



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, ECONOMICS AND LAW

From Way Out West to Veg Out West

- *A study on changes to a key brand property and brand meaning negotiation on social media.*

Master Degree Project - Msc in Marketing & Consumption
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Abstract

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the brand meaning negotiation process on social media, using the case of the Way out West brand that changed a key brand property in 2012. We aim to uncover dynamics and reasons for why and how the brand's meaning has been negotiated, and the influence social media has had by expanding on previous research, most notably Giesler (2012) research findings on brand meaning negotiation.

Design/Methodology/Approach

Since the purpose was to investigate brand meaning negotiation on social media, netnography was utilised to investigate the public space debate in order to gather material, which was then interpreted through a hermeneutic interpretive research approach.

Findings

Consumers displayed a strong reaction on social media both for and against the festival's decision to change a key brand property, and that the negative crowd quickly disappeared from the conversation. A second finding was that identity creation seemed to be the main motivator behind the actions of consumers.

Originality/Value

This article adds to the existing literature on brand meaning negotiation by illustrating the dynamics in the context of social media, while showing how consumers utilise the process for their identity creation.

Keywords: Brand meaning negotiation, Sign values, Social media, Identity creation.

Introduction

Brands are not static, but instead continuously evolving and constantly changing (Kapferer, 2011; Kornberger, 2010; Iglesias, Ind & Alfaro, 2013), either on purpose through managerial orders, or due to social and cultural influences, and pressure from stakeholders. But what actually happens when a brand decides to change a key brand property? Imagine that Volvo e.g. decides to only produce race cars, or that Starbucks decides to only offer take away coffee.

Based on previous research in the area (Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018; Giesler, 2012), we expect a negotiation from stakeholders regarding what the brand's new meaning is, perhaps new competing brand meanings and brand images may arise, i.e. the perception of the brand's meaning will most likely change. Therefore, we argue that when a brand

changes a key brand property, its brand meaning should change as well in a socially negotiated process. This is because brand meaning is, according to Gaustad, Samuelsen, Warlop & Fitzsimons (2018) "... derived from brand perceptions and incorporates people's beliefs, feelings, and expectations toward a brand; it is an overall assessment of what a brand represents in the minds of consumers" (P. 819). Tierney, Karpen and Westberg (2016) proposed another definition, stating that brand meaning is "an idiosyncratic and evolving emotional and cognitive understanding attributed to a brand as a result of a socially negotiated process" (P. 914). Brodie, Benson-Rea & Medlin (2017) also emphasise this by claiming that "...brands are socially constructed in a process in which the identity serves as a basis for developing meanings" (P. 187).

But how is brand meaning negotiated when a brand changes a key brand property? Based on Giesler's (2012) study

on the brand meaning negotiation process for a new brand, there should be various phases where initially, managers propose a brand meaning and conduct efforts to legitimise it, then other stakeholders may contest it, propose additional new brand meanings and try to legitimise them. The brand owners may then try to legitimise their perspective(-s) again by using new evidence to back it up. Giesler (2012) argues that this process is for new technological innovations and brands. However, we can implicitly see a similar process happening for existing brands that change their brand meaning. Meaning that a similar process should be in action when a brand changes a key brand property.

We currently know little about the process of brand meaning negotiation on social media, and how brand managers can use it in order to implement changes to their brands' meanings. In our opinion, the current research in this area all focuses too much on the traditional dialogue communication model, consisting of two sides taking turns discussing. We believe that a larger emphasis should be placed on new modes of communication enabled by Web 2.0 and social media. According to Tierney et al. (2016) advancements in technology as well as social and cultural changes allow consumers and stakeholders to participate and co-create meaning. This means that there has been a power shift, consumers have considerably more power to influence brands. Phan, Thomas & Heine's (2011) study on Burberry is one of the few studies on how brand meaning negotiation processes unfold on social media. In that case, content marketing was utilised in order to steer the brand meaning negotiation in a desired direction. Their study was a step forward in understanding how brand meaning negotiation and its dynamics can be controlled on social media. However, we still do not know enough about this area.

Why is brand meaning negotiation important or problematic and why do we need to look at the process behind it? This is because in practice, this socially negotiated process may improve a brand's performance or give rise to multiple brand meanings that are in strong contrast to the original meaning, and could impact the performance of a brand negatively (Giesler, 2012). In addition, Gaustad et al. (2018) found that "Brand developments risk alienating the existing customer base" (P. 818). Based on Arnould & Thompson's (2005) and Schembri et al.'s (2010) studies, we know that consumption practices and incorporating brands into one's lifestyle is seen as a form of identity creation. This leads us to believe that the identity creation aspect is one possible explanation as to why consumers and other stakeholders engage in brand meaning negotiation, and why changes to a brand may result in alienating the existing customer base. Meaning that, the brand is no longer a proper signal of their perceived identities. As such, when a brand changes its meaning, we expect a negotiation process to take place because of individuals' relationships with brands due to their perceived sign values and the importance of brands as an extension of the self (Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018; Phan, Thomas & Heine, 2011; Hartmann & Ostberg, 2013).

Tierney et al. (2016) claim that there is a need to study what practices take place, how brand meaning is co-created on different levels, and why stakeholders engage in brand meaning creation/negotiation. We argue that this is especially important in the context of digital platforms, since digital environment makes it easy to spread information and meaning (Habibi, Laroche & Richard (2014). As such, these can act as natural arenas for brand meaning negotiation processes. Furthermore, Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach (2018) claim that we need to

research cases of brands having succeeded or failed in their rebranding attempts, looking into brand meaning negotiation processes to investigate the dynamics at play.

Having examined the previous research on the area of brand meaning negotiation, and taking into account the existing research gaps, the purpose of this paper is to explore and illustrate the brand meaning negotiation process on social media when a brand changes a key brand property. In doing this, we will try to expand on the ideas about brand meaning negotiation proposed by Giesler (2012) and try to fill the research gaps. This will be done through a case study on the impact of changes to an existing brand.

The case that we have selected is the Swedish music festival Way out West (Hereafter referred to as WOW). WOW was chosen on the basis that it is a brand that has changed its meaning and a key brand property in the past and communicated it solely on social media (Jutbring, 2018; Andersson, Jutbring & Lundberg, 2013). The change in question was to only serve vegetarian food at the festival and thus, ban meat from the festival area. In the years since the change, several researchers have studied the impact of it (e.g. Jutbring, 2018; Andersson et al., 2013). However, not in terms of brand meaning negotiation. Andersson et al. (2013) argue that the change was innovative, had a positive impact on the brand, and led to a lot of controversy and publicity on both social media and mass media channels. It is worth noting that WOW has also made subsequent smaller changes, such as going milk free in collaboration with oat-drink company Oatly. However, none of these were communicated through official statements and the effects of them would therefore, be very difficult to track. When the decision to become a vegetarian festival was disclosed, outrage took place (Andersson,

et al. 2013). However, the change is not something that to our knowledge is being discussed today. Instead, there seems to be a consensus regarding the WOW brand and its meaning, as well as the festival being one of the hottest happenings of the year, as evidenced by ticket sales reaching record levels in 2017 (Viita, 2017). The main key brand property is of course the music and the artist lineup. However, we would argue that the food served at the festival can be considered a key brand property as “Festivals are now not only about seeing acts but about eating really good food.” (Festival owner Alex Trenchard, quoted in Bearne, 2016). Combining this statement with the debate that occurred following the change of the food at WOW, makes us confident that the food served at the festival is a key brand property. If it was not a key brand property, people would most likely not have cared about the change, at least not to as large a degree as was the case in 2012. According to Lawendowski & Besta (2018), music festivals are important tools for individuals to express their identities and self-develop. Because of this, we believe that there are dynamics at play that are currently under-researched which could help explain the positive outcome of the brand meaning change, making the WOW brand an interesting case for research. The core research questions that guided this study can be stated as follows:

1. *What dynamics within the process of brand meaning negotiation on social media can we find?*
2. *What are the keys to implement changes to a brand's brand meaning on social media?*

To understand this phenomenon and answer the research questions, we need to look at what we already know about brand meaning and brand meaning negotiation. Therefore, a comprehensive literature review will be presented next.

