ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Unpacking brand co-creation: a single-case study and empirical consolidation of brand co-creation performances following qualitative meta-synthesis

Lars Brand[1] · Matthias Anderski[1,2] · Tim Ströbel[1]

Abstract

An increasing body of research adopts a performative perspective of brands, assuming that multiple actors co-create brands in interrelated brand co-creation performances (*BCCP*). While gaining traction in branding research, empirical work identifying *BCCP* is scarce ($n = 3$). *BCCP* have yet been discussed in single research contexts, evolving largely independent and leading to disparate findings. Initially, this research aims to expand existing empirical work. Using the unusually revelatory 'over-over-the-top' context of the sport brand FC St. Pauli, we apply semi-structured interviews, internal brand-related documents, media content analysis, and social media analysis to identify *BCCP* in a novel research context. Building on this single-case study and existing research on *BCCP*, we empirically consolidate these primary studies ($n = 4$) following qualitative meta-synthesis to unpack brand co-creation in various contexts. The empirical consolidation results in eight interrelated *BCCP* (i.e. communicating, implementing, contesting, developing, negotiating, facilitating, social listening, and assimilating), which are divided into direct brand co-creation performances (*dBCCP*) and enabling brand co-creation performances (*eBCCP*). This research contributes to branding literature by unpacking how (i.e. through which *BCCP*) multiple actors co-create brands. Additionally, it provides brand managers with an enhanced understanding of their brand and the influence of multiple internal and external actors.

Keywords Brand co-creation · Brand co-creation performances · Brand identity · Brand meaning

Introduction

Brands are commonly acknowledged as an organisation's most valuable asset (Forbes 2020), making it essential to comprehend the processes through which they develop. Conventionally, brands are conceived as bundles of static, enduring components consciously determined by the brand owner (Aaker 2002; Keller 1993). However, in today's 'hyperconnected world' (Swaminathan et al. 2020), this

logic is considered insufficient (Merz et al. 2009; Veloutsou and Guzman 2017). Various actors create brand-related content, influence marketing decisions, and share their own brand meanings. Consequently, branding research increasingly adopts a multi-actor-dominant logic, perceiving brands as social constructs that dynamically evolve in interactions among the brand conductor and multiple actors. More specifically, brands are conceptualised as sign systems initially forming a unique identity, which initiates and facilitates processes to co-create brand meaning (Brodie et al. 2017). The exchange of co-created brand meanings ultimately creates value for actors and the brand (Conejo and Wooliscroft 2015). Therefore, brands are co-created constructs that cannot be controlled by the brand conductor (Merz et al. 2009; Sarasvuo et al. 2022). Rather, the brand conductor becomes a facilitator of brand co-creation processes (Michel 2017). While this logic is gaining traction (e.g. Black and Veloutsou 2017; Kornum et al. 2017; Voyer et al. 2017), current research on *how* actors specifically co-create brands in interactions is fragmented.

✉ Lars Brand
lars.brand@uni-bayreuth.de

Matthias Anderski
matthias.anderski@uni-bayreuth.de

Tim Ströbel
tim.stroebel@uni-bayreuth.de

[1] Marketing and Sport Management, University of Bayreuth, Universitätsstr. 30, 95440 Bayreuth, Germany

[2] La Trobe University Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

To unpack brand co-creation, we draw on performativity theory (Butler 1990), positing that social reality is continuously constituted and produced through recurrent linguistic and socio-material performances of actors (Orlikowski 2010). Accordingly, brands are socially constructed entities co-created through brand co-creation performances (*BCCP*) of multiple actors in interactions (Lucarelli and Hallin 2015). While an increasing body of research adopts a performative perspective of brands (Kristal et al. 2020), only three empirical studies investigated specific *BCCP* of actors in the context of one B2C brand (von Wallpach et al. 2017a), five B2B brands (Iglesias et al. 2020), and one human brand (Anderski et al. 2023). This research has evolved largely independent, leading to disparate findings. It is necessary (1) to examine *BCCP* in novel research contexts and (2) to empirically consolidate *BCCP* to obtain a more comprehensive conceptualisation of *BCCP* (Iglesias et al. 2020) and unpack brand co-creation. Thus, this research aims to answer the subsequent overarching research question: *Through which brand co-creation performances do multiple actors co-create brands?*

Building on the limitations of previous research, this research follows a two-pronged approach to address the overarching research question. First, we expand on existing empirical work through a qualitative single-case study in a novel research context. We use the unusually revelatory 'over-over-the-top' context of the sport brand FC St. Pauli applying semi-structured interviews, internal brand-related documents, media content analysis, and social media analysis to identify *BCCP*. Second, building on the case study and previous research on *BCCP*, we 'empirically consolidate' (Hoon 2013, p. 527) these primary studies (*n*=4) following qualitative meta-synthesis. This approach, comprising case-specific analysis and synthesising processes on a cross-study level, results in eight interrelated *BCCP* (i.e. communicating, implementing, contesting, developing, negotiating, facilitating, social listening, and assimilating), which are divided into direct brand co-creation performances (*dBCCP*) and enabling brand co-creation performances (*eBCCP*).

Overall, this research contributes to branding research by unpacking *how* (i.e. through which *BCCP*) multiple actors co-create brands in various contexts. In addition, it provides brand managers with an enhanced understanding of their brand and the influence of multiple internal and external actors.

Brand co-creation

Conventionally, the perception of branding is grounded in a brand owner-dominant logic, assuming that brand owners autonomously and strategically develop and communicate a consistent brand identity (i.e. set of static brand components)

(Aaker 2002; da Silveira et al. 2013; Ward et al. 2020). This logic considers brands as rigid, firm-controlled properties and customers as passive recipients of unilateral brand communication, serving as the sole source of brand meaning (i.e. set of actors' brand associations) (de Chernatony 2006; Kapferer 2008; Keller and Lehmann 2003). Consequently, the brand owner-dominant logic conceptualises brands as static results of conscious management decisions (Burmann et al. 2009; Keller 1993). Recent branding research responds to an increasingly dynamic, interactive, and interconnected environment by embracing a broader relational, social, experiential, and cultural perspective (Brodie et al. 2017). The logic of branding has shifted fundamentally towards a multi-actor-dominant logic, conceptualising brands as dynamic and interactive social processes involving multiple actors (Brand et al. 2023; Iglesias et al. 2013; Merz et al. 2009). Rather than being stable and exclusive products of unilateral management efforts (von Wallpach et al. 2017b), brands are understood as social constructs that are always in flux and in a constant state of becoming (von Wallpach et al. 2017a; Voyer et al. 2017). Beside the organisation (i.e. management, employees), customers, media, B2B partners, and other actors co-create brands in mutual interactions on institutional or emergent brand engagement platforms (Baker et al. 2022; Ind 2014; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2016; Sarkar and Banerjee 2021). Particularly the emergence of social media has empowered actors to actively co-create brands (Le et al. 2022; Tajvidi et al. 2020). Therefore, brand owners need to accept a loss of control, shifting the role of the brand owner from a brand 'guardian' to a 'conductor' of interactive brand co-creation processes (Cooper et al. 2019; Hatch and Schultz 2010; Ind et al. 2020; Michel 2017; Riedmeier and Kreuzer 2022; Siano et al. 2022).

