Capturing customer emotions and experiences to enhance value co-creation: the Ichnusa online brand community

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Abstract

Purpose of the paper: This study aims to explore how business-to-consumer interactions within an online brand community leverage and capture consumers' emotions and experiences to perform value co-creation processes in the realm of customer engagement theory.

Methodology: Given the explorative nature of the research, the study adopts a qualitative methodology through a case study method. In particular, it focuses on Birra Ichnusa's Facebook page in order to investigate how the brand fosters the logic of value co-creation by leveraging consumers' emotions and experiences within its online community.

Findings: The brand largely adopts different types of "emotional messages" and "experiential messages" that are strictly correlated in order to deliver memorable and unique consumer experiences of value co-creation.

Research limits: This study represents a preliminary approach to capture the complexity of consumers' emotions and experiences within the customer engagement theoretical framework in order to explore value co-creation within online brand communities. In turn, such research will require further theoretical contributions and refinements, as well as appropriate empirical tests.

Practical implications: This study may represent a useful framework for managers and decision makers to better understand the strategic advantages that could derive from leveraging on consumers' deeper emotions and experiences within customer engagement practices.

Originality of the paper: This study analyses the concept of value co-creation from a little explored perspective: emotional and experiential dynamics with reference to a very original context represented by an online brand community of food and beverage. In doing so, it deals with the validation and enrichment of the theoretical foundations of customer engagement

Key words: value co-creation; customer experience; emotions; experiences; online brand community

1. Introduction

The evolutionary role of consumers as "active players" has transformed exchanges of goods and services into real co-creational experiences

(Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000, 2004a, 2004b; Vargo and Lusch, 2004; Payne *et al.*, 2009). Co-creational experiences refer to high-quality interactions that enable customers to co-create unique experiences with companies (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b). In this view, value creation is a competitive space centred on personalized co-creation experiences that are developed through purposeful interactions between the consumer and a network of companies and consumer communities (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000). In particular, in the foundational propositions of value co-creation expressed by Vargo and Lusch (2004), there is one that closely pertains to the co-creation experience and states that the customer is always a co-creator of value: there is no value until an offering is experienced by users.

Co-creational experiences are even more emphasized by the emergence of new communication channels (Bolton *et al.*, 2014; McColl-Kennedy *et al.*, 2012). In particular, digital communication in the context of online brand communities (Huang and Rust, 2013; Park *et al.*, 2011; Nambisan and Baron, 2007), like social network-based brand fan pages (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010), represents a fundamental "touch-point" (Gambetti *et al.*, 2012:678) or "encounter" of brand-consumer interactions (Koo and Rha, 2012; Woodside and Ko, 2013) in order to learn brand/product related information, share common interests (Choi *et al.*, 2016), and also join cognitive and emotional experiences (Anderson, 2005; Gentile *et al.*, 2007; Payne *et al.*, 2008; Simonson and Schmitt, 1997). Users are essential in the value co-creation process, and act both as providers and beneficiaries at the same time (Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011). Thanks to these platforms or encounters, that reinforce brand value by connecting individuals through human experiences and facilitate the experiential view of innovation (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2003; Ramaswamy, 2008, 2011), managers can exploit relevant information about customer value expectations in order to enhance consumer engagement (Dessart *et al.*, 2016; Marbach *et al.*, 2016; Verma *et al.*, 2012), gain success and generate stronger consumer-brand relationships (Gensler *et al.*, 2013). Online consumer engagement significantly attracts both academics and practitioners of online marketing (Baldus *et al.*, 2015), since it enhances consumers' co-creative activities and practices, as well as meaningful interactive experiences (Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015; Vivek *et al.*, 2012).

However, despite the strategic role played by engagement processes and human experiences in brand building (Ramaswamy, 2011), little attention in value co-creation literature has been paid to their relevance and impact on brands (Gummesson *et al.*, 2014). Also, the term "engagement", which is the fundamental ingredient of value creation among firms and customers particularly within the service dominant logic (SDL) (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), has not been fully developed yet (Bolton, 2011; Brodie and Hollebeek, 2011; Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014). Payne *et al.* (2008) state that relatively little is known about how customers engage in co-creation and stress the need to develop a conceptual framework for value co-creation. In particular, they propose a theoretical model in which customer processes are made up by three elements of the relational experience: *emotion, cognition* and *behaviour*. From a similar perspective,

Brodie *et al.* (2011) identify five theoretical propositions on customer engagement in which they also outline the role of relevant *cognitive, emotional,* and *behavioral* dimensions.

