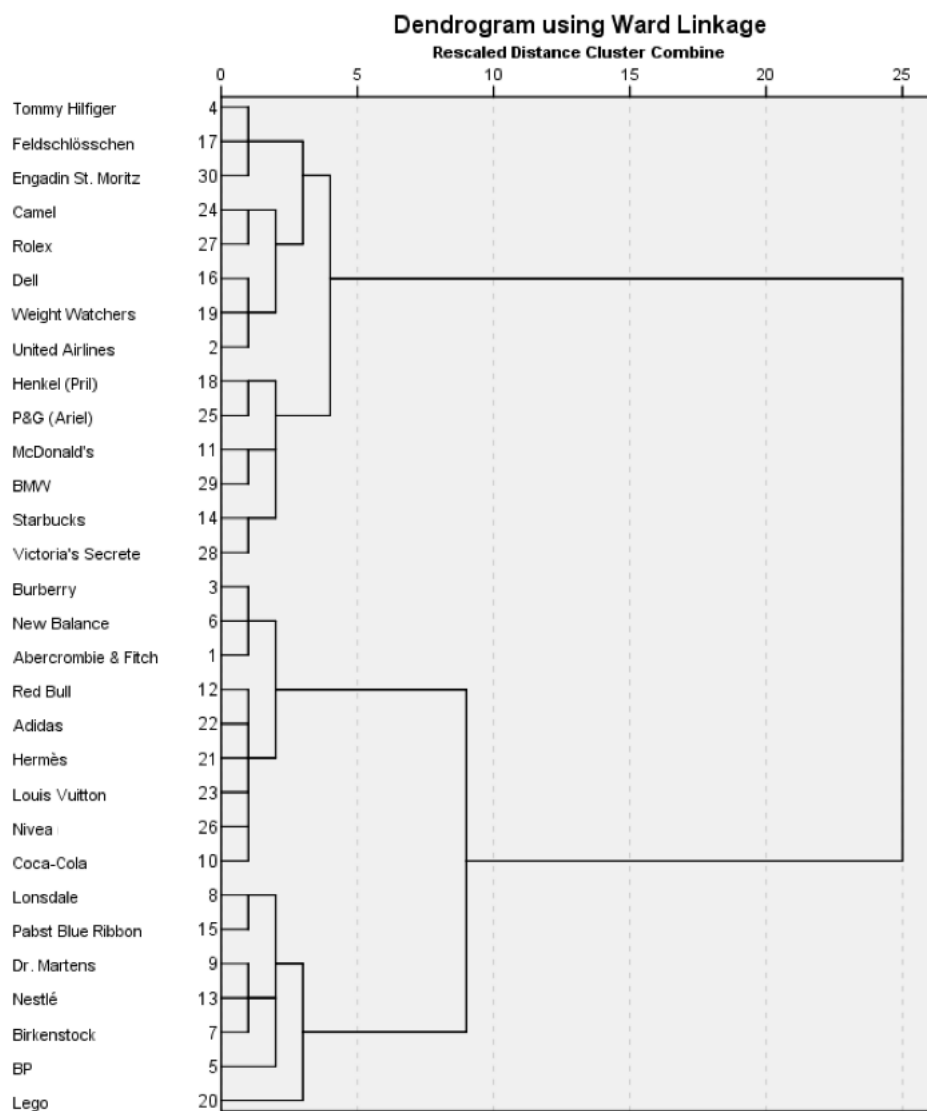


Figure A8-2: Dendrogram Using Ward Linkage (own illustration).

Step 2 – K-means clustering to find a reliable cluster solution:

In step 2, the optimal cluster number determined in the previous step was used to feed a centroid-based k-means cluster algorithm, which operates on the same input data, yet, demands for a predetermined number of clusters. Based on the fixed number of clusters k, the k-means algorithm partitions the data, identifies k cluster centres, and iteratively optimises the centres' position by minimising the cases' squared Euclidean distance from these centres. Therefore, compared to Ward's clustering method, the k-means procedure created a similar but more robust and reliable cluster solution. Table A8-3 shows the corresponding SPSS outputs: cluster memberships, cluster centres, distances between the final cluster centres, and the number of cases in each cluster. The illustrations show both the final allocation of each case to one of the three clusters and the average contribution of the seven variables to each cluster.

Cluster Membership				Final Cluster Centers			
Case Number	Brand Case	Cluster	Distance	Cluster			
				1	2	3	
1	Abercrombie & Fitch	2	1.557	Appraisiveness	4	4	4
2	United Airlines	2	1.811	Internal Complexity	2	3	4
3	Burberry	2	1.193	Diverse Describability	2	3	4
4	Tommy Hilfiger	2	1.731	Openness	2	4	4
5	BP	3	1.906	Reciprocal Recognition	2	3	4
6	New Balance	2	.997	Original Exemplar	5	5	5
7	Birkenstock	3	1.385	Progressive Competition	2	3	4
8	Lonsdale	3	1.666				
9	Dr. Martens	3	1.278				
10	Coca-Cola	2	1.850				
11	McDonald's	1	1.352				
12	Red Bull	2	1.132				
13	Nestlé	3	1.623				
14	Starbucks	1	1.579				
15	Pabst Blue Ribbon	3	1.578				
16	Dell	1	1.432				
17	Feldschlösschen	2	1.731				
18	Henkel (Pril)	1	1.222				
19	Weight Watchers	2	1.193				
20	Lego	3	2.343				
21	Hermès	2	1.252				
22	Adidas	2	1.307				
23	Louis Vuitton	2	1.067				
24	Camel	1	1.778				
25	P&G (Ariel)	1	1.809				
26	Nivea	2	1.557				
27	Rolex	1	.969				
28	Victoria's Secrete	1	1.681				
29	BMW	1	1.869				
30	Engadin St. Moritz	2	1.999				

Distances between Final Cluster Centers			
Cluster	1	2	3
1		2.416	5.113
2	2.416		2.813
3	5.113	2.813	

Number of Cases in each Cluster		
Cluster	1	9.000
	2	14.000
	3	7.000
Valid		30.000
Missing		.000

Table A8-3: K-Means Clustering SPSS Outputs (own illustration).

Summarising, figure A8-3 outlines the three resulting clusters. The bars present how much each variable contributes on average to each cluster. For example, for the variable ‘diverse descriptability’ the average value of all cases included in the first cluster is 2.1, for those in the second cluster it is 3.2, and for those in the third cluster it is 4. By taking all variables into account the cluster can be explicitly characterised. On average all variables have rather low values for cluster 1 (low degree of contestability), medium values for cluster 2 (medium degree of contestability), and high values for cluster 3 (high degree of contestability). As already mentioned, the variable ‘original exemplar’ cannot be used to differentiate between the clusters, as it is identical for all cases. Besides, the variable ‘appraisiveness’ scores rather equal for all cluster and, thus, does not add significant explanatory power.

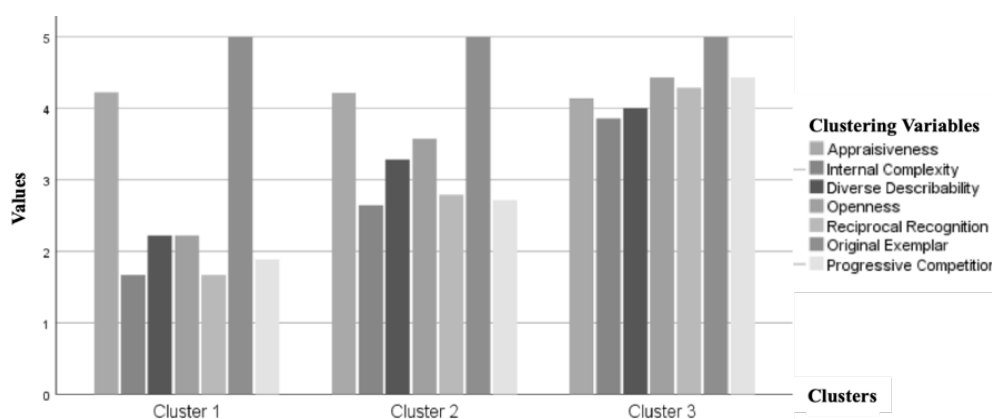


Figure A8-3: K-means Clustering SPSS Output (own illustration).