Despite increasing academic attention, research within the domain of brand co-creation is largely heterogeneous (Sarasvuo et al. 2022). First, research adopts various different but interlinked theoretical approaches. The concept of *brand experiences* is used to understand how customers co-create individual brand meanings through cumulative brand-related interactions across various direct or indirect encounters. In addition, research following an organisational perspective focuses on the role of the brand conductor to facilitate the co-creation of brand experiences (Andreini et al. 2018; Brakus et al. 2009; Payne et al. 2009; Stach 2019). *Service-dominant logic* is a pivotal theoretical pillar for brand co-creation (Ind and Schmidt 2019; Kovalchuk et al. 2023; Merz et al. 2009). This research stream examines the role of customers in the process of brand value co-creation (Merz et al. 2018), especially in digital contexts such as brand communities and social media (Chapman and Dilmperi 2022; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2016; Simmons and Durkin 2023), and aims to understand the fundamental conditions that drive brand value co-creation (Mingione and

Leoni 2020). In addition, service-dominant logic is used to adopt a macrolevel ecosystem perspective on brands and understand institutional arrangements in brand co-creation (Baker et al. 2022; Giannopoulos et al. 2021). Building on the overarching service-dominant logic, a comprehensive body of research has developed around the concept of *customer brand engagement*, referring to customers' cognitive (i.e. mental processing and contemplation related to a brand) and behavioural activity (i.e. explicit behavioural manifestations in relation to a brand occurring beyond purchase) related to specific brand interactions (Hollebeek et al. 2014, 2019, 2021; Nyadzayo et al. 2020). Similarly, *social practice theory* is applied to understand social processes among members of brand communities (Schau et al. 2009), examine branding strategies as practice (Vallaster and von Wallpach 2018), and theoretically conceptualise the process of brand meaning co-creation (Tierney et al. 2016). Other research draws on *stakeholder theory* to understand the active role of multiple actors in brand co-creation (Hatch and Schultz 2010; Vallaster and von Wallpach 2013). This is linked to *role theory*, which pertains to the examination of how actors proactively adopt and enact various roles in brand-related interactions (Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018; Veloutsou and Black 2020). Within the theoretical realm of *user-generated-content*, research aims to understand how such content (e.g. user-generated-advertisements; branded social media posts) contributes to brand meaning (Burmann and Arnhold 2008; Christodoulides et al. 2011, 2012; Koivisto and Mattila 2020; Teresa Borges-Tiago et al. 2021). In addition, research taking an organisational perspective sheds light on how to integrate user-generated content in the overarching branding strategy (Gensler et al. 2013; Shulga et al. 2023).

Second, brand co-creation research is differentiated according to the perspective (Brodie et al. 2017). Research taking a customer/actor perspective aims to understand how customers or other actors co-create individual and collective brand meanings (e.g. Tjandra et al. 2021). Research taking an organisational perspective aims to understand the role of the brand conductor and internal actors in facilitating and managing the comprehensive brand co-creation process among all actors (e.g. Essamri et al. 2019).

Third, the conceptual outcomes of brand co-creation remain ambiguous (i.e. brand value, brand identity, and brand meaning) (Sarasvuo et al. 2022). Building on the distinction made by Michel (2017) and Brodie et al. (2017), and in order to consider both customer/actor and organisational perspectives, this study refers to brand identity and brand meaning as essential concepts in brand co-creation (Iglesias et al. 2020; Koporcic and Halinen 2018). Brand identity initiates processes to co-create collective brand meaning, which develops through the social interactions of actors with the brand and other actors. This dynamically evolving collective brand meaning is a key determinant of strategic advantage

and brand value—conceptualised as the perceived use value that is solely attributable to a brand (Brodie et al. 2017; Merz et al. 2018). In other words, all actors interested in the brand 'bring brand value to life through the collective sharing and negotiation of brand meaning' (Simmons and Durkin 2023, p. 617) and the brand owner facilitates these processes through the development and communication of brand identity. Therefore, the constructs of brand identity and brand meaning are the underlying drivers of brand value (Baker et al. 2022; Conejo and Wooliscroft 2015).

Brand identity

Brand identity is a managerial concept, representing the intra-organisational and ideal understanding of what the brand is, providing a sense of direction and the strategic impetus for the development of brand meaning (Burmann et al. 2009; Iglesias et al. 2013). However, based on the multi-actor-dominant logic, brand identity is co-created intra-organisational (Chung and Byrom 2021). Findings by Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali (2021) and Dean et al. (2016) demonstrate how employees co-create individual brand meanings through their brand experiences and social interactions with management, colleagues, and customers. This learned brand meaning is reflected in the employees' development and communication of brand identity. Thus, brand identity co-creation refers to the brand conductor's activity of absorbing opinions, inputs, and influences of external actors to dynamically adapt brand identity (Brodie et al. 2017; Iglesias et al. 2020). In addition, Brand et al. (2023) and Juntunen (2012) find that management and employees constantly assess and develop brand identity within co-creative internal interactions. Furthermore, research indicates the active role of business partners and customers in developing and communicating brand identity. The involvement of external actors in organisational processes comprises the development of innovative products (e.g. France et al. 2018; Mäläskä et al. 2011; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018), the company's branding strategy (e.g. Lindstedt 2015; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018; Vallaster and von Wallpach 2018), the engagement in collaborative marketing activities (e.g. Essamri et al. 2019; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018), the provision of brand-related feedback (e.g. Essamri et al. 2019; France et al. 2018; France et al. 2020; Mäläskä et al. 2011), and the involvement in the creation of brand nomenclature (i.e. brand name and logo) and brand communication materials (e.g. Juntunen 2012; Kim et al. 2018).

Brand meaning

Brand meaning represents a socially constructed concept, co-created in mutual interactions where multiple actors

integrate and exchange resources (e.g. perceptions or opinions of the brand) to develop a collective understanding of the brand (Tierney et al. 2016). Accordingly, the brand conductor cannot control the process (Wider et al. 2018) and brand meaning is neither uniform among actors nor over time and might deviate from brand identity (Vallaster and von Wallpach 2013). Actors co-create brand meaning in social interactions (e.g. Dwivedi et al. 2016) and through brand-related experiences (e.g. Millspaugh and Kent 2016; Tjandra et al. 2021). In particular, brand promoters actively support, defend, advocate, and reinforce intended brand meanings (e.g. France et al. 2018; France et al. 2020; Mangiò et al. 2023; Mäläskä et al. 2011; Simmons and Durkin 2023; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018). They become opinion makers and active co-creators of brand stories and meanings (e.g. Oliveira and Panyik 2015; Üçok Hughes et al. 2016). However, such brand engagement can be valenced negatively as well (e.g. Dong et al. 2024), when brand offenders transform brand meaning by sharing alternative and potentially negative brand meanings (Mangiò et al. 2023; Simmons and Durkin 2023; Vallaster and von Wallpach 2013). From an organisational perspective, the brand conductor initiates, facilitates, and coordinates interactions among actors, such as participating in brand communities, integrating brand experiences, or sharing user-generated content (e.g. Essamri et al. 2019; Gensler et al. 2013; Kahiya et al. 2023; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2016). However, as described above other actors also initiate interactions outside of the brand conductor's sphere of control (Sarasvuo et al. 2022).

Performativity theory as midrange theory to unpack brand co-creation

Although the different theoretical approaches shed light on particular phenomenon of the dynamic interplay between actors and brands, the understanding of brand co-creation remains fragmented. Previous research lacks an overarching and consolidated perspective on *how* multiple actors co-create brands. For instance, Tierney et al. (2016) call for research to uncover the practices between multiple actors contributing to the co-creation of brand meaning. Similarly, von Wallpach et al. (2017a, b) or Iglesias et al. (2020) claim that research should aim to enhance the understanding of the complex and dynamic processes underlying brand co-creation.

We utilise performativity theory (Butler 1990) as a midrange theory to unpack brand co-creation. Midrange theories provide a theoretical bridge between theories with a high level of abstraction and empirical findings (Brodie et al. 2011). Performativity is a sociological theory rooted in the broader theoretical framework of social constructionism (Berger and Luckmann, 1966; Burr 2003), which is pivotal

to a co-creative understanding in brand management (Ind and Schmidt, 2019). The core notion of performativity theory holds that seemingly stable phenomena (e.g. identity) do not exist but are rather characterised by an ontological reality; i.e. social processes that continuously constitute social objects (Gond et al. 2016). Thus, social objects are an ongoing process of production as actors continuously constitute, challenge, and stabilise them in recurring linguistic and socio-material performances (i.e. doing of an activity within a situated context) (Feldman and Orlikowski 2011; Law and Urry 2004; Orlikowski and Scott 2014).