Literature Review

Brand Meaning and Sign Value

The most common definition of a brand is Keller's (1998) definition, stating that "a brand is a set of mental associations, held by the consumer, which add to the perceived value of a product or service" (quoted in Kapferer, 2011, P. 10). Kapferer (2011) adds to this by arguing that a brand is a symbol that possess the power to communicate and convey meaning. Meaning that, if it was not able to communicate meaning, it would not exist. We can see a trend of this symbolic power becoming more and more important as less and less of the consumption in today's society is done purely out of a functional need (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Kapferer, 2011; Kornberger, 2010). This means that today, a larger emphasis is placed on the symbolism of products than their core functions. Gabriel & Lang (2006) provides an interesting perspective on this as they state that "We want and buy things not because of what things can do for us, but because of what things mean to us and what they say about us" (ch.4, p.4.). Mortelmans (2005) also studied this area, and added to the area through explaining the mobile nature of sign values by stating that "[o]bjects can get different meanings according to the value people give to them in a specific context" (P. 508). As such, sign values are heavily connected to the concept of brand meaning, a link that is further explained by Tierney et al. (2016) as they quote Berry (2000), who stated that "brand meaning refers to the customer's dominant perceptions of the brand" (P. 129). This includes all signifiers of the brand's sign value. In addition, our dominant perception of a brand and its signifiers is influenced by social and cultural factors, and is not formed in solitude (Ligas & Cotte, 1999).

Brand Meaning Negotiation

Ligas & Cotte (1999) claim that a brand's meaning is influenced by three forces: marketing efforts, individual perceptions & motivations, and social influences from peers and stakeholders. Meaning that, a brand gains its symbolic value from interaction in the form of a negotiation between members of a social group. They also elaborate on the negotiation process by stating that the negotiation process is either that a person accepts and adapts to a brand meaning, alternatively develops and negotiates a new proposed brand meaning with others, or finally leaves the negotiation and uses other brands that fit the person's identity better. These findings provide us with an understanding of the dynamics that exist and the options an individual has when negotiating brand meaning. As the article is 20 years old, it is unclear if this is also the case for brand meaning negotiation processes taking place on social media. Wilner & Ghassan's (2017) elaborated on the forces suggested by Ligas & Cotte (1999) and argue that it is clear that social forces, but also cultural forces impact the perceived meaning of a brand. They discuss how the Mars brand was previously perceived as a healthy snack packed with energy, and how, due to social and cultural influences it was later seen as unhealthy and as causing obesity. Thus, the brand's positive brand meaning was changed to something negative. Another interesting contribution lies in design being seen as a symbol and tool to communicate brand meaning. This means that e.g. colours or shapes can trigger certain associations in the minds of consumers. Thellefsen & Sorensen's (2013) have another view of brand meaning negotiation, as they state that "the creation of a common consent of meaning is the creation of a brand habit which the meaning of the brand rests upon" (P. 487). This means that to create a commonly

agreed upon brand meaning, the brand has to be consistent in terms of its values and live up to expectations. By living up to its values and being consistent in living up to expectations they negotiate the brand meaning continuously. Gaustad et al. (2018) seem to agree with this idea. Both Vallaster & von Wallpach (2012) and Gaustad et al. (2018) claim that consumers have a lot of power, and as such they can be both advocates and attackers of a brand. Meaning that consumers can develop and destroy brands (Wilson, Bengtsson & Curran, 2014). Gaustad et al. (2018) found that when a brand changes, the "Brand developments risk alienating the existing customer base" (P. 818). They also state that "...consumers with a high degree of self-brand connection respond negatively to changes in brand meaning, because such changes decrease congruence between the brand and the self, and thus the brand's ability to serve as an identity signal decreases" (P. 820). As a result of the change, existing consumers of that brand's products tried to preserve the existing brand meaning that was associated with being a consumer of the brand. They also simultaneously tried to reduce and prohibit the existence and influence of new consumers on the brand, which in their mind did not fit the image of being a consumer of the brand (Gaustad et al., 2018). These findings were surprising, as it was previously believed that loyal customers were quite forgiving of changes to a brand. Another interesting implication of the study, is that this also highlights the importance of brands as extensions of the self and as tools to communicate one's identity to others.

Giesler (2012) have elaborated on how the three forces which Ligas & Cotte (1999) mentioned, works in practice, but also adds popular culture and media as another force. He found that a brands meaning is evolving in a process of contestations and legitimisations (in this

case the Botox brand). He found that stakeholders and the managers may have differing brand meaning perceptions but that they all try to legitimize their viewpoints, and can do so in many different ways. He elaborates that brands "...evolve in the course of contestations between the images promoted by the innovator and doppelgänger brand images promoted by other stakeholders" (P. 11). This process is however, not mentioned or researched to our knowledge by other authors. This paper is important as it contributes to our understanding on what the brand meaning negotiation process looks like, as well as the tools that stakeholders use to negotiate. Moreover, if a brand meaning is not agreed upon there may be a discrepancy which gives rise to doppelgänger brand images (Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel (2006). Meaning multiple brand meanings may exist simultaneously. It is defined as "a family of disparaging images and meanings about a brand that circulate throughout popular culture" (P. 50). This quote also highlight Ligas & Cotte's (1999) findings that brand meaning is shaped by individuals, social interaction and marketers. Hollenbeck & Zinkhan (2010) seems to be in line with Giesler's (2012) findings, as they found that stakeholders can have differing brand meanings between themselves. This means that a unified and agreed upon brand meaning cannot exist, but instead multiple brand meanings are always present due to individuals' ability to decode information, which is however in slight contrast to Giesler's (2012) findings. Tierney et al. (2016) further explains that brand meaning is thus shaped by the decoding process of individuals and their persuasive influence on one another. These multiple brand meanings are related to Doppelgänger brand images as previously mentioned by Giesler (2012).

Other authors have studied discrepancies in brand meaning and found

that when a brand's meaning changes it may result in brand and anti-brand communities (Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, [2010](#); Holt, [2002](#)). These are the results of consumers' identity creation, that they want to create their own identities using brands as resources. Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel ([2006](#)) found that consumers engage in anti-brands, and create alternative brand meanings and doppelgänger brand images in order to enhance their identities. Thus, consumers use brand meanings to communicate their identities. An example of this and one of the most recent studies on brand meaning negotiation is Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach's ([2018](#)) study on the failed rebranding attempt by Gap. When the brand changed their logo, which we argue was a key brand property, consumer outrage took place, and contested the new logo and thus its brand meaning as they did not want to be associated with the new brand meaning. A reason for this was that "the digital environment also amplifies their reactions causing firestorms with an immediate speed" (p.465). This resulted in the company being forced to surrender and changing the logo back to the original. This paper thus also implicitly highlights the contestation phases a brand faces when they are evolving or changing their brand as mentioned by Giesler ([2012](#)). Another interesting finding from the paper is that "the findings demonstrate the broad variety of individually and collectively constructed brand meanings, which emerged from social interactions within and between different stakeholder groups" (P. 463). This is thus, in line with Giesler ([2012](#)) and Thompson, Rindfleisch and Arsel ([2006](#)) findings that multiple brand meanings may arise.

