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How TOMS' "one day without shoes" campaign brings stakeholders together and co-creates value for the brand using Instagram as a platform

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the power of social media networks, namely Instagram, in building brand communities and co-creating value for brands. By analysing the 2015 campaign #withoutshoes by TOMS, the authors intend to demonstrate how the value creation process can be extended to involve all stakeholders and raise the effectiveness of a brand's communication campaign.

Design/methodology/approach – A qualitative approach was taken to enable an understanding of online consumer behaviour. A series of qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with retail and marketing professionals from the TOMS brand to explore brand strategy. The TOMS Instagram account was analysed for a specific marketing communications event and summative content analysis was applied to the brand's Instagram profile in order to allow for an in-depth exploration of the co-creation process. Triangulation was used for the multiple sources of evidence in order to build the study and to establish the convergence of data results, to diminish bias and to increase accuracy of the research data (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Findings – Through a detailed overview of the campaign developed by TOMS, this paper explores how TOMS fosters the formation of consumer-brand-relationships as well as maps out the advantages of value co-creation. The research findings support the literature on co-creation, which argues that the way to achieve innovation and value creation in the changing and challenging marketing landscape is through co-creation. This study adds to the findings that co-creation strategies are a privileged manner of nurturing customer relationships and of lowering costs for marketing and research and development (Sawhney *et al.*, 2005; Prandelli *et al.*, 2006).

Originality/value – There are a relatively limited number of studies focusing on the Instagram platform, and of those carried out thus far most concentrate on how the platform interprets cultural issues, rather than how it can be used effectively as a marketing strategy and how it can leverage user's preferences. Also, not a lot of studies have focused on the relationship between value co-creation and its relevance and impact on brands through engagement processes and the role of experience in brand building. Brand value co-creation through human experiences can provide considerable implications for brand management (Pralhalad and Ramaswamy, 2004a) as well as be a key component in the building process of customer experiences. This study suggests new approaches to getting useful insights about how brands can use social media to further engage with their target audience through an integrative framework of brand value co-creation with theoretical underpinning.

Keywords Social media, Instagram, Brand engagement, Word of mouth marketing, Value co-creation

Paper type Research paper



Introduction

The concept of brand has suffered changes and evolutions over the past century. It has evolved from a way of allowing consumers to identify and recognise a company's offering to an entity with high-influence power over customers' values and actions (Keller and Lehmann, 2006). Brands are also credited to represent knowledge

(Keller, 2003), enhance customer relationships and community building (Fournier, 1998; Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

The brand management process has suffered from growing disruptions in the market, mainly propelled by the introduction of social media networks as an additional touch point. This effective medium for collaborative communication has altered the way interaction works between businesses and the consumers (Dahan and Hauser, 2002).

It has also enhanced the ability to integrate consumers in the day-to-day activities of the brand, allowing them to be heard and have a say in how customer value is created and in what they would like to consume (Bhalla, 2011). Such platforms facilitate conversation and interaction between brands and consumers and allow an exchange between the physical and digital world of the brand (Nambisan and Baron, 2007) as well as new possibilities for product development, innovative delivery systems and a distinctive supplier network, amongst others. In sum, a whole new array of possibilities changed the traditional way of doing business (Denning, 2014). This economic change was described by Shaughnessy (2014, p. 17) as a "complex transformation in human behaviour produced by a new way to satisfy consumption needs". This shift in practice means that businesses need to go beyond conventional management skills and embrace a new and innovative type of management, with different goals, different ways of organising and coordinating work and different values and ways of communicating (Denning, 2013).

An effective use of social media channels presents itself as an alternative route for collaboration and innovation and as unique touch points to engage communities, start conversations, recruit employees and develop new and innovative ideas. Successful brands have been using these possibilities to engage with their followers as well as asking them to participate in brainstorming and support the values and issues of that same community. This shift is due to the fact that consumers are increasingly interested in brand stories and in being part of a dynamic relationship and full immersion with the brands they relate to. This dynamic relationship between brands and consumers is of growing importance to fashion and allows for co-creation to happen in the brand identity process (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001).

According to Bogoviyeva (2011, p. 371) co-creation has been defined as a "collaborative activity in which customers actively contribute to the creation of brand identity and image as well as ideas, information, product, service and experience offered under a particular brand". According to Ramaswamy and Gouillart (2010) the key purpose of co-creation is to engage consumers to create valuable experiences together as well as enhance network economics. The core principles around this discipline are: experience mind-set, context of interaction, engagement platforms and network relationships (Ramaswamy and Gouillart, 2010). Brands encourage customers to forward messages to their followers (Van der Lans *et al.*, 2010) thus benefiting from referrals among consumers (Porter and Golan, 2006).

The increasing role of social networks in influencing perceptions about a brand and its products was noted by Dee *et al.* (2007) through empowering participants as well as creating and maintaining engaging discussions. The authors discuss how constant and motivating behaviour helps to reinforce consumer to brand (C2B) relationships and ultimately leads to increased brand loyalty. The benefits to building loyal consumers include willingness to pay more for products as well as recommending them to other potential customers (Gee *et al.*, 2008), thus helping brands achieve a real competitive advantage (Bharadwaj *et al.*, 1993). Co-creation approaches to brands have dominated the literature in recent years, from the brand building process (Ind and Coates, 2013) to

designing brand relationship experiences (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000) as well as interactive, creative and social processes (Roser *et al.*, 2013).