Building on the perspective of brands as dynamic social constructs evolving in social interactions among multiple actors, performativity theory provides a rich theoretical approach to enhance and specify the understanding of *how* brands are co-created (da Silveira et al. 2013; von Wallpach et al. 2017a). Following a performative logic, brands have no final stable stage. Rather, brands are dynamically constituted through linguistic and socio-material *BCCP* of multiple actors in social interactions (Lucarelli and Hallin 2015; Onyas and Ryan 2015; von Wallpach et al. 2017a). Therefore, to unpack how brands are co-created, it is crucial to identify the underlying *BCCP* enacted by multiple actors that are constitutive of the brand (Iglesias and Ind 2020). This performative logic allows for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of brands and the intricate process of brand co-creation (von Wallpach et al. 2017a).

Performativity theory has been applied in prior branding research (e.g. da Silveira et al. 2013; Törmälä and Gyrd-Jones 2017). However, this research seldom focuses on pinpointing specific *BCCP* (Kristal et al. 2020). Only three studies identified 15 distinct *BCCP*. First, von Wallpach et al. (2017a) identified seven *BCCP* in a single-case study of LEGO. Each *BCCP* is crucial in developing the identities of the brand and the actors involved. Although *playing and liking* (i.e. putting together LEGO sets) strongly relates to the studied brand and the development of a customer's identity, the other six performances are relevant for any brand. *Basement building and showcasing* relates to customers demonstrating their affiliation to the brand on online platforms or offline events by sharing their creations. *Creating and innovating* describes how customers exchange knowledge, discuss building techniques, and ultimately collaborate with the brand in product development. *Community building and facilitating* includes the development and maintenance of spaces for interactions initiated by the brand conductor or customers to enable social relationships among LEGO customers. *Brand storytelling* and *missionising* refer to customers narrating, recommending, and defending the brand. Finally, *marketplace developing* describes how customers and the brand conductor initiate platforms to collect and re-sell brand-related products. While providing an initial approach to *BCCP* of customers and the brand conductor,

the study largely neglects other actors, lacks an internal organisational perspective, and focuses on the development of actors' identities.

Second, within a multi-case study ($n = 5$), Iglesias et al. (2020) identified four *BCCP* in B2B contexts. *Communicating* refers to linguistically transmitting brand identity and is particularly performed by the brand conductor, involving traditional management-driven approaches. However, also other actors (i.e. customers, B2B partners) communicate brand identity among their network. *Internalising* is concerned with implementing brand identity into actual behaviours of the management and employees of the respective brand. Therefore, brand trainings are of high importance to ensure their consistent behaviour. In *Contesting*, actors (i.e. customers, employees, B2B partners) contrast brand identity with their perceptions of the brand. They either reaffirm or challenge brand identity with their own brand meanings. *Elucidating* refers to the conversational process by which the brand conductor, together with multiple actors (i.e. customers, employees), discusses and reconciles diverse brand meanings to build a common understanding of the brand. Iglesias et al. (2020) emphasise that their study is only representative for B2B brands and call for future research analysing brand co-creation in the context of B2C brands.

Third, Anderski et al. (2023) utilised the approach of Iglesias et al. (2020) to examine *BCCP* on social media platforms within the realm of human brands. Their findings were similar to those of Iglesias et al. (2020). However, four additional *BCCP* were discovered. *Cooperating* involves the brand conductor collaborating with other actors (i.e. customers, B2B partners) to communicate brand meanings. *Reinforcing* occurs when customers and B2B partners support brand meanings that correspond with brand identity through posts and comments on social media. *Brand hating* and *loving* refer to customers' activities (i.e. comments on social media) to express their love or hate with the person behind the human brand, thus being very specific to human brands. Anderski et al. (2023) consider exclusively *BCCP* on digital platforms and focus on the co-creation of brand meaning, thus lacking an internal organisational perspective.

Single-case study: method

The empirical investigation builds on a qualitative single-case study, enabling the examination of complex phenomena that lack strong existing theory (i.e. *BCCP*) (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007; Yin 2018). Building theory from case studies requires the application of theoretical sampling to identify a significant case to analyse (Eisenhardt 1989). To replicate, refine, and extend emergent theory, it is reasonable to select extreme contexts in which the phenomena investigated become 'transparently observable' (Pettigrew 1990, p. 275).

Sport brands provide exceptionally rich contexts to examine *BCCP*: they attract diverse and highly engaged actors (e.g. fans, employees, B2B partners, media, civic organisations, etc.), who actively participate in *BCCP*.

Research context

The German football club brand FC St. Pauli (FCSP) is an unusually revelatory 'over-over-the-top' case to examine *BCCP*. Especially recognised for its skull and crossbones symbol, FCSP is one of the strongest sport brands worldwide. Today, it is popular for taking a stance on social topics, social activism, and values such as solidarity and anti-discrimination. These brand meanings did not result from the club's management, but emerged from the fans and other actors surrounding the brand. Only 20 years ago, the club started to manage its brand actively. Today, the club perceives the brand as a 'product of luck, coincidences, and passion' (ID-4), as a 'platform of possibilities' where 'people can be creative and things can arise' (Zimmer 2018), and acknowledges the participation of multiple actors (e.g. B2B partners, media, civic organisations, fans, employees, etc.) in brand co-creation.

Data collection and analysis

Data collection followed the principles of case study research. To achieve detailed empirical descriptions and ensure validity and reliability, we employed multiple data collection methods (i.e. semi-structured interviews, internal brand-related documents, media content analysis, and social media analysis, see Table 1) (Eisenhardt 1989).

Table 1 Data sources

Data sources	Interviews/documents/posts	Interview length/comments
Semi-structured interviews	**26**	**Ø66 min**
Board member	5	Ø61 min
Management	4	Ø56 min
Employee	8	Ø65 min
Partner/sponsor	3	Ø66 min
Media	2	Ø84 min
Fan	4	Ø76 min
Internal brand-related documents	**5**	
Media content analysis	**36**	
Social media analysis	**77**	**3.944**
Facebook	34	1.542
Instagram	43	2.402

We conducted 26 semi-structured interviews between November 2021 and March 2022 with various actors, including board members, managers, and employees as well as partners, media, and fans. Interviewees were selected based on theoretical considerations and exchanges with the Managing Director Brand to ensure diverse perspectives and limit bias in our research (Eisenhardt and Graebner 2007). All interviews were conducted online, lasting between 46 and 104 min in length, with an average duration of 66 min. Interviews were audio-recorded with the interviewees' permission and transcribed verbatim. Drawing on theoretical considerations and previous examples of interview guides (Iglesias et al. 2020), we asked our interview partners to explain how they and other actors participate in branding activities, leading to rich subjective descriptions of *BCCP*.

Data analysis of the semi-structured interviews followed the process of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). We repeatedly read the entire dataset to familiarise with the data. Thereupon, the research team inductively coded the whole dataset in an iterative and discursive process to generate first-order codes. We constantly assessed our coding within the research team and adapted the emerging codebook, but still followed an open process to inductively add new codes emerging from the data (Ncodes = 65; Ncodings = 1.817) (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006). Using axial coding, we aggregated codes into nine overarching second-order themes that represent the data at a higher level of abstraction (Strauss and Corbin 1998). We then clustered the themes to generate a thematic map to identify interrelationships (Braun and Clarke 2006). Both, axial coding and generating the thematic map included iterative discursive processes among the research team to reach consensus that conclusions are representative of the data.