Brand Meaning Negotiation on Social Media

When it comes to brand meaning negotiations on social media we honestly

do not know much about it. Because of this, we expect some differences to arise. Most of the relevant literature covers rebranding attempts that are taking place on social media channels and is not focusing on contestations and legitimisation processes as those proposed by Giesler ([2012](#)). Habibi, Laroche & Richard ([2014](#)) studied how social media networks are ideal sites for brand communities as they allow social interaction between individuals and also marketing efforts from the brand. Furthermore, the authors Rosenthal & Brito ([2017](#)) used Kapferer's brand identity prism to determine facets of brand meaning creation on Facebook for three different brands in Brazil. This method allowed them to map out perceived brand meanings of three brands, but did not touch upon the negotiation process and dynamics that help form them. An article that however did so is Phan, Thomas & Heine's ([2011](#)) study of the British luxury brand Burberry. They investigated how the brand's dominant brand meaning changed from fashion icon, to being the streetwear for hooligans, and then back to a successful luxury brand. The main contribution from the article is how social media can be used to negotiate brand meaning, and that even if consumers and stakeholders are co-creators it is the brand managers that steers the direction of the conversation and negotiation of brand meaning through content marketing. Other authors such as Escalas & Bettman ([2015](#)) state that in today's digitalised world, using celebrity endorsement and advocates is a highly effective tool when trying to influence and shape a brand's perceived meaning on social media. In contrast, Presi, Maehle & Kleppe ([2016](#)) researched how consumers can contribute to shape overall brand meanings through their visual communication on social media. They found that consumers can construct and deconstruct brand meanings through

taking selfies together with their branded products and experiences, and communicating it to others for approval. This ultimately means that they shape the overall brand meaning of a brand and as a result try to extend their identities through a brand. Something which is also touched upon by Belk (2013) and Doster (2013). They state that through new technology we extend our selves virtually through leaving cues to who we are online, instead of through our worldly material possessions. This means that new technology have changed our process of forming and communicating our identities to others. Similar findings are proposed by Kornum et al. (2017) who found that the relationship between brands and brand communities can create synergies but also conflicts. Similar to the findings of Gaustad et al. (2018) about consumer roles mentioned previously. This means that, the power-dynamics between brand owners and stakeholders have changed.

To summarise, the findings from the above mentioned articles mean that we need to understand that self-identity creations and social interactions with others need to be better understood when we try to illustrate the brand meaning negotiation on social media, when a brand changes a key brand property due to social signifiers that brands inherently are.

Method

Due to the purpose of this paper we needed to investigate a subject, in this case a brand that has changed its brand meaning in the past, and as previously mentioned we argue that WOW is an ideal subject to study for this specific reason. Because of this, a case study approach (Yin, 2003) was utilised. In addition, we wanted to explore and illustrate how brand meaning negotiation works on social media and since WOW's change of brand meaning was communicated solely on Social media,

the festival was considered to be a good subject for this case study. Moreover, we needed to find an appropriate method to gather material from social media to explore and analyse. A netnographic study was deemed suitable in order to understand the brand meaning negotiation surrounding the festival, as it allows us to investigate this online process (Flick, 2013).

Netnography entails studying and observing people and/or communities, and their social interactions online in order to gain insights regarding a specific group (Kozinets, 2002). According to Flick (2013) this method is suitable to study interactions of a specific group on social media. In this article, the group consists of stakeholders negotiating the WOW brand meaning on Social media. Furthermore, netnography is an unobtrusive method allowing us to investigate how WOW has communicated with consumers and other stakeholders while negotiating and legitimising their brand meaning change, without making our presence noticed (Kozinets, 2002). Netnography was also chosen since, as previously mentioned, the change was communicated through two posts on social media, and netnography allows us to go "back in time" and investigate how it actually happened. The internet was perfect for this specific reason as it acts as a form of archive for all interactions and discourses between people. Thus, in this paper, it is used in order to investigate the public space debate regarding WOW's change of a key brand property. In addition, as the main part of WOW's target audience are millennials, and these constitute one of the groups that are most active and vocal on social media, it was only natural to study their interaction in this context.

In order to capture the brand meaning negotiation process, a decision was made to first study the two posts through which, WOW made the two announcements.

Second, in order to be able to capture the results of the brand meaning negotiation process, a decision was made to also study the festival's official hashtag #wowgbg. This was due to that being the most widely used hashtag related to the festival and something that is frequently used by consumers and the brand to communicate information, opinions and negotiate brand meaning. The process of data collection and analysis lasted from 1st of March until 16th of April in 2019, which is when we had reached a point of saturation (Boddy, [2016](#)).

In examining the posts made by the festival, only the comments were taken into account. In total, the 2012 Facebook post had 1300 comments, all of which were examined in order to gain an understanding of the potential categories that they could be divided into. Examples of all the categories were then collected and categorised. The 2013 post had considerably less comments with 275, however, the same process was carried out for these comments. When examining the content of the comments, we first utilised the open coding technique suggested by Kozinets, Dolbec & Earley ([2014](#)), meaning that the comments were looked at as plain text and divided into categories based on their textual contents (illustrated in figure 1 below). As there were hardly and emojis present in the comments from 2012 and 2013, the usage of it was disregarded.

Looking at the hashtag, we examined random samples on Instagram from March 1st 2019, going all the way back to just before the 2012 festival. The reason for this is since, 2012 is when the first announcement was made, and we deemed that it would not be useful to go any further back in time as that is out of this article's scope. When examining these posts, both the captions and adjacent images were taken into account. This was because we wanted to gain as clear and as

deep knowledge about the outcome of the negotiation process as possible, especially since Instagram requires pictures to be uploaded when posting. Due to the large number of posts, it would have been virtually impossible to go through each individual post in detail. Therefore, samples were collected at random and posts made by the festival using the hashtag were sorted out as our aim was to capture the reactions of consumers. In total, 445 samples were collected.

In order to comply with ethical standards of netnography, no information about the identity of the consumers was recorded in this article. This decision was made as we did not ask for their consent to use their comments and posts (Kozinets, [2002](#)). The reasoning for this being that it would give an incomplete image if people would not like to stand by their opinions and let us use their comments and posts, and as the information is available in a public forum, it is not privately owned information. Instead, only the content of the comments and posts was collected to make sure no harm was made to the individuals.

After collecting the material, we utilised a hermeneutic interpretive sense-making approach to draw conclusions (Thompson, [1997](#)). This technique is well suited for gaining insights from consumers' stories and narratives regarding their own symbolic consumption patterns and experiences with products and brands. Since we have previously argued that consumers engage in consumption patterns to develop their own identities, we chose this approach as it lets consumers function as self-narrators due to their consumption of symbolic goods. By investigating their stories through text, in this case on social media, we sought to uncover patterns, cultural influences and meanings from their stories regarding the WOW brand. An iterative approach was thus used to pair and divide

the material with/from previous findings. The benefit of such an analysis is that excerpts from the research can be used to highlight topics and be compared with the existing theory and previous research findings (Bryman & Bell, 2011). This led us to develop the following categories: the positive, the negative, the debaters, the unserious and the unidentifiable (the conditionally positive was also added as a category for the 2013 post). These categories were used in order to sort the posts, making it easier to analyse the dynamics of the negotiation process. This process is illustrated in Appendix 1. The data collection ultimately lead to the creation of figure 1, which details the different phases examined, as well as the different parties negotiating over the brand meaning and their stances. The format of the model was based on Giesler's (2012) study of Botox and the contestations regarding the product as distinct phases can be found in both his and our study.

Findings and analysis

In order to uncover the dynamics of the brand meaning negotiation process on social media, the case of the Swedish music festival WOW will be examined.

The model below (figure 1) illustrates the three phases we found during the data collection that highlight the brand meaning negotiation process for WOW since 2012. It includes two contestations and the aftermath of the contestations. Each of these phases will be elaborated on and analysed throughout this section.