Within this study, the authors have attempted to clarify the dynamic processes and narratives that take place at the co-creation stage using the social media network Instagram as a platform. The paper intends to show how the brand TOMS and its stakeholders work collaboratively towards the co-creation and joint development of the brand's identity. It also aims to demonstrate how this leads to an increase of the effectiveness of a brand's communication campaign.

TOMS' One for One

TOMS (2015) Giving Report states clearly the brand's value proposition "We make shoes and eyewear, but really we're in business to help change lives". TOMS initiated its One-for-One[®] giving model initially through its footwear offer; donating one pair of shoes for each pair bought, and has added other product categories to further expand this model. In the absence of high-profile advertising campaigns TOMS relies on its community of consumers and "fans" to spread the word of its fashion philanthropy through its in-store community message-boards, at creative charitable events and via its website. Thus TOMS is differentiated and derives brand value through its ethical and sustainable practices, collaborations and co-creations and community building both with its global network of giving partners and those who receive its charity, but also with its brand community who engage with the brand by driving the brand storytelling and sharing this through social media.

TOMS' business model of social entrepreneurship succeeded in passing its initial target of donating 10,000 pairs of shoes in the first year of operation, and by June 2013 over 10m pairs of shoes had been donated, with estimated revenues of over \$250m for the TOMS brand which has also expanded its product and charitable offer to include eyewear and apparel (Amed and Kansara, 2013).

Literature review

Value co-creation

Value can be defined as the "capacity of goods, services or activity to satisfy a need or provide a benefit to a person or legal entity" according to Haksever *et al.* (2004, p. 292). For the authors, the successful creation, communication and delivery of such value represents the primary goal of any company. We have seen a shift in the bargaining power in favour of the customers and an acceleration of the role of the consumer as an active player in value co-creation adding efficiency and effectiveness to the value co-creation process (Zwass, 2010).

One of the pioneer works in the co-creation space dates back to 2000, when Prahalad and Ramaswamy defined value as experiences and push companies to see value the same way. Thus, co-creation emerged as a new business paradigm with customers actively participating in the production and marketing process (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004a).

Ramaswamy and Gouillart (2010) suggest that value is increased when customers work together to create value, rather than creating value inside the business, due to the fact that customers want to feel a sense of freedom in their interaction. By taking part in co-creation, value is created for both the consumer and the company. This was reinforced by Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a, p. 6) who acknowledge the shift: "consumers now seek to exercise their influence in every part of the business system". Armed with new tools and dissatisfied with available choices, consumers want to interact with firms and thereby "co-create" value.

Co-creation has been defined from different perspectives in the literature, with elements of parity spanning across those definitions – co-creation involves an effort between multiple stakeholders to co-create value/an experience collaboratively (Minkiewicz *et al.*, 2014) as well as an opportunity for on-going interaction (Ind and Coates, 2013). The value creation process is being challenged by this changing relationship between consumers and companies. Whereas the traditional value creation formula places consumers outside of the process, holding distinct roles of production and consumption, consumers now are equipped to extract and create value. However, in order for co-creation to happen, a consumer needs to be an active player in the creation of the experience (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b) and this co-creation appears as a function of interaction (Grönroos and Voima, 2013). Therefore, analysing consumers' roles as co-creators is essential to understand this process better (Gronroos and Ravald, 2011).

A review of the definitions of co-creation of value is shown in Table I.

Kambil <i>et al.</i> (1996)	Value co-creation by emphasising the role of customers in business strategy and marketing
Wikstrom (1996)	A company-consumer interaction (social exchange) for the purpose of attaining added value
Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2000)	Co-creation of personalised experiences with the customers
Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b)	The consumer and the firm are intimately involved in jointly creating value that is unique to the individual consumer ... the interaction between the consumers and firms becomes the new locus of co-creation of value
Lusch and Vargo (2006)	Value can only be co-created with and determined by the user in the consumption process and through use or what is referred to as value-in-use
Payne <i>et al.</i> (2008)	A process where the supplier creates superior value propositions, with customers equalling value to when a good or service is consumed
Xie <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Rise of presumption as value creation activities undertaken by the consumer that result in the production of products they eventually consume and that become their consumption experiences
Gummesson and Mele (2010)	Co-creation is enabled by actor to actor (A2A) involvement and commitment. It is a time-based process which comprises parallel and sequential phases simultaneously
Prebensen and Foss (2011)	The consumer taking an active part in consuming and producing value within their experience
Ramaswamy (2011)	The process by which mutual value is expanded together, where value to participating individual is a function of their experiences
Edvardsson <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Shaped by social forces, is reproduced in social structures and can be asymmetric for the actors involved
McColl-Kennedy <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Benefit realised from integration of resources through activities and interactions with collaborators in the customer's service network
Gronroos (2012)	A joint collaborative activity by parties involved in direct interactions, aiming to contribute to the value that emerges for one or both parties
Roser <i>et al.</i> (2013)	An interactive, creative and social process between stakeholders that is initiated by the firm at different stages of the value creation process
Ind and Coates (2013)	A process that provides an opportunity for on-going interaction, where the organisation is willing to share its world with external stakeholders and can generate in return the insight that can be derived from their engagement
Grönroos and Voima (2013)	Customers' creation of value-in-use where co-creation is a function of interaction
Fadil (2014)	Creation and delivery of richer experiences to stakeholders as a part of the process along with tangible outcomes

Table I.
Definitions of
value co-creation

Some authors have attempted to conceptualise the building blocks of co-creation, with Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b) addressing it in terms of the dialogue, access, risk-benefits and transparency model. This model implies that dialogue is the conversation between customers and companies and suggests interactivity, engagement and action on both sides is only possible if there is transparency of information. Brands need to have a personalised understanding of risk-benefits in order for the relationship to be beneficial for the consumer (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2004b) and when both parties collaborate in co-creation the market becomes a process of co-created experiences of unique value, benefitting both the company and the consumer (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2004b).