Step 3 – Post-hoc analysis of the cluster variance to test for the clusters’ validity:

In the third step, the resulting clusters were tested by means of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to determine if differences exist between the clusters with regard to the variable means. Table A8-4 shows the ANOVA and reveals significant differences for all variables, except for ‘appraisiveness’ and ‘original exemplar’ (for a reason see step 2). Thus, the identified clusters are highly valid and robust.

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Appraisiveness	Between Groups	.030	2	.015	.022	.979
	Within Groups	18.770	27	.695		
	Total	18.800	29			
Internal Complexity	Between Groups	18.895	2	9.448	25.328	.000
	Within Groups	10.071	27	.373		
	Total	28.967	29			
Diverse Describability	Between Groups	13.054	2	6.527	12.227	.000
	Within Groups	14.413	27	.534		
	Total	27.467	29			
Openness	Between Groups	20.268	2	10.134	25.576	.000
	Within Groups	10.698	27	.396		
	Total	30.967	29			
Reciprocal Recognition	Between Groups	27.014	2	13.507	46.841	.000
	Within Groups	7.786	27	.288		
	Total	34.800	29			
Original Exemplar	Between Groups	.000	2	.000	.	.
	Within Groups	.000	27	.000		
	Total	.000	29			
Progressive Competition	Between Groups	26.006	2	13.003	30.635	.000
	Within Groups	11.460	27	.424		
	Total	37.467	29			

Table A8-4: One-Way Analysis of Variance (own illustration).

Appendix B: Study 2 – Process Model of Brand Meaning Contestation

Appendix B1: Overview of Consumer Interviews

#	Name	Date	Duration	Gender	Age	Loved/Favoured Brands	Hated/Disfavoured Brands	Identity Traits
CI-1	Rudolf	07.03.2017, 08:15 am	38 min.	male	24	Apple, Nike, Swisscom	Nokia	technology enthusiast
CI-2	Tabea	07.03.2017, 09:00 am	58 min.	female	n/a	Longchamp, Nike	Canada Goose, Primark, Subway	fashion lover
CI-3	Nadin	07.03.2017, 11:00 am	1h 07 min.	female	23	Apple, Massimo Dutti	Burger King, Primark	anti-show-off person
CI-4	Sabine	07.03.2017, 06:00 pm	59 min	female	26	Apple, Swatch, Zara	Lacoste, BMW	early brand adopter
CI-5	Peter	08.03.2017, 11:00 am	44 min.	male	n/a	Apple, Audi, Hilfiger, Nike	Boxeur Des Rues, Ed Hardy	automobile fan
CI-6	Sandra	08.03.2017, 12:00 pm	55 min.	female	n/a	Nike, Stöckli	UPC, Porsche, Lamborghini	tennis player
CI-7	Alfred	08.03.2017, 01:00 pm	36 min.	male	25	Apple, Omega	Armani, Rolex	watch enthusiast
CI-8	Janina	08.03.2017, 02:30 pm	54 min.	female	25	Apple, Hilti, L'Oréal	Louis Vuitton, Marc O'Polo	vegetarian
CI-9	Marcel	09.03.2017, 10:00 am	1h 07 min.	male	23	Adidas, Apple, BMW	Burger King, Ikea, McDonald's	boxer
CI-10	Maria	09.03.2017, 04:00 pm	59 min.	female	24	Alhatura, Dune, Topshop	A&F, Gucci, Michael Kors	fashion blogger
CI-11	Anika	13.03.2017, 10:00 am	1h 02 min.	female	24	Apple, Coca Cola, Nutella	Louis Vuitton, Michael Kors	mainstream consumer
CI-12	Irina	13.03.2017, 11:00 am	48 min.	female	25	Apple, Jawbone, Nike	A&F, Nestlé	hip-hop/step dancer
CI-13	Antonia	13.03.2017, 02:00 pm	1h 07 min.	female	25	Anania, Ulla Johnson, Reebok	Bershka, L'Oréal, Primark	slow-fashion lover
CI-14	Maya	13.03.2017, 03:00 pm	1h 18 min.	female	26	Cleanic, Nike, Tesla, Zara	Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Tiffany	football fan (Patriots)
CI-15	Selin	13.03.2017, 06:00 pm	1h 07 min.	female	25	MAC, Dior, Victoria's Secret	Chicorée, Guess, Tally Weijl	luxury fashionista
CI-16	Saskia	15.03.2017, 12:15 pm	1h 04 min.	female	22	Apple, Nike, Swisscom, Spotify	Louis Vuitton, Michael Kors	anti-luxury consumer
CI-17	Susan	19.03.2017, 05:00 pm	1h 02 min.	female	n/a	Asics, Tibits, L'Occitane	Tommy Hilfiger, S. Oliver, H&M	sustainability advocate
CI-18	Celina	20.03.2017, 11:00 am	1h 09 min.	female	25	Akris, On Running, Tesla	Guess, BMW, Starbucks, Zebra	former musical actress
CI-19	Tatja	20.03.2017, 06:00 pm	55 min.	female	26	Massimo Dutti, Nivea	McDonald's, Pepsi, Sketchers	unihockey player
CI-20	Catarina	15.03.2017, 12:15 pm	45 min.	female	24	Coca-Cola, Clarins	Birkenstock	pilates practitioner
CI-21	Amelie	21.03.2017, 11:00 am	57 min.	female	27	Lamborghini, Oakley, Stöckli	Elan, Longchamp, VIU	skiing instructor
CI-22	Herbert	21.03.2017, 06:00 pm	1h 10 min.	male	27	All Saints, Diesel, Kapten & Son	Canada Goose, Fjällräven	athletic runner
CI-23	Silke	27.03.2017, 04:45 pm	1h 13 min.	female	n/a	Apple, Uniqlo, Tchibo	Daniel Wellington, Guess	church choir member
CI-24	Nela	05.04.2017, 08:30 am	1h 17 min.	female	24	Fairphone, Freitag, Patagonia	H&M, Huawei, McDonald's	anti fast fashion/food
CI-25	Leni	12.04.2017, 06:20 pm	1h 05 min.	female	22	Nike, Omega, Timberland	Easy Jet, Mammut, Uvex	yoga practitioner

Appendix B2: Consumer Interview Guide

Project: Contested Brands – An Investigation of Brand Meaning Contestations

Time of interview:	_____	Place:	_____
Date:	_____	Interviewer:	_____
Duration:	_____	Interviewee:	_____

Interview Procedure:

You are being asked to participate in a research study investigating consumers' perception and reaction on brand meanings that are unintended by the brand's legal owner (e.g. the company). The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of consumer behaviours that lead to the spread of unintended brand meanings and characterise perception/reaction practices. During this interview you will be asked to respond to several open-ended questions. You may choose not to answer any or all of these questions. The procedure involves an audio-recording of the interview. This recording will be transcribed verbatim. Your answers will be treated confidentially, and findings will not be related to you individually.

Informed Consent:

Please sign the informed consent form to signal your willingness to participate.

Questions:

Part I: Introduction

1. How do you usually discover new brands that interest you? When and how do you actually shop these products/services (e.g. online/offline, alone/together with friends, etc.)?
2. Could you tell me what your (three) favourite brands are and what you like most about them (this may also include non-fashion brands)?
3. Are there any brands you would never buy or which you would even publicly accuse (e.g. tell friends not to buy them)? What do you think are the main reasons for your brand dislike?

Part II: Identity work and stereotype perception

1. What brands identify you and your friends the most?
 - a. What do you think makes you and your peer group consume these branded products?
 - b. Who else in society is consuming them and what personality traits do they have?
 - c. Is there a proper way on how to consume (e.g. buy, use, dispose) these brands?
 - d. Are there any no-goes/red-lines concerning these brands' consumption?
2. What brands do people consume whom you don't like? Be specific on a particular one!
 - a. What kind of people are these? How can they be characterised and how do they behave?
 - b. How does a typical consumption environment and practice look like?
 - c. Which associations are you assigning to this brand?
 - d. Would you identify these people solely due to their brand consumption behaviour?
 - e. How would you react, if one of your friends starts consuming this brand?