Contestation 1: Way Out West goes Veggie

On the eve of the 2012 edition of WOW, the festival announced on its social media channels that only vegetarian food would be served within the festival area during

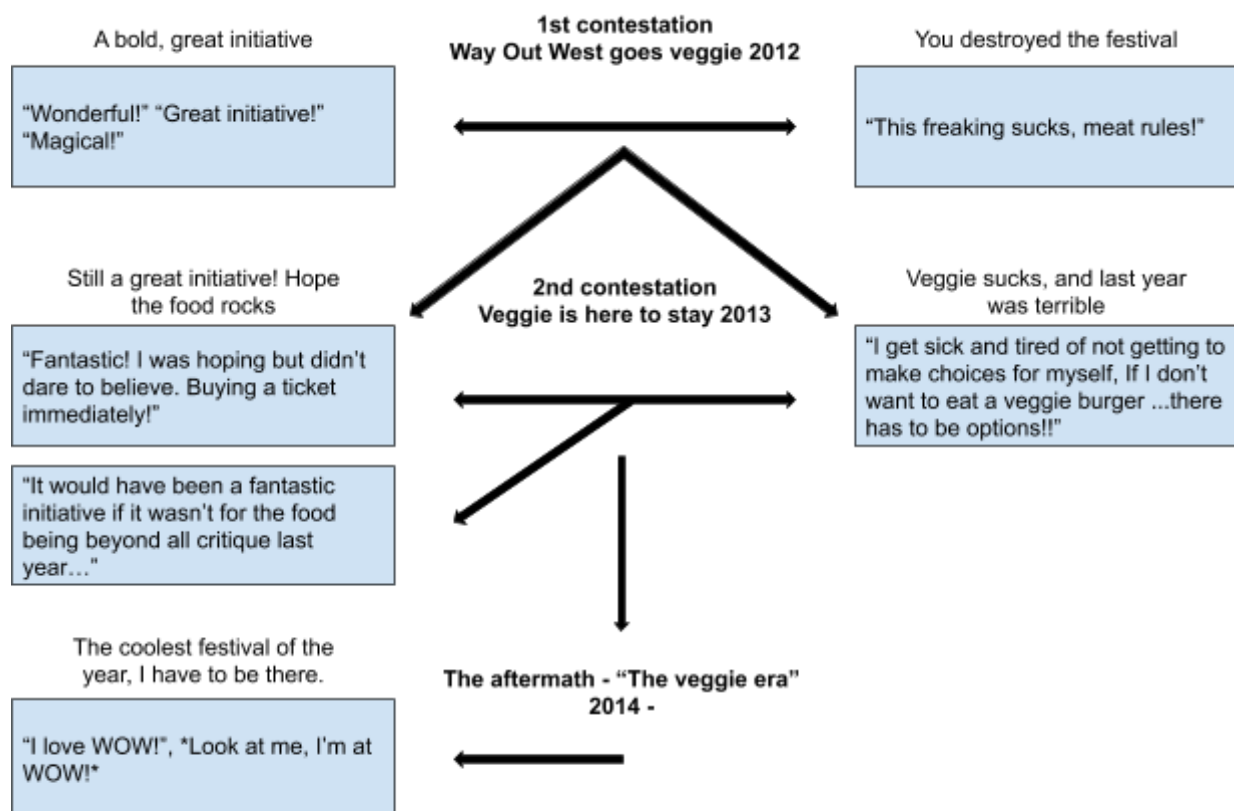


Figure 1 - The two different contestations and the aftermath.

that year's festival. While this change is not a complete change of the festival's core offering (the music), the food served at the festival is one of the most important side offerings and something that in our opinions could be considered a key brand property. The announcement that was made read as follows:

"Way Out West has always had a focus on sustainability. It is something that is very close to our hearts and we are always striving to become better. Research shows that the food we eat has the greatest impact on the environment and worst of all is the consumption of meat. Too many people believe that the criticism towards the meat industry is only about the living conditions of animals as well as about health, however, the fact is that it is as much about wasting resources and the environmental impact.

The food that we eat and throw away accounts for 25% of the environmental impact of the average swedish citizen. We have to do something, we decide what we eat.

During the 2012 festival, only vegetarian food will be served at Way Out West. That means that all food, whether it is consumed by staff, attendees or artists, will be completely vegetarian. But, if you choose to eat a bratwurst after the festival, that is up to you. However, during the festival in Slotsskogen, that will not be an option. We are not forcing anyone to stop eating meat, however, if we can reduce our environmental impact, even for a few days, we want to do that. We want to bring an end to the myths about vegetarian food tasting bad and not being nutritious, we wish to challenge the norm of meat being the normal and vegetarian being the alternative.

The festival wishes to drive the development forward. We love being first. During this year's edition we will write history together. We will do something different and something new. No one is looking to force new eating habits onto anyone - you can view Way Out West 2012 as a temporary escape from everyday life.

You might think that a few days of eating only vegetarian food will not have any severe impact on our ecological footprint. However, it will; we are expecting a vast reduction of food waste, which in turn will lessen the total environmental impact of the festival. If this leads to some of you reducing their meat consumption over the next year, then we will have taken a huge step.."

In this statement, the festival chose to highlight that the initiative would lessen the festival's ecological footprint, emphasising that sustainability is a core property of WOW's brand identity. WOW also emphasises that going vegetarian is a logical step for the festival in their aim towards becoming more sustainable, further reinforcing that their new proposed brand meaning is one of being a sustainable music festival.

Going vegetarian was something that resonated very well with many consumers, as was seen in the comment section of the post that WOW made on facebook. These consumers felt that a vegetarian WOW festival was something that was in line with their own personal identities and completely accepted the festival's new proposed brand meaning. This meant that for these consumers, the festival's identity and their image of the festival was in line with each other and that it was something they enjoyed. One of the commenters described this in the following comment:

"GREAT! <3 An impressive statement by such a large festival. Veggie does not just lead to a lesser impact on the environment but also saves the animals from a lot of suffering and death. I applaud you and hope that this inspires more festivals to go vegetarian."

This commenter displays that he or she not only sympathises with and enjoys the initiative, but that he or she also understands what the environmental impact will be, as well as agrees with the perspective on animal suffering. Another interesting detail is that the commenter chooses to state that he or she hopes that other festivals will follow WOW's lead and also ban meat from their festival areas, showing us that the commenter identifies with the initiative to an extent that goes beyond the WOW festival.

Another commenter that emphasised the environmental aspects that WOW sought to drive through their announcement commented that:

"Great! Reading this fills me with joy, a step forwards and hopefully one or two will learn a thing or two about how we can work to preserve our environment so that our children have something to inherit. And to all the negative people out there: it's not about having everyone turn vegetarian, it's about rethinking our ways of living and a balanced cuisine, something that is not only good for us but also the world we live in!"

This commenter not only shows a complete agreement with the arguments put forward by the festival, but expands on them and presumably tries to elicit an emotional response from the doubters by referencing the children of the future and

how we need to leave the planet in good shape for them. He or she also showcases another trend seen in the comment section, as he or she confronts the doubters head on, albeit in a quite diplomatic manner, stating that it is not about turning everyone vegetarian. Many of those that chose to confront the doubters, or in many cases “haters” did so in a much more critical manner. One commenter that did so commented the following:

“Hmm, so to sum up the reactions of the sceptics: Food needs to be held together by something to be edible. If you don’t serve meat, then you’re a hipster/hippie and you’re just trying to be special for the sake of it. Being conscious about the environment is unmanly and for idealists. Meat is a scarce commodity and not eating it can lead to a deep crisis of identity and confusion. Sounds reasonable...”

Here, it is clear to see that the decision to go vegetarian stirred up a lot of emotions as the comment not only feels quite frustrated, but also emphasises how the doubters are seen as naive and hateful.