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In our study, we base our conceptual underpinnings on these three dimensions while exploring the key factors that are able to enhance value creation based on customer engagement within online brand communities. In doing this, we seek to answer the following research question: within the context of brands' online communities, how can business-to-consumer interactions (Choi *et al.*, 2016) leverage and capture consumers' emotional and experiential aspects in order to co-create value?

Given to the exploratory nature of our research, we adopted a qualitative approach, and a single case study method (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Yin, 1994), represented by the Ichnusa Facebook community . In our study, value lies in the co-creation experience of a specific consumer at a specific point in time, in a specific location, in the context of a specific event (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2000; Brodie *et al.*, 2011). For this reason, we identified a concrete case study in order to explore the specific set of situational contingencies in which emotional experiences are supposed to be the main ingredient of customer engagement for value co-creation throughout the Ichnusa online brand community Facebook page.

Our paper is divided into five main sections: in Section 2 we provide key theoretical insights with reference to the problem addressed; in Section 3 we develop the adopted methodology to conduct our research; in Section 4 we discuss the study's findings, and finally in Section 5 we point out managerial implications, limitations and insights for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Customer engagement as the basis for value co-creation

Customer engagement is a relevant concept when dealing with value co-creation within the service dominant logic (SDL) (Payne *et al.*, 2008; Brodie *et al.*, 2011). SDL posits that "co-creation is about joint creation of value by the company and the customer" (Prahalad and Ramaswamy, 2004b, p. 8). That is, firms can only provide services as value propositions, which become an input towards value realisation. Value realisation depends on customers' participation in the service process (Cabiddu *et al.,* 2013). Although relatively little is known about how customers engage in co-creation (Woodruff and Flint, 2006), there have been contributions that provide theoretical frameworks for understanding and improving value co-creation: for instance, Payne *et al.* (2008) draw a conceptual scheme based on customer experiences in which encounter processes amongst customers and suppliers play a crucial role in shaping value co-creation.

In particular, they underline that the three elements of customer experience are *cognition, emotion* and *behavior*. Cognition consists of both an information processing approach that focuses on memory-based activity and of processes that are more sub-conscious and private in nature (Holbrok and Hirschman, 1982). Emotions and feelings are related to

customers' moods and personal traits. Behavior is referred to the actions of customers by which they create experience using product or service (Payne *et al.*, 2008). Brodie *et al.* (2011) explore the theoretical foundations of customer engagement by drawing on relationship marketing theory and the SDL. Specifically, they pinpoint that "CE is a multidimensional concept subject to a context- and/or stakeholder-specific expression of relevant cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions" (p. 253).

These studies stress the cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Payne *et al.*, 2008), give us the theoretical lenses for exploring the role of emotions and experiences as keys factors to enhance value creation based on customer engagement within online brand communities. Moreover, they suggest investigating the specific set of situational conditions while exploring the peculiar nature of customers' interactive engagement experiences throughout the chosen online brand community.

2.2 Customer engagement in social media and online brand communities

The development of sophisticated technological platforms has facilitated computer-mediated interaction among consumers (Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2010; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Ulusu, 2010; Vivek *et al.*, 2014; Yadav and Pavlou, 2014) and brand communities (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001; Muniz and Schau, 2005): by capturing deeper consumers' responses and behaviours within social media environments (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014), such as affective, cognitive (Dessart *et al.*, 2016), personalized, emotional and interactive engagements (Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Lusch and Vargo, 2010), consumer engagement provides powerful implications and favorable brand outcomes (Vivek *et al.*, 2012).

In the literature, the use of social media is usually associated with terms like entertainment, social connection, information and economic rewards (Baldus *et al.*, 2015), but empirical findings point out that brand pages which stimulate social experience (like tags by fans, user-generated content, celebrity endorsement) are able to achieve higher and deeper levels of consumer engagement (Cabiddu *et al.*, 2014; Floreddu *et al.*, 2014; Tafesse, 2016), which culminate in meaningful interactive experiences (Vernuccio *et al.*, 2015; Vivek *et al.*, 2012). Indeed, social media (Dessart *et al.*, 2015), and Facebook in particular (Boyd and Ellison *et al.* 2008), foster consumer engagement (De Valck *et al.*, 2009; Gummerus *et al.*, 2012; Van Laer *et al.*, 2013) by facilitating co-creation processes and interactive communication between consumers and organizations (Nenonen *et al.*, 2012). Brand pages represent rich and interactive platforms that enable brand-consumer daily interactions (Lipsman *et al.*, 2012), drive consumer engagement and support the sharing of multimedia information: photo, video, links to powerful sensory impressions and strategic messages, like emotional and experiential ones, and brand image (Ashley and Tuten, 2015; Kim *et al.,* 2015). According to the brand community perspective, social media are viewed through the lens of brand community, which is defined as "a specialized, non-geographically bound community, based on