Part III: Changing brand perceptions

1. Is there any brand that you liked earlier in life, but you would never consume today?
 - a. What happened so that you are not interested in this brand anymore?
 - b. How did your personal perception change of this brand and its meaning?
 - c. What do you feel about this brand today?
 - d. How did you change your consumption habits concerning this brand over time (e.g. your handling of the related products, touchpoints with the brand, etc.)?
 - e. Have other people (e.g. peers or social opponents) been involved in this development?
2. Are you involved in any activity, team, or social group that is connected around specific brands (e.g. people who consume same brands)? If so, could you give me some details?
3. Have you ever started or stopped consuming a branded product/service due to the fact that other people started consuming it? Did you ever get interested in certain brands, as they were consumed in a new way, at a new location, for a new purpose, or by new people?

Part IV: Reactions and counteraction strategies

Picture stimulation (positive and negative real-world instances of brand contestations):

1. What do you think about these people consuming the particular brands?
 - a. How would you characterise these consumers and where could you meet them?
 - b. Could you identify yourself with one of them?
 - c. How would you react if you notice such a consumption situation in reality?
 - d. Does this knowledge change your perception of the brand? If so, how does the meaning you ascribe to the brand alter?
2. Assuming you realise a person, who is part of a social out-group that you don't like, consuming one of your preferred (favourite) brands:
 - a. What would be your first thoughts?
 - b. How would you react to such an incident? Would that already change your brand perception or consumption behaviours? If so, how?
 - c. What needs to happen that you actually change your brand practices (e.g. repeated perception of undesired brand users, severe brand events, drastic brand alienation)?

Part V: Conclusion

1. What other experiences can you share concerning the notion of unintended brand usage?
2. Do you know someone else who belongs to a social niche-group and might be interested in talking about his brand consumption habits?
3. Do you have any further questions or ideas with regard to this interview?

Closing:

Thank you very much for participating in this interview. I highly appreciate you taking the time to support this research project. We may contact you in the future for the purpose of follow-up questions. Again, please let me assure the confidentiality of your responses. If you have any further questions, feel free to contact me by mail via daniel.dietrich@unisg.ch.

Appendix B3: Consumer Interview Picture Stimulation

Contested Brand Example 1: Birkenstock



Reference: Kpriss, C. (2013, September 10). Utilitarian sandals (Birkenstock), the new fashionable sandals. *Stylefrizz*. Retrieved from <http://stylefrizz.com/201309/utilitarian-sandals-birkenstock-new-fashionable-sandals/>

Contested Brand Example 2: New Balance



Reference: Esculapio, A. (2017, n.d.). Operation New Balance: How neo-Nazis hacked the mall. *Vestojy*. Retrieved from <http://vestojy.com/operation-new-balance/>

Appendix B4: Overview of Focus Groups

#	Name	Date	Duration	Gender	Age	Loved/ Favoured Brands	Hated/ Disfavoured Brands	Contested Brands	Identity Traits
FG-1	Bernhard	22.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 6 min.	male	30	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
FG-1	Amelie	22.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 6 min.	female	20	Apple, Gucci, Sandro	Guess, Michael Kors, Primark	Primark	open-minded, minimalistic, elegant
FG-1	Xantia	22.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 6 min.	female	19	Apple, Gucci, Zara	Designal, Marc O'Polo, Versace	n/a	ambitioned, open-minded, reliable
FG-1	Silvia	22.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 6 min.	female	24	Apple, VTI	n/a	Freitag	interested, happy, calm
FG-1	Anita	22.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 6 min.	female	23	Apple	Ed Hardy, Lonsdale	Audi, Nestlé, VW	restrained, puristic, covered, sporty
FG-2	Oskar	22.02.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 16 min.	male	31	Migros, Swatch, Victorinox	Blackwater, Credit Suisse, Pepsi	Nestlé, Wells Fargo	straight forward, pos. thinking
FG-2	Stephan	22.02.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 16 min.	male	25	Audi, Hugo Boss, Nike	A&F, BMW, BP	BMW, Louis Vuitton	n/a
FG-2	Franz	22.02.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 16 min.	male	24	Apple, Football Clubs	Android, Glencore, Google	n/a	open, interested, active, sceptic
FG-2	Tobias	22.02.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 16 min.	male	26	Emmi, Ovo, Rivella	Bio, Opodo, Salt	Nestlé, Roche, Uber	social, spontaneous, day-dreaming
FG-3	Armin	23.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 23 min.	male	27	Nike, Peak Performance	Burberry, Moncler, New Balance	BMW, Feldschlösschen	sporty, casual, humorous, empathic
FG-3	Anna	23.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 23 min.	female	25	Adidas, Everlast, Only	Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuitton	leger, urban, sporty, casual, edgy
FG-3	Luise	23.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 23 min.	female	25	Adidas, Mollerus, Vitra	Designal, Guess	Louis Vuitton	sportive, open-minded, casual
FG-3	Frida	23.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 23 min.	female	25	COS, Tods, Valentino, Vitra	Claire's, Designal, Versace	Adidas, Louis Vuitton	smart-casual, classic
FG-3	Nicola	23.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 23 min.	female	24	Adidas, Nike, Vitra	Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Guess	New Balance	sporty, spontaneous, uncomplicated
FG-3	Carmen	23.02.2018, 09:00 am	1h 23 min.	female	22	Adidas, Sandro, Zara	A&F, C&A, Desigual	Alpha Industries	interested, modern, open-minded
FG-4	Markus	23.02.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 7 min.	male	29	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
FG-4	Marta	23.02.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 7 min.	female	21	n/a	n/a	n/a	alternative, open, positive
FG-4	Lars	23.02.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 7 min.	male	20	Apple, Coca Cola	Hollister	n/a	purposeful, organized, confident
FG-4	Paula	23.02.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 7 min.	female	23	Adidas, Apple, Mercedes	A&F, Louis Vuitton, Renault	A&F	ambitious, sporty, disciplined
FG-4	Robert	23.02.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 7 min.	male	26	Benci Brothers, Canyon	Armani, Louis Vuitton, Prada	Canada Goose	individual, clean, reflective
FG-4	Josef	23.02.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 7 min.	male	27	Alnatura, Sisley	A&F, Louis Vuitton	Louis Vuitton	authentic, neutral, easy, relaxed
FG-5	Simon	02.03.2018, 09:00 am	1h 9 min.	male	25	Audi, Massimo Dutti	n/a	n/a	classic, elegant, timeless
FG-5	Bettina	02.03.2018, 09:00 am	1h 9 min.	female	26	Chanel, Ben & Jerry, Zara	n/a	n/a	classy, timeless
FG-5	Sabine	02.03.2018, 09:00 am	1h 9 min.	female	21	Apple, Sandro, Zara	Michael Kors, Samsung	Canada Goose	casual, chic, normal, basic, classy
FG-5	Sebastian	02.03.2018, 09:00 am	1h 9 min.	male	24	Adidas, BMW, Ralph Lauren	A&F, Nike, Rolex	Nestlé	orderly, charismatic, fair, ambitious
FG-5	Mathias	02.03.2018, 09:00 am	1h 9 min.	male	24	Adidas, Jack & Jones	Puma, Zara	McDonald's	classy, sporty
FG-6	Nina	02.03.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 1 min.	female	24	Apple, Audi, Tommy Hilfinger	Louis Vuitton, Primark	Audi, BMW	cheerful, ambitious, open, athletic
FG-6	Felicia	02.03.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 1 min.	female	21	Mammüt, Migros, Windows	Apple, Gucci, Parajumpers	Dr. Martens	elegant, sporty, colourful
FG-6	Ferdinand	02.03.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 1 min.	male	20	Burberry, Land Rover	Breitling, Supreme, Woolrich	Fred Perry	spontaneous, creative
FG-6	Johannes	02.03.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 1 min.	male	26	Audi, Lindt	BMW, Canada Goose	Louis Vuitton	open, honest, authentic, creative
FG-6	Emilia	02.03.2018, 03:00 pm	1h 1 min.	female	25	Cirio, Läderach, Rummo	n/a	n/a	dynamic, untrendy, extroverted

Appendix B5: Focus Group Guide

Project: Contested Brands – An Exploration of the Contestation and Negotiation of Brand Meanings

Interview Procedure:

The purpose of this focus group is to reveal consumers' experiences with brand meaning contestation by **individuals / collectives / a society** based on stimulations by **legal brand owners / other market actors**. This includes the preconditions and outcomes of potential contestation situations. Close attention will be paid to the influence of brand meaning alterations on consumers' self-brand relationship and their identity-related behaviours. The focus group should enable open group discussions and a sharing of individual experiences. Participants may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. The procedure involves audio-recording and subsequent data transcription. Both your data and the findings are treated anonymously.