The value created in the interaction with stakeholders is the sum of sharing resources, knowledge, and technology and by involving the end-user in the process of value creation, unique value is created and experiences co-created (Pralhad and Ramaswamy, 2004b).

Value is explored on the perspective of being a function of experiences (Ramaswamy, 2011) and therefore derived from the co-created experience, aligning with Holbrook's (2006) perspective that interactions are the source of experiences. This links to a concept explored by Hagel (2013) that defines this collaborative discussion as brand narrative and mentions that the problem with stories is that they end, they lack participation and that's where narrative comes in. Brand narratives can be defined as the process that sees consumers organise their brand-related experiences in the form of narratology, becoming an influential thread as well as systems of communication in various contexts (Luedicke and Giesler, 2008). Narratives have a potential to engage consumers with brands as consumers can co-create the brand.

Consumers serve as the basis for interaction and social cohesion (Schouten and McAlexander, 1995) and for that reason brands can co-create with consumers and give consumers control to enhance emotional attachment with brands (Rucker *et al.*, 2012). By participating in the brand's experience, users assist the brand in their pursuit of goals and visions, concurring with White *et al.*'s (2009) perspective where value creation occurs when consumers actively participate in the performance of one or more activities performed throughout the consumption experience.

Brodie *et al.* (2011, p. 260) define customer engagement as "a psychological state that occurs by virtue of interactive, co-creative customer experiences with a focal agent/object. It is a multi-dimensional concept subject to a context and/or stakeholder specific expression or relevant cognitive, emotional and/or behavioural dimensions". Engagement is therefore considered a process and the consumption experience is looked at as the object. It is essential that to achieve this emotional immersion, users possess a personal relevance and connection to the experience, triggered by interaction where stories and experiences are shared. Consumer engagement can be defined as the behavioural manifestation from a customer towards a brand that goes beyond transactions, results from motivational drivers and represents the way a brand connects with consumers and type of relationships it establishes (Van Doorn *et al.*, 2010). Engagement enables consumers to co-create value with the brand through the relational exchanges and bonds they establish with them (Sashi, 2012). When consumers are engaged they are more likely to recommend products to others and participate in user-generated content (UGC) that will add value to the brand, expanding on their traditional role through co-creation of value process and becoming advocates for the brand. This type of involvement culminates in higher loyalty over the long term (Oliver, 1997). Through understanding consumers and their attitudes towards brands,

marketers are able to build and effectively manage brand equity, thus leading to changes in their marketing activities (Keller, 1998).

Instagram as
a platform

The role of online and digital communication strategies

Brands have shifted their focus from traditional forms of media to online and digital media like social networking sites and viral marketing (Hutton and Fosdick, 2011) to allow for more interactive opportunities to occur. Social platforms have given brands wide possibilities for reaching potential customers, communication and collaboration, and creating value to customers (Carlson and Lee, 2015). Being able to use social media and social networking effectively is paving the way for a new generation of marketing and customer relationship management to occur.

Meadows-Klue (2008, p. 250) said “the explosion of social media since 2005 is the starkest of reminders about how fast the tools of the digital networked society continue to unfold”, leading to a new paradigm of communication and branding in the digital age. Brands have shifted from a traditional one-to-many approach to a one-to-one (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2011) allowing them to connect with their existing consumers in new ways.

Social media allows for more connectivity and opportunities to build long lasting and solid relationships between brands and consumers. As referred to by Fader and Winer (2012) the growth of social networking has resulted in UGC – that can be described as product reviews, descriptions of products, usage, and consumer created advertising, and blogs, as well as all other consumer generated material. This change in relationship has affected and altered customer’s interaction with a brand (Singh and Sonnenburg, 2012) – consumer’s change from a passive to an active participant in the brand creation process and thus become co-creators of value.

As part of a digital communication strategy, there are specific online communication tools that marketers can employ in planning: search engine marketing, online PR, online partnerships, display advertising, opt-in e-mail marketing and social media marketing (Chaffey and Smith, 2008). This last one – encompassing viral marketing and online word of mouth (WOM) – is the one considered in this analysis as a preferred method of engaging and reaching the audience – one where narratives are shared and forwarded to achieve awareness for the brand. WOM marketing builds active and mutually beneficial consumer to consumer and C2B relationships (www.womma.org/wom101). Its techniques are based on a two-way dialogue and transparent communications, looking at educating people about the brand and its products, providing tools to make the sharing of information easier as well as listening and responding to supporters. Kiss and Bichler (2008) define viral marketing as “marketing techniques that use social networks to produce increases in brand awareness through self-replicating viral diffusion of messages, analogous to the spread of pathological and computer viruses”. Viral marketing campaigns targeting new customers are likely to be more successful and, therefore, lead to higher loyalty than those where customers are acquired through traditional marketing investments (Trusov *et al.*, 2009). Viral marketing is a cost-effective marketing strategy that drives sales and facilitates interconnection between brands and consumers (Dobele *et al.*, 2007). To take full advantage of such benefits, brands should start and participate in customers’ conversations (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick, 2012). One of the most efficient platforms to do so is Instagram.