To deductively enrich and validate our interpretation of the interviews, we gathered data from additional sources of evidence (i.e. internal brand-related documents, media content analysis, and social media analysis). FCSP provided us with internal brand-related documents ($n = 5$) showing the brand's current strategy and the internal understanding of branding processes. Additionally, media content analysis and social media analysis were carried out to enrich and validate themes emerging from the interviews with a supplementary 'outside' perspective. We specifically collected media data ($n = 36$, e.g. newspaper articles) that provide further context for narratives from the semi-structured interviews. Social media analysis is a valuable method to approach brands from a multi-actor-dominant logic (Iglesias et al. 2020). Thus, after an initial screening of a total of 1.000 posts and 42.348 comments during pre-season and the first half of the Bundesliga season 2021/2022, we deliberately selected 77 brand-related posts including 3.944 comments. All of the additional data were deductively coded to provide evidence for our thematic map. The process of data collection and data analysis is summarised in Fig. 1.
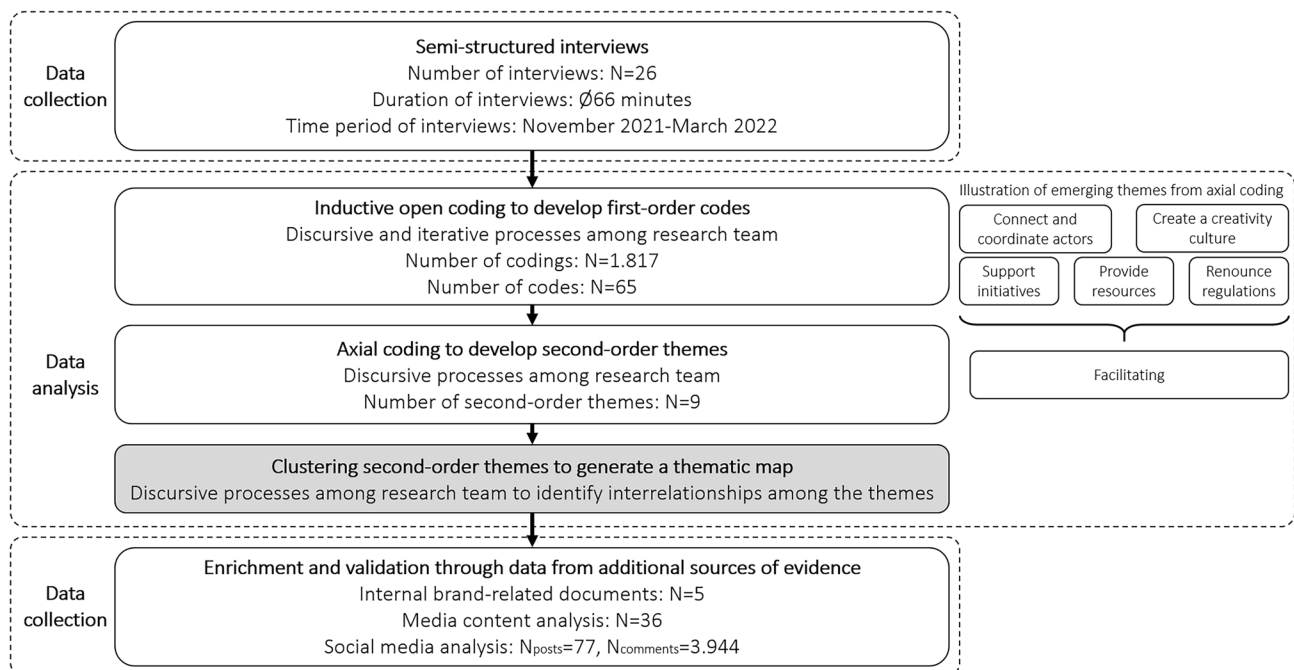

Fig. 1 Data collection and analysis

Single-case study: findings

Communicating

Communicating comprises the linguistic transmission of brand identity and brand meanings. Primarily the brand conductor employs various channels to convey brand identity to external actors. Especially social media are significant, allowing to pursue 'erratic moments' (I-2, Management) and 'docking on trends initiated by external actors' (I-10, Employee). For instance, FCSP responded to the ban of the rainbow flag during the UEFA EURO 2020: 'No international federation should prevent solidarity and an expression of opinion that speaks out in favour of a diverse society. […] Love whoever you want!' (FCSP, Instagram, 22.06.2021).

Besides the brand conductor, other actors communicate as well. Fans utilise blogs and social media to share individual narratives and independently convey and reinforce brand meaning: 'each [fan] talks about FCSP and thus creates the brand' (I-22, Partner). Partners, celebrities, and media also communicate brand meanings via their own channels to a wider audience. Especially media 'are quite decisive for the brand meaning of FCSP' (I-2, Management), but celebrities are also important multipliers. For instance, a member of a popular German band supported FCSP's decision to produce its own sportswear via Instagram: 'My favourite club is no longer interested in fast fashion!' (ED-36).

Bringing brand meanings to life

This performance refers to the socio-material transmission of brand meaning (i.e. behaviour) to underpin the brand. It is performed by the brand conductor to provide evidence that the communication of brand identity is not just a 'platitude' (I-25, Sponsor) or 'empty shell' (I-20, Media). For instance, implementing gender balanced staffing or social projects brings intended brand meanings such as diversity and solidarity to life: 'There are many projects, with children and young people; we do much for refugees. This is brand-building' (I-23, Employee). Frequently, FCSP collaborates with other actors to bring brand meanings to life. Especially partners 'reinforce and support the brand by occupying values that make up the brand' (I-25, Sponsors) with concrete initiatives. For instance, partners initiated a music school for socially disadvantaged children within the stadium or use the stadium to organise 'Millerntor-Gallery', a sociocultural art festival, where 'all the work is done by [partner]' and FCSP 'benefits extremely and presents itself as a street-like brand' (I-1, Management).

This manifestation of bringing brand meanings to life is also evident in a Facebook post by FCSP (09.07.2021): 'Artistically designed banners with important messages adorn the fence at the [stadium]. 🎨 Many thanks to @ [sponsor] for the redesign. Together against racism!'.

Beside partners, other actors are consciously involved in bringing brand meanings to life. For instance, fans, athletes, and social institutions took over the brand's social media channels to elevate consciousness about racism. Furthermore, actors frequently engage in this *BCCP* independently from the brand conductor. For instance, fans organise (political) choreographies, initiate socio-political activities (e.g. running event to raise money to fight fascism), and represent the brand in different contexts (e.g. Christopher Street Day (CSD)). This independence is reflected in the following quotes: '[The CSD commitment] was not the result of a marketing round, but it came from fans' (I-19, Employee), who 'participated in self-designed black [shirts] with rainbow skull and "Love whoever you want" on the back' (I-9, Board Member).

Criticising

Criticising refers to linguistically and socio-materially challenging brand identity, branding processes, and brand meanings. Fans, in particular, are 'critical observers' (I-24, Fan) and a 'corrective' (I-23, Employee) of the brand. They defend established brand meanings and criticise progressive branding initiatives. Fans express their criticism predominantly online (i.e. blogs, websites, social media fan pages, or social media comments). For instance, they criticised the implementation of FCSP-Shop-TV (Instagram, 06.12.2021): 'SELLOUT'; 'What are you doing? Cut the crap'; 'Not funny. Not in any way. I feel a little ashamed!' or the replacement of the club flag on the stadium roof with a rainbow flag: 'Please leave the club flag hanging. Just like our armband. The captain should wear a skull and crossbones and not a rainbow armband! Tolerance and solidarity is ok, but not in a cramped way and everywhere' (User, Instagram, 23.06.2021). Further, fans criticise through boycotts or protests when they hoist banners in the stadium. Media takes up those critics and distributes them, but also criticises independently using its reach to set 'brand boundary pillars' (I-20, Media). In order to funnel criticism, the brand conductor initiates exchange formats with fans.

Criticising also occurs internally. Several employees describe an internal conflict between two groups. While one group wants to preserve the established brand and criticises progressive branding initiatives, the other group criticises the passivity of the brand, arguing for the potential for improvement in brand communication and demanding more communication about the brand values. Similarly, partners

perform criticising in discrete interactions with the brand conductor. They challenge current branding strategies and demand more progressive branding decisions: 'the club must place value themes on an equal footing with the sporting themes to reach younger target groups' (I-25, Partner).