As mentioned, there were a lot of consumers that felt that the decision to go vegetarian was wrong. One could argue that these consumers felt that there was a gap between their image of what the WOW brand should be and the identity proposed by the festival. This group of consumers also felt that the switch to being vegetarian went against their own personal identities as carnivores. Showcased in e.g. the following comment:

“I don’t get it? I like meat = I will throw away more food if it is vegetarian. Spontaneously, I feel that I can’t be the only one that feels this way. Shit, just when I thought that it couldn’t get more hipster...”

in which the commenter states that he or she feels that this switch will be worse for the environment than serving meat, due to high amounts of waste. This comment also displays two interesting findings, namely that many of those that were against the initiative based a lot of their arguments on feelings, e.g. “I feel that I can’t be the only one”, and also the emergence of doppelgänger brands (Giesler, 2012). The doppelgänger brand that this commenter

introduces is that of WOW being a festival for hipsters only, i.e. a hipster-festival. Other examples of commenters referencing how they believe that WOW is a hipster festival are:

“Hipster-warning.” and “Hippies.”

It is important to note that in this case, the doppelgänger brand is not considered as something positive by the commenters making these comments. Instead, it is used to slander the festival and to negatively influence others’ view of the festival’s brand. Some of the pro-vegetarian commenters confronted this doppelgänger brand image head on, showcased in e.g.:

“Funny that people think that this is hipster. What is hipster about vegetarian food?...”

Showing that they did not agree with the festival being a hipster-festival just because it stopped serving meat. Another doppelgänger brand that emerged was that of the festival not really caring about the environment and the switch to a vegetarian only being a calculated PR-trick, showcased in comments such as:

“...a hipster PR-trick in a true flower power spirit so that it fits the theme of Way Out West. Unfortunately for them, it’s not only teenage hipsters with zero perspective on things that visit Way Out West, I’m sorry but that’s just not how it works.”

This commenter manages to incorporate both doppelgänger brands into his or her comment and is clearly suspicious towards the festival’s motivation behind the change. He or she references how it is made in “true flower power spirit so that it fits the theme”, a sentence that makes us as readers interpret it as him or her not at all believing in WOW’s stated reason.

As stated earlier, many of the commenters also engaged in a debate with other consumers, trying to convince the ones that were of a different opinion than themselves that their view was the correct one. Looking at those that tried to convince others that a vegetarian festival was the wrong way to go, these seldom

relied on facts but instead often cited freedom of choice as the strongest argument for why it was a bad idea to ban meat:

“Since people didn’t seem to get my previous comment and are misquoting me in various social medias I removed it and want to say the following. Thank you Way Out West for taking away my freedom of choice in regards to food. That means that I don’t have to think for myself, and can let you do it for me.”

Thus, these consumers rejected WOW’s proposed brand change as they believed that limiting visitors to only vegetarian food was not something that the WOW brand should stand for.

Before announcing that the 2012 edition of the festival would be vegetarian, WOW seemed to be a brand that many consumers liked to identify themselves with, as seen in social media posts using the hashtag #wowgbg. After deciding to go vegetarian, this had not changed, one could even argue that the amount of posts from consumers identifying themselves with the brand had increased. What is also quite striking is that the negative reactions on social media seem to be concentrated to the comment section of the specific post in which the festival announced that it would only serve vegetarian food in 2012. This leads us to conclude that the result of the brand meaning negotiation process resulted in the proposed new brand meaning being accepted, something that is reinforced by WOW’s decision to become a vegetarian festival on a permanent basis in 2013.

Contestation 2: Veggie is here to stay

On the 29th of may 2013, WOW made a facebook post stating that the festival would be vegetarian on a permanent basis. This decision reinforced the brand identity proposed by the festival the year before and the announcement read as follows:

“During Way Out West 2012, we served a range of diverse dishes, more than 100 different dishes were offered. Vegetarian

dishes. The reasons for this were many: environmental and sustainability reasons, being alternative and challenging norms, animal rights, gender, pacifistic, health and joy of discovery.

Great results were generated, the environmental impact of the festival was reduced and the attendees’ as well as the artists’ appreciation for the food was increased.

Way Out West wishes to keep moving forward, we think that we can become even better. Without banging our chests we want the food to go from being a statement to an experience, something that we are hard at work at trying to achieve. We will therefore, announce menus and artists that are hopefully going to lead to more visitors and a better experience while at the festival. And no, there will not be any meat at this year’s festival either.

The numbers show that you like it, and that you get it. And if you do not, you have an entire city to choose from. At Way Out West we try to measure wealth in different terms. A statement that will hopefully be very tasty.

Bon appetit!”

In this statement, the festival chose to highlight the wide variety of dishes that were served as way to show that vegetarian dishes can be quite diverse, and also focused on the great environmental impact during the previous year’s edition of the festival. The festival also emphasised that the decision was made in order to challenge norms and that its work with sustainability will not stop here as a way to further reinforce sustainability as a core value and as a way of legitimising the festival being vegetarian.

Making the festival vegetarian on a permanent basis was something that resonated very well with many consumers, something which was not very surprising considering the amount of love that the festival received when they announced that the 2012 edition would be vegetarian. These consumers once again felt that a vegetarian WOW was completely in line with their own personal identities and that there was no disparity between the identity proposed by the festival and their image of the festival’s brand. This can be seen in comments such as:

“Great to see! And great to see so many more positive comments than last year, great work WoW! :)”.

The example is interesting in how it captures the feeling among the

commenters of the general view being more positive towards a vegetarian festival than the year before. It also captures how he or she feels that making the festival vegetarian on a permanent basis in the joyous “Great to see!”. Many of the commenters did also, like the year before, confront the doubters in their comments:

“I’ve seen that many are pointing out that soy-protein is not very good from an environmental perspective. However, it is important to know that the main part of the soy-protein is used to feed animals. Every kilogram of meat that is produced requires an equal amount of soy-protein.”

Once again, as exemplified in the comment above, the pro-vegetarians often pointed out that the arguments of the doubters were often completely incorrect or simply based on the feelings of the person making the negative comment. But it is important to note that just as the previous year, not everyone was happy with the festival’s new proposed brand change as a permanently vegetarian festival. These consumers once again felt that the initiative went against their own personal identities and still often referenced the freedom of choice aspect, e.g.:

“I get sick and tired of not getting to make choices for myself, if I don’t want to get a veggie burger that I think is dry and incredibly boring there has to be options!!”

Just like the year before, and as noted above, many of the negative comments were based on the feelings of the consumer making the comment and quite emotionally laden, as showcased by the above commenter ending the comment with two exclamation points: “there has to be options!!”. As was showcased in the previously mentioned reply to a negative comment, many also cited soy-protein as being worse for the environment than meat in their argumentations with the pro-vegetarians, this was showcased in e.g.:

“That’s bullshit, the soy-protein is first and foremost produced to be eaten by vegetarians, and if the meat industry decides to

purchase it, that’s not their problem but instead the soy producers’. What would vegetarian food be without soy?”

Here, the commenter states that even though the meat industry is in fact using soy protein to feed slaughter animals, it is really produced to be consumed by vegetarians. This debate became one of the more prominent ones among the commenters. Another debate that was born from the doubters or “haters” was the one about gender. Since the festival chose to cite wanting to challenge gender norms as one of the main reasons for making the festival permanently vegetarian, many consumers criticised them for it as they did not see how vegetarian cuisine could be related to gender. Meaning that they did not only reject the proposed brand change on the basis of vegetarianism, but also on the basis of the motivation behind the initiative:

“Could someone please explain to me what this has to do with gender?”