Informed Consent:

Please sign the informed consent form to signal your willingness to participate.

Questions:

Part I: Introduction

1. Please answer the following question one by one: What is the most important reason for you to consume brands in public with regard to the perception by other market participants?

Part II: Identity work and consumer stereotypes

1. Have you ever purchased or not purchased a branded product in order to be part or to avoid a certain social group or stereotype? If so, what brand was it and why?
2. What experiences have you made with emotional self-brand connections? Which brands do you consider a vital part of your personal identity or of your extended self?
3. How do you deal with brand-related consumption stereotypes? (e.g. examples, perceptions, handling, etc.)

Part III: Preconditions of brand meaning contestation

1. What do you think makes a brand contestable or vulnerable (i.e. meaning alterations)? Especially with focus on critical behaviours or communications by the **legal brand owner / other market actors**.
2. Have you made any (personal) experiences with brand meaning alterations by **individual market participants / collectives / societies at large**? If so, what triggered the situation? Do you have any other occasions in mind where brands were attacked or appropriated?
3. What current trends (e.g. social media, digitalisation) do support the vulnerability of brands?

Part IV: Negotiation of dominant brand meanings

1. Have you been in a situation where a brand was discussed controversially due to misconduct of the **legal brand owner / other market actors**? If so, how was your prior relationship to the brand and how did it change or how did you react as being part of the public discourse?
2. In what ways do you think can a brand be attacked after any kind of **misconduct by legal brand owner / other market actors**? What are effective strategies of market participants to alter a brand's public perception and make it become in-authentic, irrelevant, or hated?
3. Imagine a situation (initiated by the **legal brand owner / other market actors**) in which you would eliminate a brand from your personal consideration set or your extended self: how would the situation look like and what determines your personal tipping point to reject a brand?

Part V: Outcomes of brand meaning contestations and marketing reaction strategies

1. How do you personally deal with brands that receive intense public pressure due to misconduct by the **legal brand owner / other market actors**? Would this affect your individual brand-related identity construction? If so, in what kind of way?
2. What is your opinion on the consequences of brand hijacks or public shitstorms? What are potential outcomes? How do you think companies should react to such brand contestations?
3. Under which circumstances do you think brands can lose their authenticity? Especially with focus on marketers' reaction to rival no-name brands. Do you know any examples?

Conclusion:

Do you have any further experiences or questions that you would like to share or raise?

Thank you for participating in this focus group. I highly appreciate your contribution to this research project. You may be contacted in the future for the purpose of follow-up inquiries. Again, please let me assure the confidentiality of your responses. If you have any further questions, feel free to contact me by mail via daniel.dietrich@unisg.ch.

Appendix B6: Focus Group Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions:

First name & Participation Number

Date and Time of Focus Group

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your sex? Female ☐ Male ☐

3. What is your nationality? _____

4. What is your marital status? Single ☐ Married ☐ Separated ☐ Divorced ☐ Widowed ☐

5. What is your annual income in CHF (or expected annual income if you are a student)?

Less than 60,000 ☐ 60,000 to 90,000 ☐ 90,000 to 120,000 ☐ 120,000 to 150,000 ☐ More than 150,000 ☐

6. What is your occupation/expected occupation?

7. With which racial or ethnic category do you identify?

African American ☐ Asian/Pacific Islander ☐ Caucasian ☐ Latino ☐ Other: _____

8. What is your highest academic rank?

High School Graduation ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Master's Degree ☐
Ph.D ☐ Full Professor ☐

9. In which course of studies are you currently enrolled?

10. How would you describe your personal identity style (please name 5 adjectives)?

11. Please name three brands you can identify with/which you love?

12. Please name three brands you cannot identify with/which you hate?

13. Please name brands which you think are contested (among market actors) in their meaning?

Any further remarks? _____

Appendix B7: Participation Consent Form



Consent for Participation in Interview/Focus Group Research

I volunteer to participate in the research project 'Contested Brands' conducted by Daniel Dietrich from the University of St. Gallen. I understand that the project is designed to gather information about consumer behavior. [I will be one of approximately 30 people being interviewed for this research.]1

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. If I decline to participate or withdraw from the study, no one on my campus will be told.
2. I understand that most interviewees will find the discussion interesting and thought-provoking. If, however, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
3. Participation involves being interviewed by researchers from the University of St. Gallen. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes. Notes will be written during the interview. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made. If I don't want to be taped, I will not be able to participate in the study.
4. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by last name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. Subsequent uses of records and data will be subject to standard data use policies which protect the anonymity of individuals and institutions.
5. The Risk for participating in this study are minimal. There may be no direct benefits for me as a participant in this project. The only costs I have to take is my time for participating. Not participating or choosing to leave the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits for me.
6. The University of St. Gallen Ethics Committee protects the right of people in research studies. The Ethics Review Board may review study records from time to time to be sure that people in research studies are being treated fairly and that the study is being carried out as planned.
7. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
8. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

My Signature

Date

My Printed Name

Signature of the Investigator

For further information, please contact:

Daniel Dietrich, Institute for Customer Insight, University of St. Gallen
Bahnhofstr. 8, CH-9000 St. Gallen
daniel.dietrich@unisg.ch

Appendix B8: Grounded Theory Codebook

In-Vivo Codes	Concepts	Categories
56	mainstream co-optation	Causes for Brand Meaning Contestation
37	unethical brand conduct	
24	poor brand service / product quality	
18	disappointing /unprofessional brand interaction	
18	unappealing brand appearance	
17	inappropriate value proposition / statement	
15	aging brand meaning (non-innovative)	
15	countercultural brand adoption (e.g. hipsters)	
12	collective brand appropriation	
11	changing brand strategy / leadership	
11	co-creation (customisation or modification)	
7	prominent brand rejection (opinion leader)	
5	unsustainable business practices	
49	being too mainstream	Cognitions and Social Brand Rumours
31	being an untrustworthy / inauthentic brand	
26	social rumours (neg. word-of-mouth)	
15	being related to (un-)desired consumers	
7	being irrelevant / outdated	
33	collective brand consumption	Constraints for Brand Meaning Alterations
31	negative consumer-brand connection	
24	functional brand perception	
23	positive consumer-brand connection	
22	ambiguity of consumption purpose	
16	early brand adoption (lead user)	
14	anti-show-off attitude	
8	holistic consumer appearance (brand interplay)	Contestation Context Factors
62	occurrence of consumption (place & time)	
59	public visibility (product and symbol)	
49	consumer life situation / goals	
23	product category / brand market share	
19	presence of the brand symbol (attribution)	
17	duration of brand experience (trend)	
15	frequency of brand exposure (touchpoints)	
13	repeatedly (negative) brand interactions	
12	brand abandonment over time (identity shift)	
7	political / socio-cultural development	Contestation Contingency Factors
5	cultural consumer socialisation	
39	public / social media attention	
37	quality vs. price orientation	
12	transaction costs for brand change (idleness)	
8	opinion of social media influencer	
6	substitutability (necessity of brand consumption)	
4	public knowledge spread about contestation	
3	degree of consumer-brand involvement	
3	intervention (marketing / brand communications)	