a structured set of social relationships among admirers of a brand" (Muniz and O'guinn, 2001, p. 412). The concept of traditional brand community has recently evolved towards online brand community, "which can be defined as a grouping of individuals sharing a mutual interest in a brand, using electronic mediation to overcome real-life space and time limitations" (Dessart *et al.*, 2015). Social media like Facebook are interpreted as brand-moderated online communities (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012) where "geographically scattered" followers share their opinions, feelings and passions (Baldus *et al.*, 2015; Brodie *et al.*, 2013; Dessart *et al.*, 2016; Frau *et al.*, 2018), and develop a sense of community identification and shared consciousness (Zaglia, 2013). Accordingly, companies have started to deem the development of social media-mediated brand communities as a critical part of their brand management strategies (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012), and also as a fundamental marketing tool to foster relationship-marketing communication with consumers (Ulusu, 2010).

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Brand-generated content, which connects the brand with its consumers (Ashley and Tuten, 2015) allows users to strategically use response options, such as likes, shares and comments (Hausman *et al.*, 2014), and constitutes a way to enhance multiple experiential forms of consumer engagement (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2014; Vivek *et al.*, 2012; Tafesse, 2016). Empirical findings support the evidence that Facebook brand pages better satisfy consumers' needs in terms of sensory, emotional and social stimulation (Addis and Holbrook, 2001; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), given that consumers are also encouraged to express their personal feelings by using, for instance, the "like" button, or their sentiments, through "love, surprise, anger and sadness" buttons. Actually, within brand pages, consumers are able to engage with companies by posting and commenting contents on their Facebook pages, but more interestingly can use the emoticons to display their interest or impression, an action which represents an innovative form of WOM communication (Cvijikj and Michahelles, 2013).

Firms that are able to provide positive customer experiences achieve higher levels of customer engagement and performance (Kumar *et al.*, 2010). Furthermore, they create customer loyalty (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012) and long-term relationships (Pan *et al.*, 2012), which ensure more attachment towards the brand compared to competitors' offer (So *et al.*, 2013), more willingness to pay, higher buying intentions and switching resistance (Evanschitzky *et al.*, 2012). Also, customer engagement in a brand community is positively related to brand relationship outcomes, such as satisfaction, trust, and affective commitment, which impact on customer satisfaction (Gummerus *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, strong emotional links and long-lasting affective bonds may be developed among members of the brand community (Bergami and Bagozzi in Dessart *et al.*, 2015).

Given the multidimensional role played by engaged consumers in terms of organizational collaborative development, innovation processes and the improvement of firms' offer (Sawhney *et al.*, 2005), contemporary branding trends emphasize the importance of customers' involvement in business activities in order to improve their lives (Choi *et al.*, 2016), make them perceive that the brand offers what they need and want and, thus, create long-lasting value (Gilbreath, 2009).

2.3 Details in value co-creation

Organizations are increasingly becoming familiar with the fact that *little things* can make a big difference in customer experience (Grewal *et al.*, 2009), and that the management of consumer experiences and emotions, such as sensory experiences, emotional experiences, cognition, creativity etc., may improve their business performance (Bolton *et al.*, 2014). Therefore, in order to achieve value co-creation, which arises when "consumer emotional, cognitive, and behavioural experiences are the basis of the value, impressions, recognition, and internalization they accord to the brand" (Choi *et al.*, 2016), it is extremely important to create experiential brand-consumer relationships (Payne *et al.*, 2008). Managers may act as *designers* who create consumption experiences with emotional engagement (Brown *et al.*, 2008), and leverage "the capability of brand messages and media context to elicit emotional responses, co-create multi-sensory consumption experiences and encourage consumer-brand-related behaviours" (Gambetti *et al.*, 2012, p.662). Indeed, marketers enter their consumers' lives by engaging with them from an emotional and physical perspective in order to create deeper and authentic relationships.

The *details* that are used to co-create value by driving customer experiences, can be realized along three main dimensions (Bolton *et al.*, 2014): *designing and delivering human touch experiences,* a proactive market orientation (Narver *et al.*, 2004), which centers on empathy and uncovering customers' feelings to better understand their explicit and latent needs in order to create meaningful connections with them (Brown *et al.*, 2008). According to this *human touch* approach, commercial transactions turn into human relationships (Sirianni and Bitner, 2011), where consumers are firstly treated as human beings with specific needs (i.e. security, belonging, control and fairness), and then as consumers.