This was countered by the pro-vegetarians by pointing out that most of the negative comments were in fact from men:

“It’s interesting to note who are the most critical to this; the men. And who are the most positive; the women. Yet another reason why this is about gender norms...”

Furthermore, many commenters agreed with the festival’s new proposed brand meaning on the basis of raising awareness regarding sustainability issues and having a smaller ecological footprint, however, one thing that both the pro-vegetarians and the anti-vegetarians could agree upon after having experienced a vegetarian edition of the festival, was that they were disappointed in the food that was served the year before, something that made their outlook on the future of the festival more uncertain.

“Nothing wrong with the initiative, but please make sure that the food is better than last year. Vegetarian food can be really tasty, but last year it was neither that, nor nutritious or worth the price.”

This comment highlights the importance of the food served at a festival and how the commenter enjoyed the initiative but believed that the execution was sub par. One could argue that many of these consumers were prepared to accept the change to a permanently vegetarian festival on the condition that the food was improved. This, means that they could be categorised as unsure, or hopeful.

As with the 2012 announcement, the #wowgbg hashtag was examined in order to gain an understanding of the view of consumers on the festival's brand, and as was the case in 2012, the "haters" completely disappeared after the initial post. Consumers still used the hashtag to a large degree in their personal branding efforts. This leads us to conclude that the outcome of the brand meaning negotiation in 2013 was also that the new proposed brand meaning was accepted.

The Aftermath: The veggie era

In order to be able to thoroughly examine the social media activity surrounding WOW during the years after the decision to go completely vegetarian, a decision was made to examine posts made on instagram by others than the festival that featured the hashtag #wowgbg. Now, it is important to note that WOW has made changes that have affected the brand in the years following the 2013 edition of the festival, such as going milk free in collaboration with Oatly. However, none of these have been given an official announcement through the festival's social media channels, meaning that the immediate discussion surrounding them is virtually impossible to track.

Looking at the posts made on instagram featuring the #wowgbg hashtag (all sampled posts are available in Appendix 2), one thing that was once again immediately apparent was the absence of negative posts. Instead, most of the sampled posts featured consumers that

we identified as wanting to brand themselves through creating a connection to the festival. These were both festival goers posting pictures of themselves and of the festival, some consumers posting videos of the artists, and photographers tagging their photos from the festival using the hashtag in order to gain exposure and a linkage between themselves and the festival. Examining the posts from people that used the hashtag in order to identify themselves with the WOW brand, a few common themes quickly emerged, that the photos, as mentioned mostly depicted the people in question, that it was often times almost indiscernible that the images were actually taken at the festival and that very few of them made any reference to the music, which is the main offering from the festival. This is what made us view the photos as identity creation efforts, as many of the posters were not really sharing the festival experience, but instead the fact that they were at the festival. One post that really exemplifies this is a photo of a person in front of a white wall with the caption "never not longing for the best weekend of the year. hi & hello @wayoutwestfestival see you in a few weeks! #wowgbg". This post does reference the festival, but it is framed as the person wanting to tell her followers that he or she loves the festival, which in turn should prompt the followers to draw conclusions in their minds about what kind of person the poster is. One could thus, argue that the poster is capitalising on the brand image of WOW without giving the festival any real attention. This is something that can be seen as highlighting the strength of the festival's brand. Another post that could be argued as using the festival's brand for identity creation features a photo of a person standing in front of some sort of outdoor lounge area with the hashtag: "Wow yesterday with the most beautiful sis #wowgbg". Once again, the post is not detailing any part of the

festival experience, and instead highlights that the person visited the festival, prompting associations in the minds of the person's followers.

Discussion

Looking at the dynamics of the brand meaning negotiation process on social media, two distinct findings stood out from our case, that the negative commenters were very vocal in the comment section of the posts announcing the switch to a vegetarian festival but then were nowhere to be seen, and that in general, a large focus was placed on the self.

Looking first at the disappearance of the negative commenters, as previously stated, they did not post any negative comments on any other post made by the festival and did not make any negative posts themselves using the #wowgbg hashtag. A possible explanation for this behaviour might be found in Phan et al.'s (2011) study of Burberry and how they mention that it is possible for consumers to hijack a brand's meaning, such as the hooligans turning the Burberry trench coats into a signifier of one being a hooligan. The case may therefore, be that the negative commenters were afraid that the meaning of a brand that they enjoyed and used as part of their identity creation efforts, would be hijacked by the pro-veggie consumers, especially since a doppelgänger brand of the festival turning into a "hipster festival" emerged. The swiftness with which they took to post negative comments on the announcement posts might boil down to them wanting to protect the identity that they had built up using the WOW brand. In addition, as well as them wanting to limit the influence that new consumers could have on the brand, which would be in line with the findings of Gaustad et al. (2018).

Another possible explanation for the behaviour displayed by the negative commenters lies in the power of sign values, and what other consumers will think about a particular consumer. Showing that you are strongly against the switch to a vegetarian festival will in the eyes of other consumers indicate that you are a person that really loves meat, plus a host of masculine qualities. As both Mortelmans (2005) and Gabriel & Lang (2006) stated, sign values attributed to an object are based on associations that consumers make, e.g. that someone that enjoys eating meat and is very vocal about it is also a strong and masculine person. But what about their disappearance? Looking at sign values as a possible explanation leads us to believe that commenting negative comments about the festival going vegetarian on posts made by the festival that have nothing to do with vegetarianism, but instead with e.g. artists or opening hours, would make other consumers associate the commenter with negative qualities. The same goes for making negative posts using the #wowgbg hashtag, that would likely lead other consumers to interpret the sign value of the post as the poster being a generally negative person. And, in today's consumption and social media landscape, personal branding through consumption and through posting has become ever more important. Another aspect to consider is that the negative comments made might be rooted in identity creation efforts. As Doster (2013) found in his examination of teens' identity creation efforts on social media, it is a powerful tool to utilise in order to craft an identity for others to see. That might mean that many of the negative comments may have been posted in an identity creation effort and in order to cement one's position as a member of the meat eating crowd. This would support the findings of Kornum et al.'s (2017) highlighting the importance of

communities. Combining this with the power of sign values may explain why these commenters were quick to post negative comments on the announcement posts but stopped at that, as their online identities may have suffered from posting comments on other unrelated posts. Their disappearance might also be due to them exploring different brands that are a better fit for their personal identities, as suggested by Ligas & Cotte (1999).

As mentioned, a second dynamic that we discovered was that most of the posts using the #wowgbg hashtag were very narcissistic in their nature and focused more on associating the individual with the festival than on the festival itself - I am at the festival. A possible explanation for the narcissistic nature of the posts can be found in a combination of the concept of consumption being an extension of the self (Arnould & Thompson, 2005) and the concept of sign values (Mortelmans, 2005; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Stating that consumption is an extension of the self can be equated to stating that we are what we consume, meaning that it is through consumption that we create our identities. Another vital part of identity creation is the decoding of what the consumption actually means, i.e. the sign values that it carries (Mortelmans 2005; Gabriel & Lang, 2006). Based on this, one could argue that the concepts of identity creation and sign values can not only be applied to what we consume, but also our actions and in the context of social media, who we follow and what we post. Looking then at the content of the posts carrying the hashtag #wowgbg, the most common type of post found during our research was someone posting a picture of themselves with their friends, or alone with a text about it e.g. being a great weekend. What is not discernible in these images is that they were actually taken at WOW, instead, we would argue that these consumers, whether consciously or not are using the

WOW brand and the associations that people make regarding it, in their identity creation process, i.e. to brand themselves. We could even go as far as to argue that, for many consumers the most important reason for even visiting the festival is what their attendance will mean for their personal identities. This is also in line with the findings that Doster (2013) presented in his study of teens' identity creation on social media, stating that the traditional physical artifacts previously used to craft an identity have been replaced by visual representations on social media. This might help explain the large focus on the self displayed by the posters using the #wowgbg hashtag as these consumers would then be motivated by their need to craft an identity, and the modern way of doing that is through showing others on social that they are at the festival instead of e.g. purchasing memorabilia. In Presi et al.'s (2016) research on so called "brand selfies", they found that the way in which consumers post about brands (specifically, the way in which they include brands) has the power to impact the brand's image. In the case of WOW it is more about the nature of these posts telling the viewer about what kind of person visits the festival, rather than reflecting the food and the environmental aspects of the festival's image. In many ways, one could argue that even though the festival places a large emphasis on the environmental aspects in their communication, the brand has moved in the direction of becoming a signifier of consumers' trendiness.