Instagram is a social network platform for sharing photos and videos on mobile devices with other users/followers where each user can “like” each other’s photos and comment on them. The platform was launched in October 2010 by Kevin Systrom and

Mike Krieger and named App of the Year by Apple in 2011 (Goor, 2012). Users use hashtags (#) to caption a particular topic that others can use to search. They can also tag with “@” to link that image to the profile of a user. Platforms such as Instagram are allowing brands to uncover consumers’ drivers and giving them deeper understanding of what moves them, by allowing these brands to directly communicate with their consumers and listen to them. Backed up by the continuous growth in social media usage across the world, with active user accounts now equating to roughly 29 per cent of the world’s population (We Are Social, 2015) Instagram has proven to be a very effective way of connecting brands and consumers with 53 per cent of Instagram users following their favourite brands, more than any of the other main social platforms (Weise, 2015). More than 90 per cent of the 150 million people on Instagram are under the age of 35, making it an attractive platform for fashion, entertainment and media brands focused on the 18-34 year-old age consumer (Mancuso and Stuth, 2015). Brands that target a younger generation are more likely to succeed on Instagram due to the demographic profile of its users with female consumers amongst the key users of the platform (Smith, 2014). As they are more prone to impulse purchasing due to connection to brands and beliefs (Hassan, 2014), they are more likely to respond to campaigns on this platform. Apart from following brands, users also use Instagram to research products and brands they are interested in and according to recent data 60 per cent of its users log in daily, making it a very powerful and attractive platform to increase engagement with brands.

Brands use Instagram not only to reach consumers, but also to convert these into brand advocates (Beltrone, 2012). The brand advocacy that they strive to achieve is highly effective, communicating a message and affecting customers’ perception of the brand and its products. According to Goor (2012), the conveying of a brand’s identity on their feed, through using the brand colours and depicting brand-related people and events, increases user engagement and also helps consumers to better perceive a brand and its message when it comes to purchasing (Langton, 2011). The use of image as opposed to mere text enables higher levels of engagement with consumers and also leads to more interactions than other types of content (Soonius, 2012). According to Goor (2012) brands primarily use two strategies on Instagram: an emotion strategy and a symbolism strategy. The first one concentrates on influencing affective beliefs, when a brand is associated with emotions felt when using the product and the second is applied when a brand needs to convey a certain identity or lifestyle, where the focus is on the brand’s image.

Coursaris *et al.* (2013) has developed a framework that looks to divide social media marketing messages into seven categories. On one of those categories – engagement – the author has identified eight subcategories: assistance, community, likes, photos/videos, polls, questions, appreciation and directional. This specific study was developed concentrating solely on the Facebook social network site, however it intends to bring value to other social media marketing communications platforms as well through working as a tool to better understand the range of messaging strategies and as an analytical tool for assessing the nature of engagement associated with each strategy and category (Coursaris *et al.*, 2013). The goal is to understand the categories that trigger the highest and most positive engagement amongst consumers so that brands can more accurately plan and implement future social media strategies. The seven categories and corresponding subcategories are displayed in Table II.

To Potts *et al.* (2008) social media has enabled co-creation through new forms of situated creativity, suggesting that it enables stakeholders to co-create by having more

Brand awareness Posts that build company presence and attentiveness in digital consumer market	Promotions	Posts that contain the use of celebrity and/or event sponsorship which mentions brand's name
	Heritage	Posts that seek to bring consumer into company's history; trivia and employee spotlights
	Operations	Posts that inform consumers about production processes and behind-the-scenes operations
Corporate social responsibility Posts that build a brand image of being involved in supporting and strengthening the community, primarily among socially conscious consumers	Awareness	Posts contain elements that support non-profit organisations and/or raise awareness of causes
	Fundraisers	Posts that showcase support for specific charity fundraisers
	Openings	Posts that contain store opening notifications
	Outages	Posts that contain service outage notifications
Customer service Posts that aim to build consumer knowledge about product, industry and brand changes	PSA	Posts that contain a consumer notice even if it was originally posted by another source
	Assistance	Posts that include advice, home improvement, cooking, life tips, recipes for the consumer
Engagement Posts that build consumer connections/communities through direct interaction with the brand	Community	Posts that encourage consumers to follow one of the brand's other social media platforms (e.g. Twitter, YouTube)
	Likes	Posts that specifically point consumer to "Like" a message
	Photos/videos	Posts which direct consumers to look at new photo albums and/or videos posted by the brand
	Polls	Posts that request information or prompts answers from the consumer through multiple-choice questions
	Questions	Posts that request information or prompts answers from the consumer through fill-in-the-blank or open-ended questions
	Appreciation	Posts that recognise and show gratitude for consumer support
	Directional	Post that direct a consumer to click/do something (except for liking)
Product awareness All posts which build product knowledge, understanding and existence	Name brands	Posts that mention products sold at the store but are not specifically produced by the posting brand
	House brands	Posts that mention products sold and produced by the posting brand
Promotional Posts that are designed to stimulate immediate or near future purchases through monetary incentives	Deal	Posts include some form of instant reward for the consumer to make a purchase, such as discounts, coupons, limited time deals and one-day specials

(continued)

Table II.
Proposed typology
for Facebook-based
strategic messaging

Seasonal Posts that remind and inform consumers of seasonal and annual events and related products by the brand	Chance	Posts contain incentives for consumers to make a future purchase by offering a potential reward, such as a contest, giveaway or sweepstakes
	Holiday	Posts that mention or advertise specific holidays such as Valentine's, Christmas or New Years
	Season	Posts that reference a climatic or sports season
	Event	Posts that mention significant timely events that are not holidays, such as graduation, tax day, daylight savings, or spring break

Table II.