Negotiating

Negotiating comprises the process of harmonising diverging perspectives on the brand. First, it refers to an organisational perspective, where internal actors discuss directions for brand identity and its communication and implementation. This ensures that branding decisions 'are better informed because wide varieties of opinions are incorporated. Ultimately, this participatory approach characterises the brand. It is an eternal struggle to do the right thing' (I-13, Employee). Second, negotiating comprises boundary-spanning processes. Progressive leveraging activities of partners often have to be adapted or discarded by the brand conductor; opinions and criticisms of fans are considered in internal negotiation processes; or the brand conductor negotiates brand meanings directly with fans through exchange formats. These negotiation processes are reflected in the following quote:

> I approached the club and asked them how they see themselves in gaming. There were very heated discussions because FCSP was convinced that this would meet with resistance in the fan scene, because gaming is polarising. However, in intensive discussions, a strategy was developed together with the fans. […] We always find a joint solution. (I-25, Partner)

Negotiating results in two dimensions: reinforcing emerging brand meanings and adjusting brand identity or deliberately refusing and challenging them. For instance, the brand conductor adapted the slogan 'love whoever you want' to its brand communication in response to fans using it for CSD (see above). Similarly, after receiving criticism from fans, the brand decided to terminate Shop TV (see above). Negotiating processes also occur among external actors only when they negotiate shared brand meanings. For instance, fans rejected a fan group that demanded less political positioning of the brand conductor and its environment. This is reflected in the discussion among fans in relation to the political banners within the stadium (Instagram, 09.07.2021):

> User A: why do you send such derogatory smileys when it comes to a campaign against racism?
> User B: not everything is discriminatory just because I don't think much of this campaign. "Football shouldn't be political" doesn't make it directly discriminatory […]

> User A: but that doesn't matter. St. Pauli is not just a sport club like any other club and if you want to see good football and you are only interested in the "sporting" side of things, I question your choice of club

Initiating brand development

This performance refers to giving impulses for the development of the brand. Predominantly internal actors engage in this *BCCP*. At FCSP, there is an inner circle of employees (i.e. 'brand-tribe'), that initiates brand development processes (ID-2). Deriving from internal negotiating processes, the brand conductor 'gives impulses' (I-4, Club Official) and 'sets the scope and direction' (I-18, Employee) for the development of the brand.

External actors also engage in initiating brand development. Members of the club submit and vote on motions at the general meeting, which can result in 'fundamental changes to the brand' (I-8, Club Official). For instance, a motion prompted the brand to develop an overarching sustainability strategy as one interviewee explains: '[The members] have a very strong influence via the general meeting. We would not be so notable on the path of sustainability today if a corresponding motion had not been made in 2016' (I-2, Management). Further, partners initiate brand development as an interviewee describes: 'We are a driving force. That was the case with eSports, but it is also the case with digitisation. We […] try to open up new fields from time to time' (I-25, Sponsor).

Implementing brand development

Implementing brand development refers to turning impulses for brand development into concrete concepts and initiatives. This is a main task of the brand conductor. However, often FCSP intentionally includes various actors to access their expertise in different fields. In order to elaborate strategic concepts, FCSP regularly 'mobilises [actors] around a topic' (I-4, Club Official) and lets them 'carry [the brand] along the way' (I-5, Management). For instance, various actors were involved in conceptualising the brand's digitalisation, diversity, and sustainability strategy: 'We called on our members, fans, and interested parties to think about sustainability with us. We then held a series of workshops where we were able to involve interested actors and they created a catalogue of measures' (I-4, Club Official). Additionally, implementing brand development refers to the brand conductor using actors' expertise to receive feedback. One interviewee explains this process: 'The brand conductor always gets the separate opinion from the fan club spokesman council […]. There are people who have trust in us and say: Here is an idea that just popped up, what do you say? ' (I-16, Fan).

Facilitating

Facilitating refers to the support and promotion of inter-actions. One interviewee (I-22, Partner) explains: 'The brand conductor has the responsibility to moderate, coordinate, stimulate and also structure the co-creation process'. Therefore, facilitating comprises the creation of 'a breeding ground' (I-13, Employee), 'an enclosure like a greenhouse' (I-20, Media), and a culture for creativity to facilitate *BCCP*. In particular, the brand conductor provides brand engagement platforms, to consciously involve actors in brand co-creation. For instance, the 'brand-tribe' offers a platform to facilitate internal exchanges and the brand conductor provides additional platforms such as town hall meetings. Similarly, FCSP enables participatory processes to initiate and develop the brand's sustainability strategy together with multiple actors (see above). Further, offering its social media channel to other actors to elevate consciousness about racism describes a digital brand engagement platform.

> *Over the past few weeks, foundations, initiatives, clubs, groups and individuals have taken over the channels of FC St. Pauli and our partner @sponsor as part of the "No place for racism" campaign. [...] Thank you for enriching this campaign with your content and information and for sharing your experiences with us (FCSP, Instagram, 09.06.2021).*

One interviewee explains: 'That is what is so special […]. We do not have to do everything ourselves […]. We sometimes just need to see ourselves as facilitators' (I-5, Management). However, brand engagement platforms also emerge out of the brand conductor's sphere of control, when external actors engage in facilitating (e.g. events, online forums, or social media fan pages).

Social listening

Social listening refers to recording developments in broader society and the direct context of FCSP. Mainly the brand conductor engages in this performance, but also other actors function as intermediaries that take up currents and approach the brand conductor. For instance, the brand conductor consciously reads fan blogs, keeps up to date on social media, or exchanges with key actors. Further, the brand conductor maps macrolevel societal developments to continuously adjust the brand and steer it towards new directions (ID-2). The brand conductor needs to be aware of currents to react, dock on them, and potentially adjust branding processes as one interviewee explains: 'The cosmos of all the currents and opinions that come to us centrally is then reflected in the implementation' (I-10, Employee).

Assimilating brand meanings

This *BCCP* refers to the psychological process by which actors understand the brand. One interviewee underscores its importance for the consistent communication and behaviour among actors: 'It is essential that there are people at work who understand what the brand stands for' (I-2, Management). Assimilating commences with the selection of new actors. The brand conductor consciously selects new hires and partners who align with brand values. For instance, the brand conductor uses a tool called 'CSR check' to evaluate and select potential partners. Further, the brand conductor facilitates assimilating processes through internal brand communication. Employees are confronted with posters, captions, and relics within the office space to ensure that they constantly 'bathe in the brand' (I-15). Partners, however, receive explicit explanations to sensitise them for the brand. An interviewee reflects on this process: 'We are always in exchange. Especially in the beginning, a lot was explained' (I-25, Sponsor). However, while formal processes are important, mostly informal interactions with senior employees or external actors initiate assimilation processes.

> *You get feedback from the fans. What do they think is good? What suits FCSP? Because many people write 'That is exactly why I like the club […]'. Then you also get more and more a feeling for the [brand]. (I-12, Employee)*

Beside internal actors and partners, every actor is involved in assimilating. These actors constantly assess existing brand meanings based on their interactions, assimilate those brand meanings, and integrate them into their *BCCP*.

Empirical consolidation of BCCP following qualitative *meta*-synthesis

The outcomes of our single-case study add a novel and rich empirical context to existing research on *BCCP*, which comprises isolated work and reaches disparate conclusions. Qualitative meta-synthesis offers a powerful method to accumulate and empirically consolidate rich qualitative evidence from primary case studies to develop a generic theoretical understanding grounded in a broad range of contextual conditions. It comprises the systematic extraction, analysis, and synthesis of qualitative evidence and the interpretations of the original researchers of case studies to build theory and contribute beyond the original studies. Thus, qualitative meta-synthesis essentially encompasses the in-depth analysis of qualitative case studies and their synthesis on a cross-study level (Hoon 2013).

First, following an extensive literature review, we included four qualitative case studies in our meta-synthesis

(i.e. Anderski et al. 2023; Iglesias et al. 2020; von Wallpach et al. 2017a; this study). The articles were selected based on three specific criteria. *Constructs*—only articles building on performativity theory within the context of branding research. *Methodology*—only articles building on qualitative case study research with primary data sources. *Content*—only articles providing insights into the specific *BCCP* of multiple actors. Second, all members of the author team carefully read and analysed each case study to identify core themes on a case-specific level. In the following, overarching cross-study patterns and themes were developed and synthesised in mutual discussions among the whole author team.

The qualitative meta-synthesis resulted in eight generic and interrelated *BCCP*, which are distinguished into direct brand co-creation performances (*dBCCP*) and enabling brand co-creation performances (*eBCCP*) (see Table 2). Within *dBCCP* (i.e. communicating, implementing, contesting, and developing), actors directly co-create brand identity and brand meaning. These *dBCCP* require *eBCCP* (i.e. negotiating, facilitating, social listening, and assimilating), which are foundational for brand co-creation, eventually enabling *dBCCP* and making them possible.