The second dimension is about *creating emotionally engaged experiences* in order to encourage customers' emotional engagement with the brand (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). According to this perspective, "consumer engagement in a virtual brand community involves specific interactive experiences between consumers and the brand […] consumer engagement is a context-dependent, psychological state characterized by fluctuating intensity levels that occur within dynamic, iterative engagement processes […]consumer engagement is a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/ or behavioural dimensions, and plays a central role in the process of relational exchange […] in iterative engagement processes within the brand community" (Brodie *et al.*, 2013, p. 107).

The third dimension deals with *creating human touch and emotionally engaged experiences*, which combines human touch and emotionally engaged dimensions in delivering memorable customer experiences by allowing consumers to co-create opportunities (Tsiotsou *et al.*, 2010). In this sense, co-creation arises because the firm is like an open platform that allows outsiders (i.e. customers) to create something of unique value for them. "Customer value can't be reduced to functionality versus price. Instead, it is comprised of both the functional and the emotional benefits that customers receive minus the financial and the nonfinancial burdens they bear" (Berry *et al.*, 2002, p. 86).

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3. Methodology

To explore how business-to-consumer interactions leverage and capture consumers' emotions and experiences in order to enhance value co-creation within an online brand community, we decided to adopt a qualitative methodological approach. A qualitative methodology was preferred to investigate the interaction process among community members, since it allows information about customers' emotions and experiences, which are difficult to quantify to be collected.

The methodology used to carry out the study is an exploratory single case study (Dubois and Gadde, 2002; Yin 1994), which is a proper research strategy for the analysis of complex social phenomena and the development of a holistic understanding of a social phenomenon even in an online context (Yin, 1994). Furthermore, the single case study method represents the most suitable methodology to answer the following research question: within the context of brands' online communities, how business-to-consumer interactions leverage and capture consumers' emotional and experiential aspects in order to co-create value? To carry out the research, we focused on a local Sardinian firm in the food and beverage sector in order to provide empirical insights concerning the phenomenon of value co-creation from an emotional and experiential perspective.

3.1 Research Setting

The research setting regards the exploitation of social media to co-create value within an Italian brewery online brand community. The brewery industry is particularly suitable for this research because of the recent growth in the number of craft breweries which has stimulated older firms to undergo a process of customer engagement. Moreover, beer represents a product that is traditionally associated with emotions and experiences since it is usually consumed in "free time" social contexts. This evidence makes it easier to leverage consumers' emotions and experiences in order to develop a process of positive online interaction which enhances value co-creation. Brewery firms can actually benefit from the use of web technologies in creating and improving a strong online brand community.

In our analysis, we focused on the social media Facebook, the most relevant and exploited tool by the Italian brewery sector. In addition, Facebook allows the brand to use more than one form of multimedia content, such as videos, links, photos, gifs etc., on its page at the same time, which stimulates the sharing of emotions and experiences. In Facebook brand communities, it is also easy to better observe the interaction process between the firm and its customers, and even customer-to-customer interactions thanks to the evolutionary sequence of posts and comments that are continuously published by the actors.

3.2 Sample selection

In our research, we focused our attention on a firm belonging to the food and beverage industry, because it may provide deeper insights into the value co-creation process through consumers' emotions and experiences. Consequently, we properly selected the case study by following these criteria: 1) transparency; 2) key information (Pettigrew, 1990; Tsoukas, 2010); 3) background knowledge of the firm and its environment, such as history, competitors, customers, work habits and routines, way of organizing projects, and standards of quality (Bourdieu, 1990; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011); 4) long-running company; 5) at least one emotional and/or experiential product; 6) active interaction within an online brand community.

Transparency, access to key information and a good background knowledge of the firm provide significant data to strengthen the research design. Moreover, an ideal company has been operating for more than ten years, since its relationships with its customers require time before being deemed as stable. In addition, these relationships are expected to be positive since our aim is to explore and provide an example of a successful case of customer engagement for value co-creation.

Besides longevity, the firm must also produce emotional and/or experiential products, because we need to study a company that tries to capture and leverage its consumers' emotions and experiences to co-create value. Finally, we need to deal with a firm that successfully manages an online brand community, since the main goal of this study is to deal with the phenomenon within an online context.

By applying these criteria, we chose to collect data from Birra Ichnusa, the most popular Sardinian beer brand, and also the only Sardinian beer producer that has managed to go beyond the island' borders. It was founded in 1912, when Amsicora Capra opened the first Ichnusa brewery plant in Cagliari (the capital of Sardinia). The company survived the First World War, but War had to stop production during the Second World until 1945, when it entirely resumed its production activity.