Source: Coursaris *et al.* (2013)

transparency and dialogue. Social media will not sell products but it will help increase digital presence and create stronger relationships with customers to increase brand value. By giving customers the opportunity to actively participate in the co-creation process (Füller *et al.*, 2007) through innovation and product design, consumers undertake a sequence of experiences that are developed and reinforced overtime. By investing in co-creation, the marketing spend reduces due to the fact that the products launched become instantly relevant to the target audience (McEleny, 2010).

Methodology

The aim of the present study is to more fully understand the complex dynamic processes that underpin the co-creation of brand identity through a qualitative case study of the TOMS brand, to uncover the decisions, processes and activities as evidenced in an exploration of a contemporary fashion business situation. The rationale behind our selection of the case study method is that this approach does not attempt to define a fixed set of dimensions or a management "tool box" for co-creation, rather the research aim is enabled, i.e. to uncover how co-creation works in practice, to answer the central question driving this research: what are the actions and influences of the various stakeholders involved in this specific brand? In this application the case study research approach aims to uncover detailed knowledge about the operations and experiences of one particular situation (Kvale, 1996; Punch, 2000) in order to inform understandings of the wider population to which this specific case belongs (Gummesson, 2005; Wolcott, 1994). According to Gummesson (2005) a qualitative approach to business research recognises the complexity of business entities and enables the interrogation of the influence of assorted variables through an iterative investigation of multiple data sources. In this study brand identity is conceived as a dynamic negotiated social process and thus investigating the situated concept of co-creation necessitates the exploration of multiple stakeholders' contributions to the brand identity. The interpretative practices of the researchers are recognised as fundamental to a qualitative research approach which seeks to explore implicit meanings (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) and in choosing a qualitative approach to explore the practice of co-creation of fashion brands, the researchers hope to penetrate "the complex and the elusive" practices involved, over a desire to claim any unambiguous causal relationships between variables (Gummesson, 2005, p. 312).

The case study approach utilised in this study is primarily inductive with data drawn from multiple “real world” sources (Gummeson, 2005, p. 322) and in line with inductive qualitative research practice this case study comprises research data drawn from a variety of sources that reveal not only the corporate branding strategy as embodied in the management vision, but also the company’s internal culture and its external image (Hatch and Schultz, 2001).

A full media review was undertaken in order to answer the research questions and a series of qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants including marketing and retail managers and store workers in the UK and Amsterdam (where TOMS has its European HQ). These eight interviews were transcribed and coded to develop themes, which inform the discussion. These themes were filtered according to relevance and ultimately the researchers focused on the ones that related to digital media strategies as well as consumer engagement as a way to reinforce this research.

To supplement the media review and inform research into the brand’s external image and co-creation activities of its consumers’ content analysis of the brand’s social media platforms was carried out. Also, as the focus of this research is not on what consumers say they do but rather on how they contribute to the TOMS’ brand identity through their interactions, researchers carried out discourse analysis of the brand’s social media platforms. To achieve this goal, content analysis was conducted on the social network Instagram. Content analysis can be defined as “a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication” as well as a “technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages”, according to Bryman (2001, p. 178).

The research used qualitative analysis to the data in line with the methods of summative content analysis, moving beyond quantifying data and seeking to develop meanings through interpretation (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005) To reduce the likelihood of researcher or informant, triangulation between and across the multiple data sources was employed in order to define research themes and to establish the convergence of the data results (Saunders *et al.*, 2009).

Regarding the scope of research, 360 posts using the #withoutshoes were analysed directly on the Instagram social network site for the content analysis in order to examine the characteristics of the campaign and users’ participation. The data were gathered during the week following the end date of the campaign. An equal number of posts from each country’s official TOMS’s Instagram accounts was used (12 in total), selecting the top 30 in popularity, identified by number of likes. To get a realistic picture of how the brand was engaging with consumers and vice versa, data resulting from the analysis of all pictures was coded in an analytical grid, which took into account the complexity of digital tools and their different types of media.

The framework developed emerged as a way of explaining the data and clarifying the different interactions that took place between the brand and consumers, as well as the rationale behind the dialogue and exchange of value taking place. It intends to clarify how social media practices can influence the co-creation of value. Using Brodie *et al.* (2013) framework of online engagement, we have looked at five crucial processes to initiate consumer engagement: sharing, co-developing, socialising, advocating and learning. The authors use consumer loyalty, satisfaction, empowerment, connection, commitment and trust to trigger engagement between brands and consumers. By mapping out these concepts with the ones emerging from our analysis, we were able to further add to this model by integrating the actions needed (“likes”, “comments” and

“send to”) as well as the types of media (photos and videos). The rise of the code “community” was the central piece of this framework as we found it acts as the glue that puts all these elements and interactions in place.