It is also interesting that our findings seem to contradict those of Gaustad et al. (2018) who found that consumers that display a high degree of association to a brand may not enjoy changes to that brand's identity, something that they argue goes completely against what was previously believed. According to Gaustad et al. (2018), the belief used to be that loyal consumers would be very forgiving

to brand changes. Interestingly, we found the case to be somewhat of a double sided coin, as there seemed to be both loyal consumers displaying joy over the changes to WOW's brand identity and those that displayed outrage over the changes.

Having examined the dynamics of the brand meaning negotiation process on social media through WOW's brand meaning change, what keys to implementing changes to a brand's meaning on social media did we find? Firstly, when examining the changes that WOW actually made to its brand meaning, we found that it was very difficult to determine whether or not the brand meaning change was successful, however, out of the 445 sampled posts using the #wowgbg hashtag, not a single one was a negative post. The lack of negative posts could be interpreted as WOW at least retaining the same level of brand equity as before the change.

An important aspect of WOW's brand changes is that the festival did not make any changes to its core offering, namely, the music. Ever since the very beginning, the type of artists playing at WOW have stayed the same, they are not the artists that one would typically hear when listening to the radio, but instead slightly more niche. The only major change to the core offering was when the festival decided to expand to 3 days (Festivalrykten, 2012). Furthermore, the festival is still held in Slottsskogen in Gothenburg, meaning that it is still very much an experience that takes place in a park during summer. This is important, as the food served at the festival, while being a major component of the overall experience is not what one first and foremost pays for. The festival has also remained very consistent in both their visual and written language, meaning that the feeling should remain the same. This is important to note, as Wilner & Ghassan (2017) argued that design can signal

certain associations in the minds of consumers, and keeping it consistent could help the festival to keep consumers looking to associate themselves with the properties of the WOW brand despite the change to the food. One could go as far as to argue that the success of the festival is not only due to what the festival has changed, but also due to what has stayed the same. Also, looking at what the festival did change and especially their reasoning behind making the change, it was for a cause that their core audience was, and still are very passionate about. This means that the festival avoided the risk of ruining their existing customer base as suggested by Gaustad et al. (2018), a group whose influential power should not be underestimated (Wilson et al., 2014; Vallaster & von Wallpach, 2012), and instead only exposed the festival to the risk of "fringe customers" choosing not to attend due to the changes. The reasoning that the festival communicated when making the initial change also emphasises that sustainability has always been a part of its core values. This can be seen as the festival striving to show a consistency in its decisions, something that Thellefsen & Sorensen (2013) argued as being one of the keys to creating a commonly agreed upon brand meaning.

Another important aspect of the changes to the WOW brand is that they were not all made at the same time. Instead, the festival started by announcing in 2012 that the food would be vegetarian as a first sustainable initiative, this was followed up by the decision to go permanently vegetarian in 2013 and subsequent smaller changes, such as going milk-free. This meant that the festival was able to leverage the results of the previous changes in order to justify making further changes. The festival also had an easier time legitimising the changes as the image of the festival as a sustainable event started taking hold. The process of legitimisation

was also mentioned as one of the key factors in Giesler's (2012) study of Botox, where different stakeholders worked hard to legitimise their viewpoints. The festival also worked with strong influencers within the subject (although, not celebrity advocates, as suggested by Escalas & Betman, 2015) such as Oatly, one of the festival's main partners in order to help legitimize the changes. The festival also showed no signs of giving into the negative commenters' demands and criticism of the festival limiting their choices. Contrary to what Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach (2018) found in their examination of apparel brand GAP's logo change where the brand gave in to the backlash on social media, WOW treated the haters as not being present.

Our findings have implications for the theory on brand meaning negotiation as we argue that a larger focus should be placed on the consumers willingness to identify with, and willingness to utilise the brand in their identity creation efforts. This is something that has gained attention in the previous literature on brand meaning negotiation (e.g. Giesler, 2012; Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach, 2018), however, as brand meaning negotiation is moving towards mainly being carried out on social media, we would argue that it is the most important aspect to consider, and thus, should get the bulk of the attention. In this paper, we have shown how this is one of the main aspects to consider when examining the dynamics of the brand meaning negotiation on social media, as one of our main findings is that the most important dynamic of the negotiation process on social media was the consumers showing a willingness to use the festival's brand and hashtag in their identity creation efforts. Our study also contributes to the brand meaning negotiation theory by applying Giesler's (2012) model to an existing brand that has changed one of its key brand properties.

We would also argue that our findings show that Belk (2013) and Doster's (2013) findings about teens' identity creation practices on social media extend to other ages as well, seeing as we have argued that a large portion of the posts utilising the #wowgbg hashtag, as well as the comments on the announcement posts were made due to identity creation reasons.

What potential implications does this study have for marketers looking to utilise social media in order to make changes to their brands' meanings? As mentioned, while WOW did make a change to one of their key brand properties, most of the formula that made the festival a hit with the visitors remained the same. It is important to consider the reason for making the change when deciding on the scope of the change as a larger change might end up alienating the existing customer base, as was suggested by Gaustad et al. (2018). WOW also employed gradual changes, leveraging the results of the previous changes in order to motivate further changes, something that combined with the utilisation of relevant influencers, as suggested by Giesler (2012) could be beneficial. The reasoning behind the change to a vegetarian festival, was something that the core audience was very passionate about, as well as something that is considered socially acceptable in today's society. This is important as Tierney et al. (2016) found that our perception of brands and their signifiers are influenced by the context in which they are present, encompassing both social and cultural factors. This means that, as making changes due to environmental reasons was both something that was in line with the societal development and something that one "should support", the likeliness of the brand change being a success should increase. Great importance should thus, be placed on investigating the contemporary

trends within the social context, in which the brand is present.

It is also interesting to note that WOW did not confront the criticism from commenters that were outraged over the brand change. This is the direct opposite of what Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach (2018) found in their examination of GAP's 2010 logo change. They found that the way in which the brand handled the criticism only fuelled the negativity towards the brand, and we would argue that WOW may have avoided an even bigger reaction from the critics by treating them as if they were not present and standing firm by their decision. Thus, it could be beneficial for marketers to employ the same stance towards the critics that WOW did.

We would also argue that it is important for marketers to be mindful of the relationship between consumption and identity creation in the contemporary society. As Arnould & Thompson (2005) suggested, consumption activities can be seen as an extension of the self, combining this with the sign values placed on consumption activities (Gabriel & Lang, 2006; Mortelmans, 2005), marketers should be mindful of what implications a brand meaning change will have for the core audience's willingness to associate themselves with the brand. This is further corroborated by Thompson, Rindfleisch & Arsel (2006), Tarnovskaya & Biedenbach (2018) and Wilner & Ghassan (2017), who all emphasise the importance of consumer identities when negotiating brand meaning. One way in which consumers use brands to convey meaning is through so called branded selfies (Presi et al., 2016), and since these as previously mentioned can influence the brand's image, marketers should pay close attention to the activity on social media surrounding their brands.