In-Vivo Codes	Concepts	Categories
25	active brand communication (desired associations)	Counteraction Strategies (Legal Brand Owner)
21	strategic brand endorsement (opinion leader)	
19	changing brand symbols / design (re-branding)	
19	creative brand twist (re-shaping)	
18	distancing from disfavoured brand customers	
14	subdividing / segmenting brands	
12	satisfying / orchestrating old and new customers	
9	await abatement of media attention (slow rebuild)	
9	utilise meaning contestation (brand growth)	
8	flexible and fast brand adjustment	
8	ensuring / increasing brand transparency	
7	revitalising brand meanings	
7	exemplifying intended brand utilisation	
5	releasing brand control (accept co-creation)	
4	apologising for brand misconduct (publicly)	
4	offering compensation / redemption	
3	accepting new (unintended) customers	
2	avoiding merely objective justifications	
1	understanding contestations (market research)	
116	stereotyping brand consumers	Disruption of Brand Meanings
73	signalling collective identity (social class)	
57	signalling self-identity (personal traits)	
51	identifying (self-brand identity construction)	
49	consumer-brand stereotypes	
26	conspicuous brand consumption	
23	status consumption	Forecasting Strategies (Legal Brand Owner)
38	identifying trend waves (brand relevance)	
3	foreseeing contestation contingencies	
3	tracing core customers	Negotiation of Brand Meanings
77	standing-out: differing from social peers	
61	differing from social out-groups	
47	adjusting to social peers (following)	
42	propagating experiences / brand meanings	
36	social pressuring (group norms)	
34	fitting-in: assimilating to social in-group	
20	reconsidering self-brand relations	
13	comparing and coping (brand practices)	
11	dissuading peers from brand usage	
8	neglecting others opinion	
7	isolating brand meanings and personality traits	
5	accepting brand consumption of peers	
4	individualising branded products	
3	competing (mutual outperformance)	
3	making fun of (stereotypical) brand consumers	

In-Vivo Codes	Concepts	Categories
20	modified brand perceptions (meanings)	Outcomes of Brand Meaning Disruption
17	reaching the tipping point (behavioural change)	
15	contradictive consumer habits (brand utilisation)	
8	selective brand consumption	
5	brand meaning dilution	
5	improved brand value (market share)	
5	retention of target customers	
3	alienated target customers	
2	altered brand practices (consumption habits)	
1	cutback of brand community backing	
65	observing consumption habits	Perception of Brand Meanings
60	exchanging idiosyncratic perceptions	
55	sharing experiences (suggestions by social peers)	
43	informing (discovering / substantiating insights)	
36	debating brand meanings	
30	associating brand features	
23	social criticising (confrontation)	
8	mismatching of brand and customers	
7	challenging motives for brand consumption	
35	being authentic / building trust	Prevention Strategies (Legal Brand Owner)
9	establishing a timeless brand	
6	promoting positive brand experiences	
4	creating a strong brand community	
4	ensuring brand service quality	
55	retaining brand habits (perception-action gap)	Reaction to Disrupted Brand Meanings
34	rejecting brands (engaging in disruptions)	
26	terminating brand usage / self-brand relation	
19	defending brand consumption (legitimising)	
17	distancing from contesting brand users	
16	detaching brands (from extended self)	
15	avoiding brand consumption	
14	passivating brand consumption	
12	resisting against brand disruption (active)	
6	promoting disrupted brands (propagandising)	
5	adopting brands (into extended self)	
3	supporting brand meaning disruptions	
1	disposing branded products	
7	boycotting brands	Specific Contestation Practices
6	social media shit-storm	
3	anti-branding / doppelgänger brand images	
254	direct quote	Supportive Codes
47	picture stimulation	
37	hated / disfavoured brands	
27	beloved / favoured brands	

Appendix C: Study 3 – Brand Protection Measures

Appendix C1: Overview of Expert Interviews

#	Participant	Company	Position	Industry	Date	Duration	Mode	Reference
EI-1	Alexander Dirrheimer	FWU Group (AtlanticLux)	Global Head of Marketing	Insurance	25.04.2018, 08:00 am	55 min.	phone	M1, M2, M4, M6, M8
EI-2	Sonja Baumann	Zimmerli	Head of Brand Communications	Fashion	25.04.2018, 10:00 am	51 min.	phone	M1, M3, M5, M8, M9
EI-3	Ariane Ehrat	Lenzerheide Bergbahnen	Strategy and Business Development	Tourism	27.04.2018, 08:35 am	20 min.	phone	M1, M4, M6, M8
EI-4	Anonym	German Car Manufacturer	Team Lead Client Segmentation	Automotive	27.04.2018, 09:00 am	41 min.	phone	M1, M2, M3, M5, M8
EI-5	Lars Zipins	Beiersdorf (Nivea)	Head of Global NIVEA Brand Management	Personal Care	27.04.2018, 02:00 pm	62 min.	phone	M2, M3, M4, M8, M9
EI-6	Michael Sellen	DHL Group	Group Head of Digital Coordination Team	Logistics	27.04.2018, 04:00 pm	47 min.	phone	M2, M5, M7, M8
EI-7	Rudolf Blankschön	SBB	Head of Brand Management/Experience	Rail Transport	01.05.2018, 03:00 pm	38 min.	phone	M1, M5, M6, M7, M8
EI-8	Katja Kleebach	Hermès	Head of Marketing and Communications	Luxuries	02.05.2018, 10:00 am	62 min.	phone	M1, M2, M4, M5
EI-9	Jan Becker	E-Commerce Company	Team Lead Brand Strategy	Online Retailing	07.05.2018, 10:00 am	48 min.	phone	M1, M2, M4, M8, M9
EI-10	Mirko Mandić	YourPosition	Head of Sales	Marketing Agency	07.05.2018, 01:00 pm	37 min.	face-to-face	M2, M3, M4, M5, M8
EI-11	Oliver Brunschweiler	Freitag	Head of Brand Communications	Fashion	07.05.2018, 03:00 pm	44 min.	face-to-face	M3, M4, M5, M6, M8
EI-12	Julian Trautwein	Airbnb	Head of Communications DACH and CEE	Lodging	08.05.2018, 09:00 am	48 min.	phone	M1, M2, M4, M7, M8
EI-13	Philipp Hausmaninger	Red Bull	Head of Marketing Germany	Beverages	08.05.2018, 02:00 pm	61 min.	phone	M1, M2, M4, M5, M8
EI-14	Filip Good	GoPro	Senior Director of Marketing EMEA	Electronics	08.05.2018, 04:00 pm	59 min.	phone	M1, M3, M4, M5, M8
EI-15	Roland Bienz	Electrolux	Marketing Director	Home Appliances	09.05.2018, 08:00 am	54 min.	phone	M2, M3, M4, M5, M9
EI-16	Daniel Reiser	Zalando	Lead Strategic Projects	Online Retailing	09.05.2018, 11:00 am	51 min.	phone	M1, M2, M4, M5
EI-17	Alexander Engelhardt	Telekom	Vice President Brand Management	Communications	11.05.2018, 10:00 am	68 min.	phone	M2, M3, M4, M7, M8
EI-18	Michael Jahn	Wikimedia	Head of Communications and Partnerships	Knowledge	11.05.2018, 12:00 am	55 min.	phone	M2, M3, M4, M5, M8
EI-19	Siroon Hirzel	Uber	Marketing and Communications Manager	Transportation	14.05.2018, 02:00 pm	54 min.	phone	M1, M2, M3, M4, M8
EI-20	Jessica Nowak	Hilti	Head of Corporate Brand/Communications	Manufacturing	15.05.2018, 05:00 pm	68 min.	phone	M1, M4, M5, M6, M7
EI-21	Kilian Wagner	VIU	Co-Founder and Chief Executive Officer	Eyewear	17.05.2018, 01:30 pm	14 min.	face-to-face	M1, M3, M5, M8, M9
EI-22	Thomas Gronbach	Dropbox	Marketing Manager	Data Storage	17.05.2018, 02:00 pm	51 min.	phone	M1, M5, M7, M8
EI-23	Thomas Clemens	DHL Group	Senior Manager Digital Brand Strategy	Logistics	18.05.2018, 10:00 am	62 min.	phone	M2, M4, M6, M7, M8
EI-24	Francesca Krist	Credit Suisse	Head of Branding	Banking	18.05.2018, 01:25 pm	49 min.	face-to-face	M1, M2, M5, M6, M7
EI-25	Deniz Keskin	Porsche	Director Brand Management	Automotive	30.05.2018, 08:30 am	31 min.	phone	M1, M2, M4, M5, M8
EI-26	Marc Diegelmann	B. Braun	Director Corporate Brand Management	Healthcare	01.06.2018, 01:30 pm	59 min.	phone	M1, M3, M4, M5, M8
EI-27	Flurina Cantieni	Vitra	Group Marketing and Communications	Design Furniture	12.06.2018, 03:00 pm	37 min.	phone	M1, M3, M4, M7, M8
EI-28	Olaf Gens	REWE Group	Divisional Director Market Research	Retailing	12.06.2018, 04:00 pm	48 min.	phone	M1, M3, M5, M8
EI-29	Marc Oltmann	Adidas	Director Brand Communications Sport/Style	Sportswear	19.06.2018, 11:00 am	36 min.	phone	M2, M4, M7, M8, M9
EI-30	Günaz Meyenburg	Essity (Tempo)	Global Marketing/Communications Director	Consumer Goods	21.06.2018, 04:00 pm	54 min.	phone	M2, M5, M6, M8, M9
EI-31	Arjan Sissing	DHL Group	Senior VP Group Brand Marketing	Logistics	26.06.2018, 05:00 pm	44 min.	phone	M2, M5, M6, M7, M8