Discussion

Defining how stakeholders co-create value with a brand is essential to fully understand the role that social network platforms play in engaging with consumers. The concept of value has evolved over time, ranging from functional, utilitarian, perceived value, value for customer, value chain concept, relationship value, superior value and lately co-created value (Agrawala *et al.*, 2015) and for this reason it is important to understand how brands with sustainable and ethical practices use value in its own terms. Understanding how social media can play a key role in communicating and creating a dialogue with all stakeholders is key to understanding the value co-creation process. (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2011) According to Muniz and O’Guinn (2001, p. 413) consumers deeply involved with a brand that offers them emotional and symbolic benefits develop “a common understanding of a shared identity” and for that reason they are more likely to engage in new product development and experience sharing (Ouwersloot and Oderkerken-Schroder, 2008).

Figure 1 represents the developed model applied to the #withoutshoes campaign and illustrates the process of co-creating value with the consumers through an Instagram campaign.

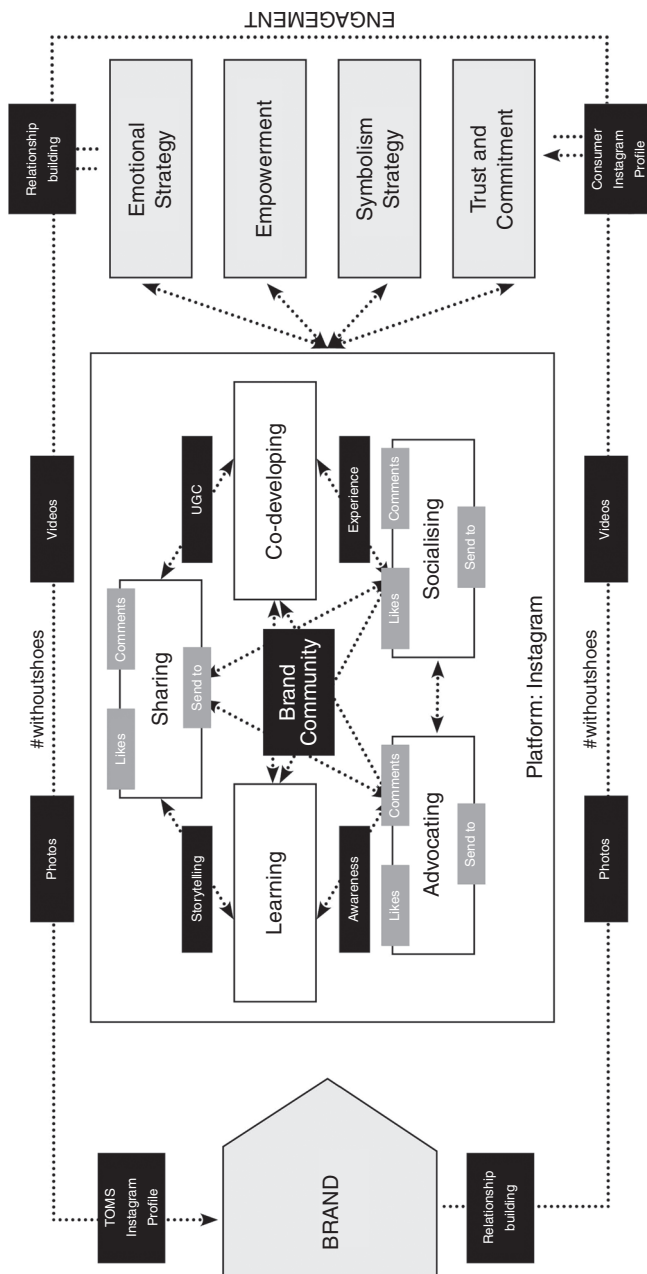
The campaign entitled “One day without shoes” took place on 21 May 2015. For the two weeks ahead of the day, TOMS were determined to raise awareness for children’s health and education by challenging consumers to post a photo of their bare feet. For every photo tagged on Instagram, the brand would give a new pair of shoes to a child in need (TOMS, 2015). This campaign addresses the purposes of brand advocacy as stated by Beltrone (2012) where the effectiveness of an Instagram campaign is increased through powerful narratives and leads to highly positive consumer perception and awareness of the brand in question. In line with this, Mycoskie (2015) clarifies:

This year’s One Day Without Shoes will be different than any we’ve ever done. We’re extending the timeframe to build awareness and anticipation, but most importantly, so that more people can participate in an effort to give more. The best part is that even if someone is not a TOMS customer, he or she can simply take a photo and post #withoutshoes to make sure a child in need somewhere in the world will get a new pair.

The framework used to analyse the campaign has its key elements in the five crucial processes as defined by Brodie *et al.* (2013): sharing, co-developing, socialising, advocating and learning. All five elements play an equal part in this dynamic interaction between a brand and the consumer. For the purpose of this analysis, the authors will start with the learning process.

Learning

A brand can differentiate itself by creating a unique customer narrative and by doing that “companies can greatly improve their ability to retain customers, target key customers segments and enhance network profitability” according to Vincent (2000, p. 25). Having a business model built on philanthropy has given TOMS a competitive advantage in a variety of ways: with its giving partners; with other industry collaborators who appreciate the halo effect of their partnerships; with its conscious consumers whose commitment to social entrepreneurship drives sales and with TOMS’



Source: Adapted from Brodie *et al.* (2013)

Figure 1.
TOMS value
Co-creation process

employees who feel good about working in social entrepreneurship as part of the TOMS “family”.