Direct BCCP

Communicating: Consistent with previous research, this study highlights the linguistic transmission of brand identity and brand meanings through internal and external actors. Especially internal actors, acting on behalf of the brand conductor, are pivotal in communicating as they transmit brand identity via various channels (e.g. social media, traditional media, website, corporate videos, or press releases). They make use of storytelling and communicate in relation to other actors or incidents (Anderski et al. 2023; this study). However, also external actors communicate brand meanings. They engage in word of mouth (Iglesias et al. 2020; von Wallpach et al. 2017a); express their brand love (Anderski et al. 2023); reinforce intended brand meanings by commenting and producing content on social media (Anderski et al. 2023; this study) and blogs (this study); advocate the brand when being criticised; write articles to endorse the brand; and develop brand-related narratives (von Wallpach et al. 2017a). Our results confirm previous research highlighting the linguistic dimension of *dBCCP*. Therefore, we conceptualise *communicating* as the linguistic transmission and reinforcement of brand identity and meaning by internal and external actors. This conceptualisation is also in line with the understanding of user-generated content as relevant activity in the formation of brand meaning (Shulga et al. 2023). In addition, it highlights the participation of other actors in brand communication (Essamri et al. 2019; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018).

Implementing: Internal actors convey brand identity through its implementation in subsequent behaviour—consistent brand behaviour breathes life into brand identity and is a crucial success-factor. This is reflected in this study and the work of Anderski et al. (2023) and Iglesias et al. (2020). However, external actors also implement

Table 2 Empirical consolidation of *BCCP*

Von Wallpach et al. (2017a)	Iglesias et al. (2020)	Anderski et al. (2023)	This study	Empirically consolidated *BCCP*	*BCCP* category
Basement building and showcasing	Communicating	Communicating	Communicating	Communicating	Direct Brand Co-Creation Performances (*dBCCP*)
Missionising		Cooperating			
Brand storytelling		Reinforcing			
		Brand loving			
Missionising	Internalising	Internalising	Bringing brand meanings to life	Implementing	
Brand storytelling					
	Contesting	Contesting	Criticising	Contesting	
		Brand hating			
Creating and innovating			Initiating brand development	Developing	
			Supporting brand development		
	Elucidating	Elucidating	Negotiating	Negotiating	Enabling Brand Co-Creation Performances (*eBCCP*)
Community building and facilitating			Facilitating	Facilitating	
Marketplace developing					
			Social listening	Social listening	
	Internalising		Assimilating	Assimilating	

brand meanings into their behaviour. This expands beyond the conceptualisation of Iglesias et al. (2020), perceiving internalising as an internal performance, and follows the results of Anderski et al. (2023) and von Wallpach et al. (2017a). External actors create drawings, videos, or other socio-material artefacts such as brand merchandise, initiate joint activities in the context of the brand, and therefore breathe life into brand meanings. Therefore, *implementing* refers to internal and external actors participating in socio-material branding activities that reinforce brand identity and brand meanings. This conceptualisation is not specifically addressed within the broader body of research on brand co-creation.

Contesting: This study and previous research highlight how actors linguistically and socio-materially contest branding processes, brand identity, and brand meanings. While Anderski et al. (2023) restrict contesting to customers as external actors, this study and Iglesias et al. (2020) indicate its internal dimension (i.e. employees contest the brand internally). Additionally, this study expands the understanding of external actors beyond customers to every actor engaging with the brand (i.e. partners, civic organisations, media, etc.) and highlights the socio-material dimension of contesting. Contesting occurs in emergent (e.g. fan blogs) and institutional contexts (e.g. brand-owned social media, exchange formats between brand conductor and actors). Building on Iglesias et al. (2020), Anderski et al. (2023), and this study, we define *contesting* as linguistic or socio-material performances of internal and external actors to challenge existing branding processes, brand identity, and brand meanings. This conceptualisation relates to the role of brand offenders (Vallaster and von Wallpach 2013), negative valenced customer brand engagement behaviour (Dong et al. 2024), and brand-related feedback activities (France et al. 2018; Mäläskä et al. 2011).

Developing: *Developing* comprises to the process of initiating new strategic directions. Actors set impulses, develop novel ideas, and drive the brand towards emerging topics. This strategic dimension is missing in previous research. While internal actors continuously develop the brand, external actors also give impulses. This study highlights the brand conductor's deliberate involvement of external actors to access their resources (e.g. expertise) in brand development. von Wallpach et al. (2017a) also describe how customers participate in lead-user workshops to innovate products and provide feedback to the brand conductor. However, this study expands on this, illustrating how the brand conductor deliberately includes various actors in the development of branding strategies (e.g. sustainability strategy for the brand). This strategic dimension of brand co-creation is also in line with the broader body of research (Ind et al. 2017; Törmälä and Saraniemi 2018; Vallaster and von Wallpach 2018).

Enabling BCCP

Negotiating: Anderski et al. (2023), referring to Iglesias et al. (2020), call this performance elucidating and describe it as conversational process between brand conductor and external actors to reconcile distinct brand meanings and negotiate a shared understanding of brand meaning. Internal and external actors engage in those processes when negotiating contestations or impulses for brand development as well as when collaborating with partners in branding initiatives. However, as found in this study, negotiating not only occurs between internal and external actors—it also expands among internal and external actors only. Internal actors negotiate strategic directions, how to communicate and implement brand identity, or they internally negotiate contestations to adapt brand identity. External actors engage in negotiating, when they discuss common positions towards the brand. Therefore, we define *negotiating* as ongoing conversational process of harmonising diverging perspectives on the brand among internal and external actors and among internal and external actors only. This perspective is hardly discussed within the broader body of research. Only Essamri et al. (2019) describe the brand conductor's exchange with a brand community to 'bridge' diverging brand meanings.

Facilitating: Facilitating refers to the provision of infrastructural conditions for *dBCCP*. First, it involves the development and maintenance of brand engagement platforms where multiple actors can engage in *dBCCP*. This is also reflected in the work of von Wallpach et al. (2017a), where especially customers facilitate discussions about the brand. However, this study highlights the brand conductor's role, but also the role of various other actors (e.g. partners) in providing brand engagement platforms to connect actors and encourage *dBCCP*. It shows how the brand conductor facilitates, supports, and promotes actor-initiatives by providing various resources (e.g. financial resources, network resources). Considering the broader body of research on brand co-creation, *facilitating* relates to the organisational perspective of brand co-creation (Essamri et al. 2019; Ramaswamy and Ozcan 2016).

Social listening: *Social listening* comprises the brand conductor's recording of macrolevel developments in broader society and within the direct context of the brand. Therefore, it is a prerequisite for *dBCCP* (e.g. developing). Even when considering the broader body of brand co-creation research, this *eBCCP* is not addressed.

Assimilating: *Assimilating* comprises the fundamental psychological processes to enable an understanding of the brand. This *eBCCP* is indicated in Iglesias et al. (2020); however, this study enhances and highlights the conceptualisation of assimilating. In contrast to Iglesias et al. (2020), assimilating includes not only internal actors, but refers to every actor interacting within the context of the brand.

Assimilating is an important *eBCCP* since an actor's individual understanding of the brand determines its *dBCCP*. This understanding is also reflected in research on brand experiences (Dean et al. 2016; Tjandra et al. 2021), highlighting the development of individual brand meanings through co-created brand experiences.