Over time, the connections among Birra Ichnusa,Sardinian people and the whole Island have become extremely strong. In 1963, the company launched a project for a new production unit located in Assemini, which was at the forefront compared to the Italian standards of the time. In 1986, Heineken Italy bought Birra Ichnusa. Thanks to this holding, the Sardinian Birra Ichnusa began to be noticed even at an international level. For two consecutive editions, Birra Ichnusa achieved international recognition, i.e., the Superior Taste Award, at the international competition organized by the International Taste and Quality Institute in Brussels.

In time, the relationship that the company has established with its customers has come to represent a point of reference, mainly by leveraging its Sardinian origins.

3.3 Data Source

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We collected our data from two main sources: 1) general information about the company on the company's official website; 2) content shared on its Facebook page.

During the first step, with the official website data we created a dataset containing information about the main features of Birra Ichnusa such as its history, communication style, products, commercial partners and so on.

During the second step, in order to understand how Birra Ichnusa performs value co-creation by capturing and leveraging on its consumers' emotions and experiences within its online brand community, we focused on its Facebook page. Therefore, we used NCapture, a browser application of NVivo software, to collect all of the multimedia content shared on Birra Ichnusa's official Facebook page in the last year (2016-2017). Thanks to this tool, we gathered a rich collection of data (see Table 1), which allowed us to analyze both business-to-consumer and customer-to-customer interactions. We gathered data like posts, photos, links, tags, videos, and the company's replies to its clients' comments. With reference to the clients, we registered their reactions to the company's contents and their comments. We think that this dual perspective is extremely important in analyzing how the firm and customers co-create value, and also to understand the dynamics of their interaction process.

Tab. 1: Summary of the data sources

Data sources	Type	Number
Website page	Internet page	13
Official Facebook page	Post	344
Official Facebook page	Photo	594
Official Facebook page	Link	676
Official Facebook page	Tag	462
Official Facebook page	Video	27
Official Facebook page	Comment	15.001

Source: authors' elaboration

3.4 Research Process and Data Analysis

In order to understand how Birra Inchnusa interacts with its customers by leveraging on emotional and experiential values to enhance value co-creation, we performed a two-step analysis by adopting a "like to like" coding scheme (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013) through NVivo 10.

During the first step, we based our data analysis on the concepts found in the literature: emotional messages (Bolton *et al.*, 2014; Brodie *et al.*, 2011a; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009) and experiential messages (Bolton *et al.*, 2014; Brown, 2008; Verhoef *et al.*, 2009). According to the previous literature, we considered two conceptual categories that provide a specific definition of emotional and experiential messages (see Table 2). During this step , we classified the contents of the Birra Ichnusa Facebook page according to the two types of message definitions in order to explore and

interpret what type of "emotional" and "experiential" communication the brand conveys to its brand community. By doing so, we wanted to find out if there is some correlation between the two categories in delivering real memorable experiences of value co-creation (Tsiotsou *et al.*, 2010) and creating something that is of unique value for the brand's consumers. We therefore created two nodes families (Actors and Value Co-creation Levers) by following the logic of "like to like" grouping (Bazeley and Jackson, 2013). Accordingly, the child nodes Birra Ichnusa and Clients were categorized under the parent node Actors, while the Emotional Message and Experiential Message child nodes were connected to the Value Co-creation Levers parent one. Thanks to this coding scheme, for example, when a data segment referred to a client talking about an experience related to the consumption of beer, the segment was coded at two nodes: "Clients" and "Experiential Message". Then, we searched for possible associations between nodes by looking for coding co-occurrences and running a matrix query with NVivo (Table 2).

Tab. 2. Summary of the first step of analysis: concepts and their labels, definitions, descriptions, and examples

Concept	Definition	Description	Example
Emotional messages	They focus more on emotional bonds (Brodie *et al.*, 2011a), by providing sensory-rich experiences (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009) and by customizing/personalizing experiences to meet customers' desires, i.e. "customizing" (Bolton *et al.*, 2014)	Brand multimedia content aimed at stimulating consumers' emotions, and consumers' positive reaction/reply	"A 2016 full of emotions! Thank you all for each moment lived together"
Experiential messages	They provide a more "holistic experience" (Verhoef *et al.*, 2009), and centered on customers' feelings and empathy, their explicit and latent desires and needs (Brown *et al.*, 2008), emphasizing the necessity to recognize consumers' needs for security, belonging, control and "human touch" features (Bolton *et al.*, 2014)	Brand multimedia content related to daily life or special events, and consumers' sharing of their personal experience with the brand	"Always on the side of our favorite team. Share your picture of yourseilf as a true supporter"

Source: authors' elaboration

After this first step, we enriched the analysis by considering three aspects related to emotional messages and experiential messages: cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Payne *et al.*, 2008). Therefore, the first set of analysis was further examined to group them according to the specific message the company wanted to convey (see Table 3). In this case as well, we adopted a "like to like" coding scheme. We used two parent nodes and kept Actors divided into Birra Ichnusa and Clients because it is important to study the interaction between these

actors. Moreover, we created another parent node Dimensions which gathers the Cognitive, Emotional and Behavioral child nodes. We observed the co-occurrences again and ran a matrix query to pinpoint associations between nodes (Table 3).