These internal and external stakeholders represent the driving force behind the brand and were one of the key drivers of the campaign, for instance in organising walks during the #withoutshoes day and sharing the brand’s values with the community. These groups of stakeholders include employees, managers, suppliers, influencers (e.g. media) and overall consumers. Through a meaningful two-way dialogue they recognised the brand’s actions, perceived them as consistent with their own through a common cause and shared values. The narrative created allowed TOMS to experience a positive feedback loop of outcomes that enabled them to pursue their purposes more profitably, with greater support and more effectively. This aspect was reinforced by the interviews conducted with members of the TOMS brand:

I think people that like TOMS and follow TOMS they are socially aware and that’s why they like TOMS – you know we’re able to give back and that means that they give something back by purchasing the shoes, they’re part of it. [...] Social media allows us to provide updates to our customers so they’re part of it (the brand’s activities and giving actions) (Interviewee TOMS, 2015).

As such, stakeholders were key components in the learning process and through a method of “storytelling” were able to spread the message and inform about the TOMS’ brand values, mission and vision. The interviews concluded that these values and the brand’s story are always a central piece of communication to the brand. According to one of the interviewees in this study “Our main thing is the story comes before the product [...] We are about getting the story out there to our customers, to give them as much information as we can”.

Sharing

As Funk (2009) suggested, social media will not sell products but it will help increase digital presence and create stronger relationships with customers to increase brand value. This dialogue can be seen in how consumers share posts with their peers. There is a tendency towards a participatory culture in which people aim to “contribute to their world’s and organisations’ search for consumer sight” as informed by Ind *et al.* (2013, p. 6) and in fact, additional academic studies confirm that consumers feel more intimate, positive and creative to brands after starting being more involved in brands’ communities. Similar to consumers, brands are extremely interested in achieving a high level of engagement, which usually results in “an intimate long-term relationship with the customer” according to Sashi (2012, p. 254). In this campaign, photos are always accompanied by a mention to the campaign # as well as with a short description and reference to brand-related people. An interesting finding was that photos with higher levels of creativity tend to be liked and shared the most. Stakeholders participating in the campaign used it as a way to express their beliefs and did so by creating images that visually translate the purpose of the campaign. Through the use of “likes”, “comments” and “send to” functions, consumers then post their photos using the social network site. Sharing then leads to co-developing through UGC. The fact that consumers’ stories are part of this viral marketing strategy was also mentioned in the interviews: “Social media’s strength is the accessibility of its WOM and the fact that it empowers others to share stories” (Interviewee TOMS, 2015).

One of the strengths of the campaign lies in the fact that TOMS starts and participates in customer’s conversations through publishing these photos on their

official feed. This is in line with Dobeles *et al.* (2007) perspective that viral marketing is a cost-effective marketing strategy that facilitates the interconnections between a brand and its consumers.

Co-developing

By relying on UGC, the brand is able to establish a strong sense of community. Users tend to use elements of the brand in order to allow for more correct identification and immediate recognition of the brand in the photos and videos posted. As stated by Goor (2012) the use of brand colours as well as brand-related people and events, helps consumers to better perceive a brand and its message. By using images as opposed to only text, levels of engagement are higher (Soonius, 2012) and allow for increased interaction. The majority of photos posted through the #withoutshoes campaign feature the TOMS actual shoes, the brand's flag, the blue colour and other recognisable brand elements.

Instagram has facilitated the conversation between TOMS and its target audience thanks to the interactive nature of the platform and social media in general (Pickton and Broderick, 2001; Sashi, 2012; Ubeda *et al.*, 2013). Instead of being passive recipients of brand information, customers that are engaging with brands can make active contributions to these interactions (Hollebeek, 2011) and use technology as a way to reach a level of exposure and customer engagement well beyond what was previously possible (Belch and Belch, 2012). This co-developing leads to socialising through the element of experience.

Socialising

Social media platforms have the power to develop a meaningful connection and provoke conversation with actively engaged audiences (Hermida *et al.*, 2012) as well as facilitate the formation of brand communities (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001; Muñiz and Schau, 2005).

Since brand communities' member share common beliefs, this generates a bond (De Valck *et al.*, 2009) and increases consumer feelings of empowerment (Cova and Pace, 2006). Brands that co-create with consumers, give them an emotional attachment and the ability to participate in a unique experience. As clarified by the interviews conducted, value creation occurs through:

Building and helping to build a community. [...] It is about bringing likeminded people in. Whatever it is, it's about them sharing something and it's working really well. It's creating a really close community around TOMS (Interviewee TOMS, 2015).

The socialisation process is enhanced through the use of "likes", "comments" and "send to" functions, allowing for a quick spread of the message. Stakeholders are able to quickly extend the reach of the community through this social platform.

TOMS has different Instagram profiles according to the countries in which it is present, however the official account for TOMS was the one that gathered all photos and generated the highest traffic: on average, each photo posted had a total of 13,830 likes. The benefits of social media was addressed in the interviews:

We are a completely different business model, we don't use the same marketing budgets. [...] Social media is quite a quick evolution and it's so important and so influential and so cost effective as a marketing tool. You're reaching millions of people from what can be a very small spend as a brand (Interviewee TOMS, 2015).