Contributions

Theoretical contributions

First, this study empirically consolidates *BCCP* from previous research and a single-case study. It offers an overarching approach to examine brand co-creation in various contexts by conceptualising eight generic *BCCP*. The first six *BCCP* are derived from an empirical consolidation of previous *BCCP* research (Anderski et al. 2023; Iglesias et al. 2020; von Wallpach et al. 2017a; and this study). Although these *BCCP* are not entirely new, we take into account their different manifestations in previous research to conceptualise them in a uniform manner. For instance, building on von Wallpach et al. (2017a) and this study, we extend on the strategic dimension of brand co-creation (i.e. *developing*). While not occurring in Anderski et al. (2023) and Iglesias et al. (2020), this conceptualisation is supported by the findings from Törmälä and Saraniemi (2018) and Vallaster and von Wallpach (2018), who highlight the participation of multiple actors in designing a branding strategy. This conceptualisation also refers to the strategic approach to brand co-creation (Ind et al. 2017). Social listening and assimilating emerge as novel *BCCP* from our case study. While

social listening is not found in previous *BCCP* research, it is consistent with the findings of Sarasvuo et al. (2022), who highlight the brand conductor's process of absorbing opinions, inputs, and influences of external actors to adapt brand identity. *Assimilating* is an individual *BCCP* and refers to the traditional psychological approaches to branding (Keller 2003; Swaminathan et al. 2020) and brand experience research (Stach 2019). Referring to research on internal branding (Barros-Arrieta and García-Cali 2021; Dean et al. 2016), the brand conductor aims to facilitate assimilating processes of internal actors to ensure their consistent communication and implementation of the brand. However, also external actors engage in assimilating to develop an understanding of the brand, which they integrate in their *BCCP*.

Second, this study enhances the understanding of the complex interrelationships and consecutiveness among *BCCP* (see Fig. 2). We categorise *dBCCP* (i.e. communicating, implementing, contesting, developing) and *eBCCP* (i.e. negotiating, facilitating, social listening, assimilating). Within *dBCCP*, actors directly co-create brands, while *eBCCP* eventually enable *dBCCP*. In *communicating* and *implementing* internal and external actors linguistically and socio-materially transmit and reinforce brand identity and brand meaning. Additionally, actors transform the brand in *dBCCP*. In *developing* actors collaboratively initiate innovative and potentially transformative branding strategies. However, actors not only reinforce and innovate existing brand meanings, but also *contest* them. Therefore, *dBCCP* are situated on a continuum between the two dimensions of reinforcing and transforming. Both dimensions are also emphasised by Simmons and Durkin (2023). In order to engage in *dBCCP*, actors first have to *assimilate* the brand

Fig. 2 Interrelationships among *BCCP*
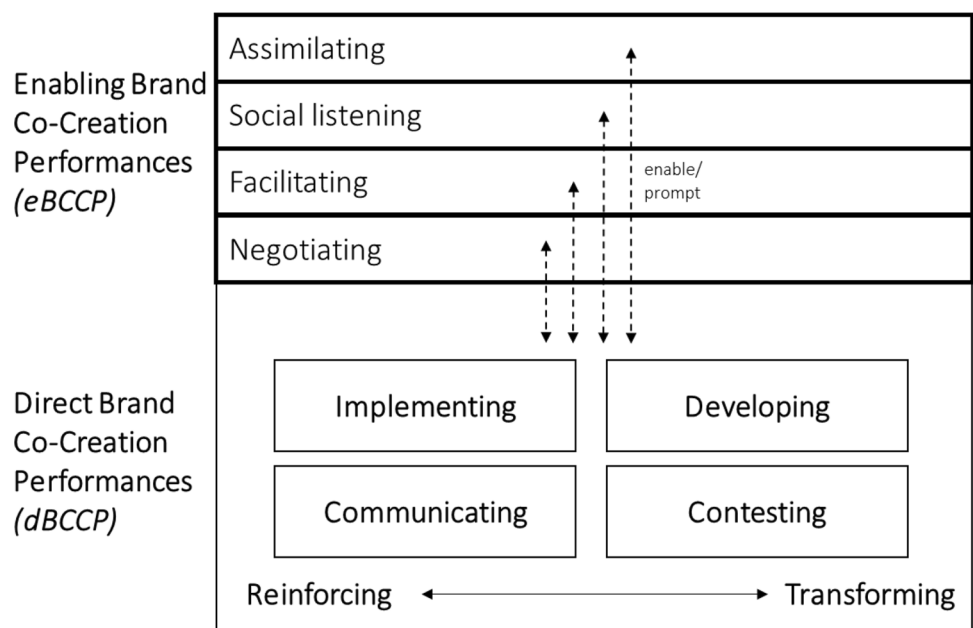
and develop an individual brand meaning, which is manifested when actors engage in *communicating*, *implementing*, *developing*, or *contesting*. Further, all *dBCCP* can only occur if there are spaces for interactions. Brand conductors provide brand engagement platforms to *facilitate dBCCP* of various actors. For instance, events facilitate *communicating* and *implementing* performances, exchange formats with customers facilitate *contesting* performances, and workshops facilitate *developing* performances. However, also external actors engage in *facilitating*. *Social listening* is an *eBCCP*, where actors record developments in broader society and the specific context of the brand, to utilise them in *dBCCP*. *Negotiating* is a key *eBCCP*, often prompted by *contesting*. In *negotiating*, actors constantly balance perspectives on the brand that are reflected within *dBCCP*. For instance, internal actors negotiate *communicating* or *implementing* tactics based on *contesting* performances of external actors and developments in the wider society, derived from *social listening*. Thus, *dBCCP* require preceding *eBCCP* but also prompt successive *eBCCP*. There is a constant interaction between *dBCCP*, which can be either reinforcing or transforming, and *eBCCP*.

Third, this research specifies the actors engaging in particular *BCCP* (Iglesias et al. 2020; Kristal et al. 2020). It highlights interactions among internal actors to co-create brand identity. This dedicated organisational perspective, underscoring the heterogeneous composition of the brand conductor and the *BCCP* of internal actors (i.e. negotiating, contesting), has been neglected yet (Sarasvuo et al. 2022). However, it is consistent with the findings of Schmeltz and Kjeldsen (2019), who suggest that internal actors are not a homogenous actor collective, but rather a co-mingled group of actors, participating in individual *BCCP*. This research acknowledges the complexity of internal branding processes. Beside this organisational perspective, this research underscores the active role of various actors in brand co-creation. *BCCP* occur among the brand conductor and external actors, among external actors only, and among internal actors only.

Managerial contributions

This study offers brand managers an enhanced understanding of their brand, by unpacking *how* multiple actors co-create the brand. First, this study shows that brand managers need to communicate the brand, implement brand identity into brand behaviours, and continuously develop strategic directions for the brand. This is still an important source of brand meaning. Further, brand managers must appreciate the importance of contesting performances of internal actors, which leads to constant internal assessments of the brand. Thus, brand managers must also acknowledge the *dBCCP* and the influence of other actors on the brand.

Second, brand managers must engage in *eBCCP* to enable *dBCCP*. They need to facilitate *BCCP* of internal and external actors. Especially internal brand engagement platforms acknowledge the heterogeneity of internal actors and offer opportunities to raise criticism and develop branding tactics and strategies. However, brand managers must also facilitate interactions among internal and external and external actors only. Additionally, brand managers must engage in internal and boundary-spanning negotiating processes to balance brand identity and brand meaning. Brand managers need to remain open for adaptions of brand identity and accept the imperfect perfection of brand building. They take the role of negotiators, balancing and uniting diverging perspectives in the dynamic and infinite process of brand co-creation. Brand managers must further promote assimilating processes to ensure consistent *dBCCP* of internal actors. Since actors engage in *BCCP* also in contexts outside the brand conductor's sphere of control, brand managers must constantly engage in social listening to pick up currents and involve them in *dBCCP*.

Declarations

References

Aaker, D.A. 2002. *Building strong brands*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Anderski, M., L. Griebel, P. Stegmann, and T. Ströbel. 2023. Empowerment of human brands: Brand meaning co-creation on digital engagement platforms. *Journal of Business Research* 166: 113905.

Andreini, D., G. Pedeliento, L. Zarantonello, and C. Solerio. 2018. A renaissance of brand experience: Advancing the concept through a multi-perspective analysis. *Journal of Business Research* 91: 123–133.

Baker, J.J., J.A. Fehrer, and R.J. Brodie. 2022. Navigating the emergence of brand meaning in service ecosystems. *Journal of Service Management* 33(3): 465–484.

Barros-Arrieta, D., and E. García-Cali. 2021. Internal branding: Conceptualization from a literature review and opportunities for future research. *Journal of Brand Management* 28(2): 133–151.