Appendix C2: Expert Interview Guide

Project: Contested Brands – Practical Implications and Marketing Measurements

Interview Procedure:

The purpose of this expert interview is to reveal marketers' perspective on brand meaning contestations and to develop a set of potential measures to forecast, prevent, and counteract the contingency of contested brands. This includes the analysis of outcomes and risks with regard to brand contestations. Moreover, the need for brand control and monitoring will be investigated. The expert interview seeks for an open discussion and a sharing of individual experiences. Participants may choose not to answer any or all of the questions. The procedure involves audio-recording, transcription, and anonymised data analysis. Besides, is it okay that your name, company, and job title are referred to in the publication?

Introduction

- Short introduction of the idea and different types of contested brands
- Explanation of a few contested brand case examples (e.g. A&F, BMW, Nestlé)
- Brief introduction of the participating expert (e.g. job position, brand, tasks, etc.)

Questions:

Part I: Practical contested brand experiences

- (1) Do you have any experiences with customers who took control over your brand and, thus, caused harm to your brand image (neg.) or improved your brand value (pos.)?
 - What do you think are the main reasons for consumers to contest a brand? (e.g. identity goals, anxiety reduction, lack of information, publicity, warning others)
 - Who are the most dangerous stakeholders to adopt your brand for their purposes?
 - Which are the greatest risks of customers taking control over your brand?
 - How important is brand co-creation for your perspective on brand management?

Part II: Forecasting methods

- (2) How do you track the adoption of your brand by undesired customers?
 - Which media monitoring tools are you using and how are they operating?
 - By what means can social or public media shitstorms be identified?
 - How can consumers be identified who display strong negative or positive brand attitudes?
- (3) Which information are required to forecast potential brand contestations?
 - What are relevant indicators and how can you measure them?
 - Which trends do you expect for the future of brand monitoring and how will these change current marketing practices? (e.g. machine learning, trend recognition, social media listening)

Part III: Prevention strategies

- (4) How do you prevent your brand from being taken over by undesired customers?
 - What marketing measures protect a brand from unexpected meaning alterations?
 - How to make a brand stable against external shocks that reduce your brand control?
 - Which brand associations are the least contestable, attackable, or dispersible?
 - How can you prevent conflicting customer segments to influence each other?

- (5) Is it reasonable to release parts of your brand control to other market actors in order to make your brand more robust or anti-fragile against external shocks? If so, why?
- Does a looser brand control enable you to react more dynamically on market events?
 - Under what conditions can customer-brand self-regulations be constructive?
 - What risks do you think come along with the strategy of dispensing brand control?

Part IV: Counteraction measures

- (6) After being attacked by stakeholders: How do you usually deal with such situations? Which are the most important factors regarding your reaction strategy?
- Is there a standard procedure or course of action brand managers have to follow?
 - What do you think about the following counteraction strategies?
 - Situation selection (e.g. ignoring, denial, evasion of responsibility)
 - Situation modification (e.g. apologising and offering remedies or corrections)
 - Attention deployment (e.g. redirecting attention to the positive aspects)
 - Cognitive change (e.g. offering different appraisals to the situation)
 - Response modulation (e.g. offering an alternative channel of communication)
 - How do you react if your company/your employees/your partners/your testimonials misbehave and, therefore, create performance or value discrepancies (= gaps between customers' expectations and their actual experiences)?
- (7) How can you intervene if undesired customers start consuming your brand and, thus, alienate your target customers or harm your brand meaning?
- What marketing/communication measures can you utilise to counteract such contestations?
 - Could you think about different counteraction strategies for the short and long term?
 - What are your personal experiences with best and worst practices of countermeasures?
 - How may future counteraction opportunities look like (e.g. technology driven)?

Part IV: Further outlook and market trends

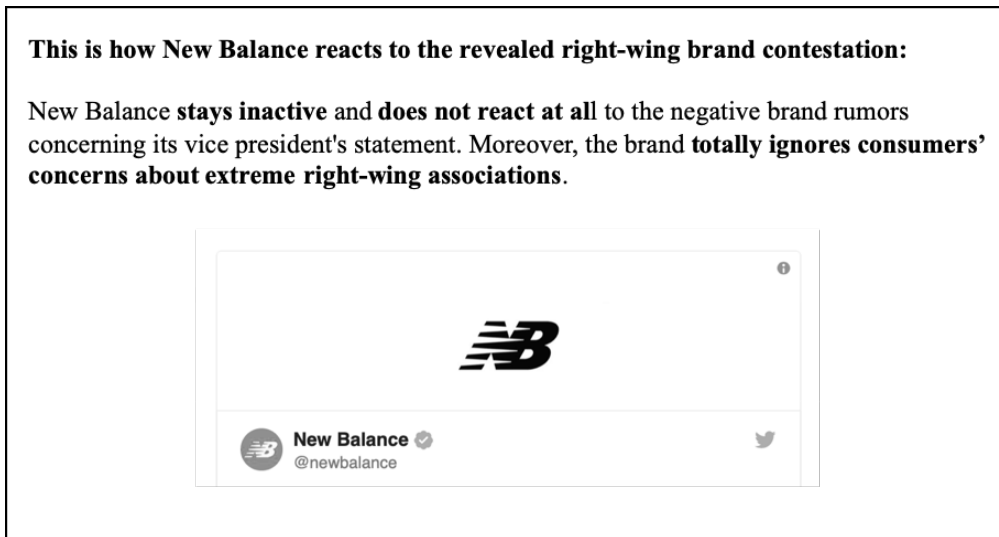
- (8) Are there any further questions, market trends, or personal experiences that you would like to raise or share?