To further extend the benefits of this platform, Instagram was confirmed in the interviews conducted as the tool that allows for such a campaign to be truly global: “One Day Without Shoes is a global initiative. (It has) fantastic interactive potential with customers and we get a massive reach into the millions just via digital media” (Interviewee TOMS, 2015).

Advocating

Consumers' role and their increasing importance as brand ambassadors, co-creators of innovative products and active participants in their favourite companies make them a key player – they are becoming not only the consumer, but the producer, a supplier, a seller and a style manager (Fashion Futures, 2010). Brand advocacy and collaboration emerges from the formation of communities (Algesheimer *et al.*, 2005) as discussed above. These consumers are defined by the brands they choose (Muniz and Hamer, 2001), leading to the process of social categorisation and to the establishment of membership in resulting social groups. Through a process of generating awareness, they then continue the circle educating and further learning about the brand at stake. The advocating journey was confirmed at the interviews:

Once one person knows the story properly, they tell someone else and so each person becomes almost like a brand ambassador themselves and that's the success of TOMS - is that people are engaged with the story and they spread the story. It's quite a simple one really. It's very powerful (Interviewee TOMS, 2015).

Advocacy is not, however, the campaign's main goal. According to TOMS founder Mycoskie (2015) the #withoutshoes campaign was not just about advocacy and giving based on buying, but based on real giving for giving's sake. In fact, every country where the brand has a presence and that were the object of this study, has adhered to the campaign, using Instagram to promote the activities held during the day and campaign timeframe. By doing so, at the end of the campaign, the brand was able to donate a total of 296,243 shoes and has successfully shared this using the same platform. As stated by Mycoskie (2012, p. 187) “TOMS' success is not the result of an idea, but a community of people who believe in the power of giving”. This reinforces Mycoskie's vision on the power of positive customer brand endorsement “My customers are my biggest evangelists” (Binkley, 2010). Customers are immensely attracted by values and meanings; it is not about the utility or quality of a particular item, but about that story behind it. Giving is the fundamental story that supports the TOMS brand and Mycoskie (2012, p. 37) reveals, “We spend every day thinking about new ways to spread our story”. This engagement can be defined as a combination of both rational and emotional bonds.

Through a two-way narrative, redirecting focus from the brand to the consumer, the dialogue shared on Instagram allows for a mutually beneficial process to occur between brands and consumers. Relationship building is built on the premises of both an emotional and symbolic strategy with the TOMS brand, feeling of empowerment for doing good and participating in a common cause as well as trust and commitment to the brand that the notion of brand community creates and develops.

Conclusion

With the proliferation of social networks, the dynamic between brand and consumers has changed, though allowing the consumer to actively participate in the construction of the brand identity, bringing the brand closer to the consumer. Through co-creating

with the community, the consumers become an active stakeholder, both in the interaction and in the context. At this stage, value creation takes place through the interaction and experience of creating unique products.

Collaboration and relationship building are seen as sources of value and one of the premises on which this is built is the belief that by sharing experiences, all the individuals involved acquire a greater understanding of what is happening on the other side of every interaction, enabling them to devise a new and better experience for both sides. (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004a) As well as ethical and sustainability issues, consumers are increasingly interested in brand stories and the dynamic relationship between brands and consumers is of growing importance to the analysis of the brand experience, with consumers increasingly seeking full immersion in unique contexts and experiences which confirm the meanings, cultures, symbols and identities behind their chosen brands.

This analysis of TOMS' key annual marketing event has shown the power of brands to leverage social media enabled co-creation in ways that were not previously possible and that to an extent could not have been imagined. The effective and dynamic use of Instagram facilitated consumers to join together in brand communities and assume a key role in the creation of the brand's narrative. Through a joint and focused effort, both brand and corresponding stakeholders worked collaboratively to co-create the value, shape TOMS' message and reach a common campaign goal. As one can see by the data collected, the use of Instagram has allowed for higher levels of engagement, shared ownership of the brand and increased effectiveness of the #withoutshoes campaign.

The connection of design and marketing is evident in how the campaign is supported and how it makes use of the brand's visual components as a key strategic tool to allow for the sharing and advocacy of the message. In sum, building brand excellence in the fashion business can be done through creating lasting and meaningful stakeholder value. For a brand to succeed in today's competitive landscape it needs to stretch beyond short-term results and have a purpose beyond pure profit. A successful brand that engages effectively with consumers and derives trust, commitment and emotional responses is grounded in creating long-lasting social and economic value for all its stakeholders and by doing so, maintains its relevancy and drives growth as well as loyal consumers.

Reflecting upon implications of this study from a managerial perspective, one can say that marketing strategies using digital platforms need to generate an environment of trust that enables participation to happen as well as a sense of creativity through the use and sharing of brand values. It is a brand's task to develop platforms and mechanisms to enable consumers to contribute effectively (Ind *et al.*, 2013). Interactions need to be designed having tasks, platforms, tools and media in mind and allowing for interaction within the brand community.

As for academic implications, this study has shown the need for further theoretical developments to take place, if co-creation theory is to be embedded further into the marketing literature. Also, the need to focus on Instagram, its processes, tools and evaluation techniques as a preferential tool of a brand's marketing strategy is another recommendation arising from this study.

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