Tab. 3: Summary of the second step of analysis: dimensions and their labels, definitions, descriptions, and examples

Dimension	Definition	Description	Example
Cognitive	Cognition consists of both an information processing approach that focuses on memory-based activity and on processes that are more sub-conscious and private in nature (Holbrok and Hirschman, 1982).	Brand multimedia content that triggers customers' memories, and customers' sharing of coherent replies with that evoked memory	"When drinking Birra Ichnusa, I remember the unforgettable moments I spent during my holidays in Sardinia."
Emotional	Emotions and feelings are related to moods and personal characteristics of customers.	Brand multimedia content aimed at affecting customers' mood, and customers' coherent reaction of personal involvement	"Ichnusa takes you back to Sardinia from anywhere in the world. For those who left Sardinia, Ichnusa is a reminder that fills my heart with joy. A beer can make you feel at home even if you are far from it. When holding a Birra Ichnusa, you can dream about myrtle trees in bloom, the sound of the waves, the colours of the land."
Behavioral	Behavior is referred to the actions of customers with which they create experience when using a product or service (Payne *et al.*, 2008).	Customers' sharing of daily life episodes while consuming the product, and the brand's positive reaction to the customers' content	"Every moment is the right one… not only at the beach [the customer posted a picture with a bottle of beer in the snow]"

Source: authors' elaboration

The data analysis process reflects the qualitative nature of our study. Specifically, the data analysis process was performed by two co-authors, who prepared the coding rounds in a separate and simultaneous manner. For each stage, the two co-authors checked the robustness of the codes by means of a coding comparison query and then discussed the inconsistencies until they reached a Kappa coefficient value above 0.75. The achievement of this value means that there is coherence between the coding processes performed by the two co-authors and therefore that the phenomenon was interpreted in the same way.

4. Findings

Emotional messages

In looking at the videos, photos, and links posted by Birra Ichnusa, we found many messages aimed at stimulating consumers' emotions when

presenting and promoting its product: *"Made with all your soul, loved with all our heart"* or *"Always proud of our origins, since 1912 we have been proud of our recipe"*. These inputs were strongly welcomed by the customers, who positively reacted with enthusiastic comments like: *"Very good!", "He who drinks beer lives 100 years!", "Always in my heart", "Lover of Sardinia and especially of Birra Ichnusa , ALWAYS!"*. This business-to-consumer interaction displays how the firm engages with its customers by leveraging on their emotions. We discovered that there is particular emphasis on emotional concepts like *love, passion, pride*, which trigger a process of value co-creation that is confirmed by the correspondent reactions of customers, which are also expressed by using the "like" and "heart" Facebook buttons. The firm actively interacts with customers to enhance value co-creation by answering *"our blonde is always the same, but we want to please its great soul. It is that of our brewmasters, who have been producing it with passion and tradition since 1912, that of Sardinia, its land, and all of you who, for over 100 years, have been fans of Ichnusa", "The Birra Ichnusa recipe has been the same since 1912, guarded by our Assemini brewery beermasters"*.

Another interesting instance of customer emotional engagement occurs when Birra Ichnusa shares pictures of local nature, such as Sardinian landscapes, sea, and countryside, aimed at triggering consumers' emotions: *"proudly made in Sardinia", "today cheers to all the marvellos places in our land",* which provoke consistent reactions of customer engagement, like *"it's impossible to see a better picture* [referred to a picture with the beer and a landscape]", and the presence of a huge number of "likes" and "hearts". In our case study extremely strong and positive reactions of consumers were frequent when looking at pictures of their land. Again, this is proof of engagement that is exploited by the firm to enhance value co-creation and is also expressed by firm's the responses (sharing of likes, smiles and hearts).