Conclusion:

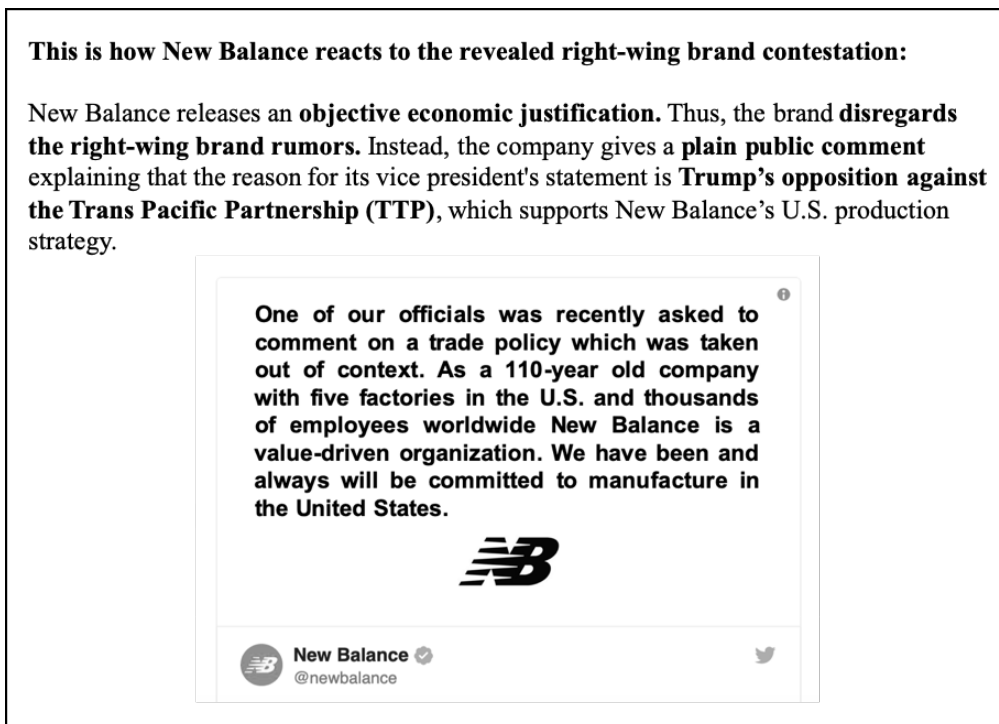
Thank you very much for participating in this expert interview. I appreciate your contribution to the present research project. In return for your effort I am pleased to send you current research insights in form of an article on the topic of contested brands, which was recently published in a Swiss research series. Again, please let me assure the agreed confidentiality of your responses. If you have any further questions, feel free to contact me via mail at daniel.dietrich@unisg.ch.

Appendix C3: Experimental Groups and Manipulations*

Control Group (Ignorance and Inactivity):



Treatment Group 1 (Rational Business Justification):



*The comprehensive experimental set-up, scenario description, and its visualisation for participants are available electronically and can be provided on request.

Treatment Group 2 (Empathy and Emotional Excuse):

This is how New Balance reacts to the revealed right-wing brand contestation:

New Balance shows **great empathy** to consumers' concerns and **publicly apologizes** for its vice president's statement. The brand **clearly distances itself from any extreme right-wing association**. Moreover, the company **emotionally ensures an equal treatment of humans from all cultures, religions, races, genders, and sexual orientations**.

New Balance does not tolerate bigotry or hate in any form. Therefore, we totally understand our consumers' concerns about the recent comment of one of our officials. We sincerely apologize for the misleading message and we will take the necessary internal consequences. New Balance is a value-driven firm that treats all humans equal independent of their culture, race, gender, or sexual orientation. We have been and always will be committed to humanity, integrity, community and mutual respect for all people around the world.



Treatment Group 3 (Release of Brand Control):

This is how New Balance reacts to the revealed right-wing brand contestation:

New Balance **shows great appreciation** for the public rumors about its vice president's statement. The brand **moderates a value-driven dialogue** between consumers and **clarifies its intolerance of any kind of socio-cultural discrimination**. Moreover, the company **encourages its customers to shape the brand and transform it into a strong symbol against right-wing extremism**.

New Balance appreciates the public dialogue in response of the recent comment of one of our officials. It is more than important to raise voice against extreme right-wing ideologies. In line with our brand-values, we do not tolerate any form of socio-cultural discrimination. Thus, we would like our consumers to shape the New Balance brand with us and make it a strong symbol against right-wing extremism.



Appendix C4: Experimental Core Constructs*

Scale	Items
Self-Brand Connection strongly disagree (1) – strongly agree (5) (Escalas & Bettman, 2003)	- New Balance reflects who I am. - I can identify with New Balance. - I feel a personal connection to New Balance. - I (can) use New Balance to communicate who I am to other people. - I think New Balance could help me become the type of person I want to be. - I consider New Balance to be “me” (it reflects who I consider myself to be or the way that I want to present myself to others). - New Balance suits me well.
Negative Consumer-Brand Relationship (Hatred) describes poorly (1) – describes well (5) (Johnson et al., 2010)	- New Balance is my enemy. - I am a fanatic against New Balance. - It would please me to know I have inflicted harm on the firm that makes New Balance. - I would be willing to expend effort to weaken or destroy New Balance. - Helping New Balance fail would be a source of satisfaction for me. - I would consider breaking the law if it meant hurting New Balance.
Brand Attachment (focus on brand-self connection items) not at all (1) – completely (5) (Park et al., 2010).	- To what extent is New Balance part of you and who you are? - To what extent do you feel personally connected to New Balance? - To what extent do you feel emotionally bonded to New Balance? - To what extent is New Balance part of you? - To what extent does New Balance say something to other people about who you are?

*Further experimental constructs of the covariates and the demographic variables are available electronically and can be provided on request.

Appendix C5: Statistical Analysis of Experimental Data

Experimental Data Analysis – Statistical Outputs (SPSS)

1. Descriptive Data Analysis*

Descriptive Statistics									
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
SBC_DV	163	1	5	2.638	1.102	.189	.190	-1.113	.378
NegBR_DV	163	1	5	1.821	1.121	1.165	.190	-.028	.378
BATTA_DV	163	1	5	2.287	1.207	.427	.190	-1.138	.378
BFAM	163	1	5	3.597	.941	-.713	.190	.215	.378
BATT	163	1	7	5.603	1.085	-.912	.190	1.384	.378
BESC	163	1	7	4.090	1.716	-.198	.190	-1.010	.378
BM_SI	163	1	7	3.780	1.846	-.013	.190	-1.273	.378
BM_GI	163	1	7	3.533	1.798	.044	.190	-1.187	.378
BM_SS	163	1	7	3.256	1.798	.213	.190	-1.244	.378
BM_PV	163	1	7	4.050	1.654	-.324	.190	-.769	.378
BM_NH	163	1	7	3.488	1.481	.204	.190	-.756	.378
PRE_KNWO	163	1	5	1.883	1.302	1.118	.190	-.236	.378
D_AGE	163	18	78	38.374	11.908	.806	.190	.170	.378
D_GENDER	163	1	2	1.485	.501	.062	.190	-2.021	.378
D_EDUCATION	163	1	5	3.123	.792	.004	.190	-.535	.378
D_INCOME	163	0	7	3.074	1.585	.358	.190	-.156	.378
D_ETHNICITY	163	1	5	1.521	1.008	1.697	.190	1.456	.378
D_NATIONALITY	163	5	7	6.006	.136	2.350	.190	52.764	.378
D_POLITIC	163	1	5	2.877	1.175	.103	.190	-.867	.378
Valid N (listwise)	163								

Table C5-1: Descriptive Statistics of Experimental Variables (own illustration).

2. Graphical Data Analysis

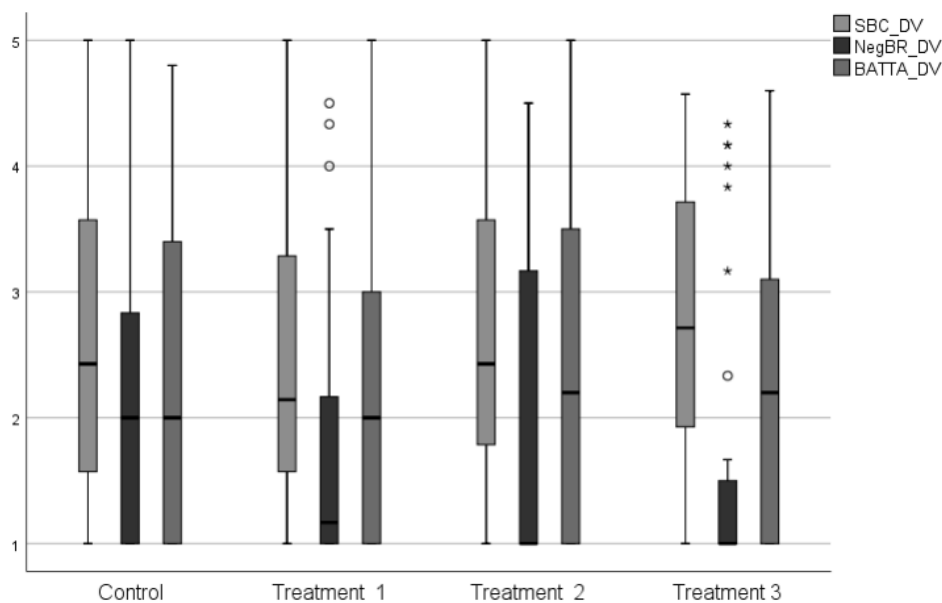


Figure C5-1: Boxplot of Core Constructs Across Experimental Groups (own illustration).