What direction should the future of brand meaning negotiation research on social media take? One question that was raised during the analysis of the material

that we collected was whether or not the consumers making negative comments did actually visit or even intended to visit the festival. This question was fuelled by us finding a person commenting about how loud the music was and that the consumer, who stated that they lived across the street from the festival area could not sleep. However, as other consumers were quick to point out, that consumer did not even live in Gothenburg and was what is commonly referred to as an "internet troll". It would thus, be interesting to examine whether or not the consumers that commented and made posts using the #wowgbg hashtag did actually visit, or intended to visit the festival, in order to be able to measure the impact on the brand meaning negotiation process from consumers that were just looking to engage in a discussion or to hijack the brand meaning. This is something, that to our knowledge has not been done before and would add greatly to the understanding of the impact of social media in the brand meaning creation/negotiation process.

We would also, as previously mentioned argue that special attention should be paid to individuals' use of brands in their identity creation and diving deeper into the motivations of the consumers that used the festival's hashtag in an effort to brand themselves could provide valuable insight into the keys to implementing brand meaning changes on social media.

Another suggestion is to investigate the influential power of the festival's artist lineup. These could be seen as advocates for the decision to go vegetarian, as they decided to attend the festival and as they are utilised in the festival's social media channels and marketing efforts, where the sustainable initiatives are also featured.

Conclusion

To conclude this article we would like to look back at our two research questions, namely, *What dynamics within the process of brand meaning negotiation on social media can we find?* and, *What are the keys to implement changes to a brand's meaning on social media?* We would argue that the main dynamic found was that of the importance placed on the self and identity creation by the consumers. Our findings suggest that the sign value that can be gained from posting certain images or comments are of paramount importance to consumers. This is in accordance with not only the theories by Gabriel & Lang (2006) and Mortelmans (2005), but also Doster's (2013) theories on identity creation on social media. This dynamic also helps explain the second main dynamic of the negative commenters seemingly disappearing from the conversation after the comments on the initial posts. Looking at the keys to implementing changes to a brand's meaning on social media, we would argue that it is important to be mindful of the aforementioned importance of consumers' use of social media in their identity creation efforts. We believe that it is more important for consumers and the festival to be associated with sustainability and vegetarianism than actually doing anything to improve the world socially and environmentally. We do not say that they do not contribute, although, we do on the other hand argue that the idea of being linked with sustainable initiatives is beneficial for personal brands and WOW due to its socially agreed upon sign value. It is also paramount that one starts from the objectives of the change, as missteps may end up alienating the existing customer base. Looking at the case of WOW, they implemented a change for a reason that their core audience was (and still are) very passionate about.

All in all, this article adds to the existing literature on brand meaning negotiation by illustrating the dynamics in the context of social media, while showing how consumers utilise the process for their identity creation.

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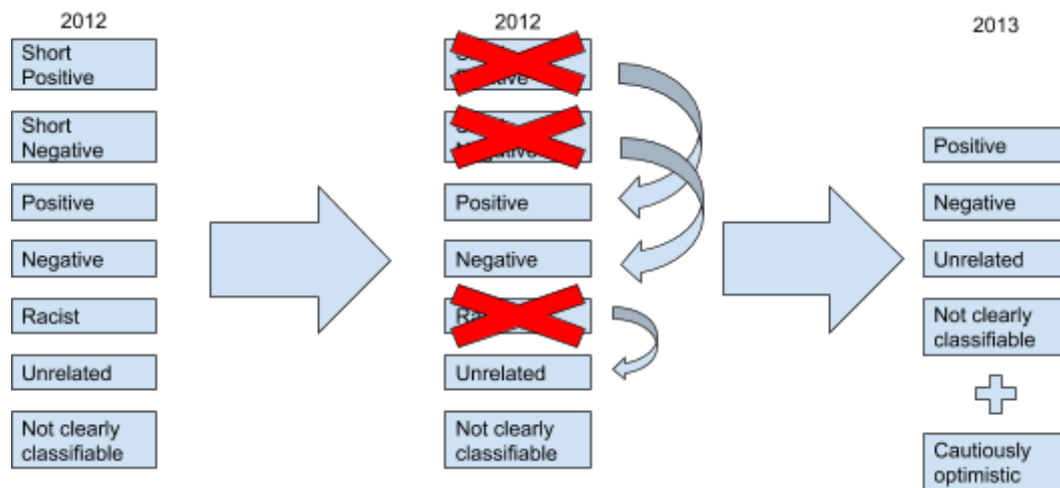
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Appendix 1 - Coding and Analysis Process:



Appendix 2 - 445 Sampled Instagram Posts Using the #wowgbg Hashtag:

https://www.instagram.com/p/BmWEPvqgMT1/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=1m8ztkobxv738
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmS4zWME8U/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=1ca07e47zwbob&fbclid=IwAR2bB7LnepwIFtWgkx130HPHJlTvrVal6KFE5i05BYGxCk11-rCWsdM
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmY_eh_jnS/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=1fba17yiv2&fbclid=IwAR154YowfM0T9Uua6w6Cioa4qH00_z34p6SUIrt1v3u9erRw5hPM_Y
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmYZ0SLRm0S/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=ec2k6f6m7i&fbclid=IwAR1zZHEGxDz2lWMDw1VDQufIom1u1m9ww6BhOxL_BGeuCGZ2V260L_WPc
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmY6Qw5FoQI/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=66vvo869envt&fbclid=IwAR3YF8XHHlxShd1HRCKAoxnb2alnCV2nF_0qOmCW8snNUTO7ix9gnRK0s4
https://www.instagram.com/sandraberovoyistw/BmY6GBnl5D/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=1aql03edw41ou&fbclid=IwAR0GwGEIe9_7MaW1vTPrtshUll_mKQlaid4RUVPdYQZG4EIXMlloBw
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmY8Aop5u2/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=1snfwhkdd4v&fbclid=IwAR1Xih8aSlw595L900_jFvohXB7ihSTA4ZTVo0T7lCMlloBw2HnA
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https://www.instagram.com/p/BmYUw7ABQas/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=1wmm3e8d56i&fbclid=IwAR2vMhaUXI7xOCDLQSLNUm6LQ3uIHlCSLT4okKob8v1aYwllhBHMwmo0
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmYXHDlhaH/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=choz537cqp1&fbclid=IwAR2Xdf_KRBF69XnoG519m3HLL_IKmbaEIJVODrFUFz1nT8LwVJscXP6Zl
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https://www.instagram.com/p/BmX_b8ah8oH/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=12bewliwncrd4&fbclid=IwAR0cxDOAHJdJFs2uotN27C-lE4d4GnrKRCzIsx532wXTTNS0MBI_l_bZAXs
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmX9T9eI8N1/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=190wlb1ucv2k&fbclid=IwAR1zZHEGxDz2lWMDw1VDQufIom1u1m9ww6BhOxL_BGeuCGZ2V260L_WPc
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmX6Q8oF1Bu/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=rsi8u7hli9&fbclid=IwAR32-vu7i8WwJNlJvWgAdEDbeT87KXKvWxbRUB7XSo9mSG9Y9W9Y8FVBU
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmTo_k8ImX/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=tlv21o7da&fbclid=IwAR0cxDOAHJdJFs2uotN27C-lE4d4GnrKRCzIsx532wXTTNS0MBI_l_bZAXs
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmX2MFI8r/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=1v3fp1przm6&fbclid=IwAR1Xih8aSlw595L900_jFvohXB7ihSTA4ZTVo0T7lCMlloBw2HnA
https://www.instagram.com/p/BmXvUsw5nS/2utm_source=ig_share_sheet&igshid=10noxkwor1o7&fbclid=IwAR0GwGEIe9_7MaW1vTPrtshUll_mKQlaid4RUVPdYQZG4EIXMlloBw
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