Tab. 4: Summary of emotional messages: firm's voice, reaction, community's voice, and firm's response

Firms's voice	Reaction	Community's voice	Firm's response
"Made with all your soul, loved with all our heart"	1598 likes 58 hearts	"Very good!" "He who drinks beer lives 100 years!"	"Our blonde is always the same, but we want to please its great soul. It is that of our brewmasters, who have been producing it with passion and tradition since 1912, that of Sardinia, its land, and all of you who, for over 100 years, have been fans of Ichnusa"
"Always proud of our origins, since 1912 we have been proud of our recipe"	728 likes 24 hearts	"Always in my heart" "Lover of Sardinia and especially of Birra Ichnusa, ALWAYS!"	"Birra Ichnusa recipe has been the same since 1912, guarded by our Assemini brewery beermasters"
"Proudly made in Sardinia"	720 likes 29 hearts	"I guarantee it's very good!" "Special beer, congratulation!"	Likes and comments with hearts and smiles
"Today cheers: to all marvellous places of our land"	1487 likes 67 hearts	"Wonderful beer and places" "Very good! I always advice it to all supermarkets in my city"	Likes and comments with hearts and smiles

Source: authors' elaboration

Experiential messages

Throughout the Birra Ichnusa Facebook page, we found several posts aimed at emphasizing the social side of the brand like: *"fresh and ready to be opened: have you called your friend?", "who is your beer mate today?"*. Common replies to these posts are represented by reactions such as "likes", "hearts" and "smiles", as well as amateur pictures of friends that drink beer together in a pub or eat a sandwich or a pizza with a Birra Ichnusa. In addition, the firm answers with replies like *"cheers!", "have a nice day!"*. In this way, the firm promotes interactions of value co-creation within its online community that are positively perceived, and strengthen not only the social side of the messages, but also its closeness with customers' daily life.

Other messages are focused on traditional or well-known Sardinian events: *"did you make a toast with us for Cagliari's victory*? [with the photo of Cagliari' football players]", *"live together a timeless emotion: proud of being the main sponsor of Sartiglia"*. This type of communication enables the firm to engage with customers by focusing on experiences that they actually know and relate to. Customers positively react by sharing personal photos of themselves during events, for instance with a bottle or a glass of Birra Ichnusa. It is further proof of value co-creation thanks to the brand's interactive processes with its customers.

Tab. 5: Summary of experiential messages: firm's voice, reaction, community's voice, and firm's response

Firms's voice	Reaction	Community's voice	Firm's response
"Fresh and ready to be opened: have you called your friend?"	1088 likes 36 hearts	"It's my favorite!" "I drink and will always drink Birra Ichnusa"	"Cheers!"
"Who is your beer mate today?"	2332 likes 63 hearts 16 smiles	"It would be a pleasure!" "Me!" "I'm drinking it right now!"	"Cheers!"
"Experiencing a timeless emotion together: proud of being the main sponsor of Sartiglia"	2633 likes 64 hearts 18 smiles	"Proud of being Sardinian!" "We will be there!"	"Have a nice day!"

Source: authors' elaboration

Cognitive dimension

Looking at our database, the firm's attempt to evoke customers' memories emerged through its use of multimedia contents such as photos, gifs and videos in which the brand showed, for example, an old Birra Ichnusa sign, or "vintage" versions of its brand image. In this kind of posts, customers usually reply by sharing their childhood memories: *"I still remember when I was a child and I went there with my grandfather"*. This interaction leverages on the deeper side of customer engagement, since it triggers customers' memories and it starts a process of value co-creation through the connection with positive and pleasant memories, together with the firm's sharing of likes and comments with hearts and smiles.

Tab. 6: Summary of the cognitive dimension: firm's voice, reaction, community's voice, and firm's response

Firms's voice	Reaction	Community's voice	Firm's response
"One of our favorite bars... Do you recognize it?"	1959 likes 54 hearts 10 smiles	"I still remember when I was a child and I went there with my grandfather"	Likes and comments with hearts and smiles

Source: authors' elaboration

Emotional dimension

In order to affect the emotional state or mood of its customers, the Ichnusa brand used messages such as: "The *best moments start this way!"*, *"the real human spirit is inside the bottle that one drinks"*. Customers positively react and state *"always with us!", "have a nice day!"* or *"always my blonde friend Sardinia"*. We saw that the firm tries to inspire a specific mood to make their day better, and customers react in a positive manner in turn. The process of value co-creation emerges thanks to this constructive interaction, which is also supported by firm's responses *"cheers!", "have a nice day!", "good choice!"*.

Tab. 7: Summary of the emotional dimension: firm's voice, reaction, community's voice, and firm's response

Firms's voice	Reaction	Community's voice	Firm's response
"The best moments start this way!"	8836 likes 82 hearts 29 smiles	"Always with us!" "Have a nice day!"	"Cheers!" "You have a nice day too!"
"The real human spirit is inside the bottle that one drinks"	590 likes 19 hearts 10 smiles	"Always my blonde friend Sardinia" "Ichnusa is the best!"	"Good choice!"