*The detailed list of all variables and their explanations is available electronically and can be provided on request.

3. Statistical Analysis of Hypothesis H₁

Between-Subjects Factors		
		N
GROUP_C_T	0	41
	1	122

Descriptive Statistics			
Dependent Variable: NegBR_DV			
GROUP_C_T	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
0	2.08130	1.173860	41
1	1.73361	1.093150	122
Total	1.82106	1.120571	163

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances ^{a,b}					
		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
NegBR_DV	Based on Mean	.530	1	161	.468
	Based on Median	1.436	1	161	.232
	Based on Median and with adjusted df	1.436	1	146.460	.233
	Based on trimmed mean	.636	1	161	.426
Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.					
a. Dependent variable: NegBR_DV					
b. Design: Intercept + GROUP_C_T					

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: NegBR_DV						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	3.710 ^a	1	3.710	2.991	.086	.018
Intercept	446.606	1	446.606	360.039	.000	.691
GROUP_C_T	3.710	1	3.710	2.991	.086	.018
Error	199.710	161	1.240			
Total	743.972	163				
Corrected Total	203.420	162				

a. R Squared = .018 (Adjusted R Squared = .012)

Table C5-2: Analysis of Variance for Hypothesis H₁(own illustration).

Between-Subjects Factors		
		N
GROUP_C_T	0	41
	1	122

Descriptive Statistics			
Dependent Variable: NegBR_DV			
GROUP_C_T	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
0	2.08130	1.173860	41
1	1.73361	1.093150	122
Total	1.82106	1.120571	163

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances ^a			
Dependent Variable: NegBR_DV			
F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.168	1	161	.281
Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.			
a. Design: Intercept + BFAM + PRE_KNWO + D_POLITIC + BM_SI + BM_GI + BM_PV + D_AGE + D_GENDER + D_ETHNICITY + GROUP_C_T			

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: NegBR_DV						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	117.456 ^a	10	11.746	20.768	.000	.577
Intercept	.218	1	.218	.385	.536	.003
BFAM	.951	1	.951	1.682	.197	.011
PRE_KNWO	22.246	1	22.246	39.335	.000	.206
D_POLITIC	.138	1	.138	.245	.621	.002
BM_SI	1.363	1	1.363	2.409	.123	.016
BM_GI	7.507	1	7.507	13.274	.000	.080
BM_PV	4.177	1	4.177	7.386	.007	.046
D_AGE	.301	1	.301	.532	.467	.003
D_GENDER	1.006	1	1.006	1.779	.184	.012
D_ETHNICITY	2.556	1	2.556	4.519	.035	.029
GROUP_C_T	2.748	1	2.748	4.859	.029	.031
Error	85.964	152	.566			
Total	743.972	163				
Corrected Total	203.420	162				

a. R Squared = .577 (Adjusted R Squared = .550)

Table C5-3: Analysis of Covariance for Hypothesis H₁ (own illustration).

4. Statistical Analysis of Hypothesis H₂

Between-Subjects Factors		
		N
GROUP_T1_T2	1	44
	2	43

Descriptive Statistics			
Dependent Variable: BATTA_DV			
GROUP_T1_T2	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
1	2.15455	1.113857	44
2	2.42791	1.265349	43
Total	2.28966	1.192129	87

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances ^a				
Dependent Variable: BATTA_DV				
F	df1	df2	Sig.	
.011	1	85	.916	

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + BFAM + PRE_KNWO + D_POLITIC + BESC + BM_GI + BM_SS + D_AGE + D_GENDER + D_ETHNICITY + GROUP_T1_T2

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: BATTA_DV						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	65.613 ^a	10	6.561	8.809	.000	.537
Intercept	.868	1	.868	1.165	.284	.015
BFAM	1.549	1	1.549	2.079	.153	.027
PRE_KNWO	3.291	1	3.291	4.418	.039	.055
D_POLITIC	.000	1	.000	.000	.986	.000
BESC	6.163	1	6.163	8.275	.005	.098
BM_GI	.099	1	.099	.133	.717	.002
BM_SS	1.470	1	1.470	1.974	.164	.025
D_AGE	.174	1	.174	.233	.630	.003
D_GENDER	5.449	1	5.449	7.316	.008	.088
D_ETHNICITY	.507	1	.507	.680	.412	.009
GROUP_T1_T2	5.276	1	5.276	7.083	.009	.085
Error	56.607	76	.745			
Total	578.320	87				
Corrected Total	122.221	86				

a. R Squared = .537 (Adjusted R Squared = .476)

Table C5-4: Analysis of Covariance for Hypothesis H₂ (own illustration).

5. Statistical Analysis of Hypothesis H₃

Between-Subjects Factors		
		N
GROUP_T12_T3	0	87
	1	35

Descriptive Statistics			
Dependent Variable: SBC_DV			
GROUP_T12_T3	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
0	2,561576355	1,070995063	87
1	2,775510204	1,039603370	35
Total	2,622950820	1,062249635	122

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances ^a				
Dependent Variable: SBC_DV				
F	df1	df2	Sig.	
.340	1	120	.561	

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + BFAM + PRE_KNWO + D_POLITIC + BESC + BM_GI + BM_SS + D_AGE + D_GENDER + D_ETHNICITY + GROUP_T12_T3

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects						
Dependent Variable: SBC_DV						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	59.667 ^a	10	5.967	8.616	.000	.437
Intercept	3.476	1	3.476	5.019	.027	.043
BFAM	.006	1	.006	.009	.925	.000
PRE_KNWO	3.003	1	3.003	4.337	.040	.038
D_POLITIC	1.911	1	1.911	2.760	.099	.024
BESC	5.942	1	5.942	8.580	.004	.072
BM_GI	1.280	1	1.280	1.849	.177	.016
BM_SS	.001	1	.001	.001	.977	.000
D_AGE	.072	1	.072	.103	.748	.001
D_GENDER	1.774	1	1.774	2.562	.112	.023
D_ETHNICITY	.318	1	.318	.459	.499	.004
GROUP_T12_T3	1.670	1	1.670	2.412	.123	.021
Error	76.866	111	.692			
Total	975.878	122				
Corrected Total	136.533	121				

a. R Squared = .437 (Adjusted R Squared = .386)

Table C5-5: Analysis of Covariance for Hypothesis H₃ (own illustration).

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Daniel Dietrich
Date of Birth June 13, 1990
Place of Birth Munich, Germany

Educational Background

02/2016 – 10/2019 University of St.Gallen (HSG), St.Gallen, Switzerland
Ph.D. in Management
08/2013 – 01/2014 University of British Columbia (UBC), Vancouver, Canada
Master Studies Abroad
10/2012 – 06/2015 Technical University of Munich (TUM), Munich, Germany
Master of Science in 'Management and Technology'
08/2011 – 01/2012 Singapore Management University (SMU), Singapore
Bachelor Studies Abroad
10/2009 – 10/2012 Technical University of Munich (TUM), Munich, Germany
Bachelor of Science in 'Management and Technology'

Professional Experience

10/2019 – today HSG Institute for Customer Insight, St.Gallen, Switzerland
Project Leader & University Lecturer
10/2015 – 10/2019 HSG Institute for Customer Insight, St.Gallen, Switzerland
Research Associate
07/2014 – 09/2015 TUM School of Management, Munich, Germany
Research Assistant
04/2014 – 08/2015 Linde AG, Munich, Germany
Internship & Working Student
03/2013 – 04/2013 German Academy of Science and Engineering, Munich, Germany
Internship
03/2012 – 06/2012 OSRAM AG, Munich, Germany
Applied Research Project