Source: authors' elaboration

The Behavioral dimension

An important lever of communication between the brand and its customers regards the sharing of multimedia content when, for instance, consumers publish photos while drinking the beer on the beach: *"on the beach with Ichnusa"*, "I'm *never without Ichnusa!"* and the firm replies *"it's always amazing for us when you tell us such great things"*. This kind of interaction is particularly powerful in the process of value co-creation because we can observe an inverse process where the customer initiates the interaction and the brand replies by really appreciating the positive comments.

Tab. 8: Summary of the behavioral dimension: community's voice and firm's response

Community's voice	Firm's response
"On the beach with Ichnusa" "I'm never without Ichnusa!"	"It's always amazing for us when you tell us such great things"

Source: authors' elaboration

5. Conclusions

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Capturing customer
emotions and experiences
to enhance value co-
creation: the Ichnusa online
brand community

The main aim of this study was to deepen the understanding of value co-creation dynamics from an emotional and experiential perspective within online brand communities. In order to achieve this goal, we firstly identified and described a specific theoretical framework highlighting the main features of the value co-creation process within online brand communities, thus emphasizing the issue of consumer engagement and digital communication through social networks as Facebook, which represents a way in which firms try to co-create value by interacting with their consumers. Specifically, the theoretical lenses that we adopted to develop our study, were drawn from the conceptualization of customer engagement (Brodie *et al.*, 2011; Payne *et al.*, 2008) in which cognitive, emotional and behavioural processes play a strategic role in shaping value co-creation.

In order to explore such theoretical aspects, we looked for an empirical setting in which to explore the emotional and experiential communication through interactions among businesses and customers. For this purpose, we singled out the Birra Ichnusa via its online brand community Facebook page for it represented a fruitful case study for exploring value co-creation processes between businesses and customers.

Regarding the *cognitive* sphere, we found that customers incorporate Birra Ichnusa beer in their daily lives consciously: they post pictures of themselves and the bottle of beer in photos in different settings, e.g. while lying on the beach, or when it is snowing. The Ichnusa brand is a natural part of their experience, a companion of leisure time.

Ichnusa is also associated with *emotions* that create positive experiences: it is clear that the role of the firm is to inspire good moods in its customers, by making their day better for instance, and customers react in a positive manner in turn. Value co-creation also emerges thanks to this constructive interaction.

The customers' *behavioural* dimension is clearly reflected in the frequent posting of pictures that stress the strong tie existing between customers and the Ichnusa staff. What clearly emerged was the strong power of the product as part of the customers' lives: this represents the core of the value co-creation. Customers are consumers - as well as marketers - of Ichnusa, which positively impacts their experiences and emotions. Indeed, value co-creation derived both by Ichnusa's staff and the customers' activity through the online Facebook community.

Moreover, this study provides insights from a managerial point of view, since managers and marketers may be inspired by the strategic use of digital communication based on emotional and experiential values to achieve a better competitive advantage, profit, brand image, etc.

In particular, from a managerial perspective, it is important to understand how firms, can exploit business-to-consumer interactions within their online communities (Choi *et al.*, 2016) in order to capture consumers' emotional and experiential aspects to enhance value co-creation. The results of our work demonstrated that, in order to achieve value co-creation by leveraging on these customers' deeper insights on the

Facebook page, managers should behave in an active manner by constantly monitoring the page and the online community, initiating conversations and discussions, engaging with customers interacting with them, quick responses, suggestions , photos, etc. In this way, managers are able to create personal and close relationships with their customers, who represent the key drivers to succeed, enhance brand value, gain advantages in highly competitive markets, etc.

Managers strongly need to foster their online brand community to generate content on their page, express their feelings and emotions, and understand if they are disappointed or not. The use of online brand's community is important due to the fact that it has become an important tool both to support and monitor customer engagement. Thus, firms should adopt this approach in order to obtain market insights and capture trends, as well as positive or negative feedback. Firms should integrate this tool into their communication strategy in order to provide better service, improve their products, and meet customers' expectations.

The study presents some limits. The first one is related to the research context: it may be interesting to analyze and compare more than one organization in order to provide further empirical findings. The second one regards the timeframe taken into consideration due to time constraints: it may be helpful to analyze more than one year. Moreover, it may be interesting to look further into the impact of customer-to-customer interaction to see how it can affect value co-creation in the context of brand pages. We suggest that further research address these less explored issues, in order to extend and focus on the role of emotions and experiences as key dimensions for customer engagement.

Finally, although our findings display a process of value co-creation between Birra Ichnusa and its online brand community, this paper does not provide insights about such co-created value could be quantified. Future research could provide a measurement of co-created value (e.g. Lombardo and Cabiddu, 2016) by assessing whether emotions and experiences can be exploited for customer engagement and value co-creation.

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