Berger Peter, L., and T. Luckmann. 1966. *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge*. Garden City: First Anchor.

Black, I., and C. Veloutsou. 2017. Working consumers: Co-creation of brand identity, consumer identity and brand community identity. *Journal of Business Research* 70: 416–429.

Brakus, J.J., B.H. Schmitt, and L. Zarantonello. 2009. Brand experience: What is It? How is it Measured? Does it Affect Loyalty? *Journal of Marketing* 73(3): 52–68.

Brand, L., P. Stegmann, and T. Ströbel. 2023. Rethinking brand management within sport: Advancing towards the integrative sport brand ecosystem (ISBE). *European Sport Management Quarterly* 24(6): 1–21.

Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77–101.

Brodie, R.J., M. Saren, and J. Pels. 2011. Theorizing about the service dominant logic: The bridging role of middle range theory. *Marketing Theory* 11(1): 75–91.

Brodie, R.J., M. Benson-Rea, and C.J. Medlin. 2017. Branding as a dynamic capability. *Marketing Theory* 17(2): 183–199.

Burmann, C., and U. Arnhold. 2008. *User generated branding: State of the art of research*. Münster: LIT Verlag.

Burmann, C., S. Hegner, and N. Riley. 2009. Towards an identity-based branding. *Marketing Theory* 9(1): 113–118.

Burr, V. 2003. *Social constructionism*. Milton Park: Routledge.

Butler, J. 1990. *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. Milton Park: Routledge.

Chapman, A., and A. Dilmperi. 2022. Luxury brand value co-creation with online brand communities in the service encounter. *Journal of Business Research* 144: 902–921.

de Chernatony, L. 2006. *From brand vision to brand evaluation: Strategically building and sustaining brands* (2nd ed., repr). Marketing. Elsevier/Butterworth-Heinemann.

Christodoulides, G., C. Jevons, and P. Blackshaw. 2011. The voice of the consumer speaks forcefully in brand identity. *Journal of Advertising Research* 51: 101–111.

Christodoulides, G., C. Jevons, and J. Bonhomme. 2012. Memo to marketers: Quantitative evidence for change. *Journal of Advertising Research* 52(1): 53–64.

Chung, S.-Y., and J. Byrom. 2021. Co-creating consistent brand identity with employees in the hotel industry. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 30(1): 74–89.

Conejo, F., and B. Wooliscroft. 2015. Brands defined as semiotic marketing systems. *Journal of Macromarketing* 35(3): 287–301.

Cooper, T., C. Stavros, and A.R. Dobele. 2019. The levers of engagement: An exploration of governance in an online brand community. *Journal of Brand Management* 26(3): 240–254.

da Silveira, C., C. Lages, and C. Simões. 2013. Reconceptualizing brand identity in a dynamic environment. *Journal of Business Research* 66(1): 28–36.

Dean, D., R.E. Arroyo-Gamez, K. Punjaisri, and C. Pich. 2016. Internal brand co-creation: The experiential brand meaning cycle in higher education. *Journal of Business Research* 69(8): 3041–3048.

Dong, X., C. Veloutsou, and A. Morgan-Thomas. 2024. Negative online brand engagement: conceptualisation, scale development and validation. *Journal of Research in Interactive Marketing* (Ahead-of-print).

Dwivedi, A., D. Wilkie, L. Johnson, and J. Weerawardena. 2016. Establishing measures and drivers of consumer brand engagement behaviours. *Journal of Brand Management* 23(5): 41–69.

Eisenhardt, K.M. 1989. Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review* 14(4): 532–550.

Eisenhardt, K.M., and M.E. Graebner. 2007. Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal* 50(1): 25–32.

Essamri, A., S. McKechnie, and H. Winklhofer. 2019. Co-creating corporate brand identity with online brand communities: A managerial perspective. *Journal of Business Research* 96: 366–375.

Feldman, M.S., and W.J. Orlikowski. 2011. Theorizing practice and practicing theory. *Organization Science* 22(5): 1240–1253.

Fereday, J., and E. Muir-Cochrane. 2006. Demonstrating rigor using thematic analysis: A hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding and theme development. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5(1): 80–92.

Forbes. 2020. Council Post: Your Brand Is Your Greatest Asset. Forbes, 24 February, https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2020/02/24/your-brand-is-your-greatest-asset/?sh=41ab18b563b7. Accessed 20 October 2023.

France, C., D. Grace, B. Merrilees, and D. Miller. 2018. Customer brand co-creation behavior: Conceptualization and empirical validation. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 36(3): 334–348.

France, C., D. Grace, J. Lo Iacono, and J. Carlini. 2020. Exploring the interplay between customer perceived brand value and customer brand co-creation behaviour dimensions. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(4): 466–480.

Gensler, S., F. Völckner, Y. Liu-Thompkins, and C. Wiertz. 2013. Managing brands in the social media environment. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 27(4): 242–256.

Giannopoulos, A., L. Piha, and G. Skourtis. 2021. Destination branding and co-creation: A service ecosystem perspective. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 30(1): 148–166.

Gond, J.-P., L. Cabantous, N. Harding, and M. Learmonth. 2016. What do we mean by performativity in organizational and management theory? The uses and abuses of performativity. *International Journal of Management Reviews* 18(4): 440–463.

Hatch, M.J., and M. Schultz. 2010. Toward a theory of brand co-creation with implications for brand governance. *Journal of Brand Management* 17(8): 590–604.

Hollebeek, L.D., M.S. Glynn, and R.J. Brodie. 2014. Consumer brand engagement in social media: Conceptualization, scale development and validation. *Journal of Interactive Marketing* 28(2): 149–165.

Hollebeek, L.D., R.K. Srivastava, and T. Chen. 2019. S-D logic–informed customer engagement: Integrative framework, revised fundamental propositions, and application to CRM. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 47(1): 161–185.

Hollebeek, L.D., M.K. Clark, W. Hammedi, and R. Arvola. 2021. Cocreated brand value: Theoretical model and propositions. *Journal of Brand Management* 28(4): 413–428.

Hoon, C. 2013. Meta-synthesis of qualitative case studies. *Organizational Research Methods* 16(4): 522–556.

Iglesias, O., and N. Ind. 2020. Towards a theory of conscientious corporate brand co-creation: The next key challenge in brand management. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(6): 710–720.

Iglesias, O., N. Ind, and M. Alfaro. 2013. The organic view of the brand: A brand value co-creation model. *Journal of Brand Management* 20(8): 670–688.

Iglesias, O., P. Landgraf, N. Ind, S. Markovic, and N. Koporcic. 2020. Corporate brand identity co-creation in business-to-business contexts. *Industrial Marketing Management* 85: 32–43.

Ind, N. 2014. How participation is changing the practice of managing brands. *Journal of Brand Management* 21(9): 734–742.

Ind, N., & Schmidt, H. J. (2019). *Co-creating brands: Brand management from a co-creative perspective.* Bloomsbury Business.

Ind, N., O. Iglesias, and S. Markovic. 2017. The co-creation continuum: From tactical market research tool to strategic collaborative innovation method. *Journal of Brand Management* 24(4): 310–321.

Ind, N., N. Coates, and K. Lerman. 2020. The gift of co-creation: What motivates customers to participate. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(2): 181–194.

Juntunen, M. 2012. Co-creating corporate brands in start-ups. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 30(2): 230–249.

Kahiya, E., N. Ashill, and O. Perkinson. 2023. Branding governance in international recurring sports events: The world rugby 'sevens' series. *European Sport Management Quarterly* 23(5): 1477–1499.

Kapferer, J.-N. 2008. *New strategic brand management: Creating and sustaining brand equity long term*, 4th ed. London: Kogan Page Limited.

Keller, K.L. 1993. Conceptualizing, measuring, and managing customer-based brand equity. *Journal of Marketing* 57(1): 1–22.

Keller, K.L. 2003. Brand synthesis: The multidimensionality of brand knowledge. *Journal of Consumer Research* 29(4): 595–600.

Keller, K.L., and D.R. Lehmann. 2003. How do brands create value? *Marketing Management* 12(3): 26–31.

Kim, H., S. Stepchenkova, and V. Babalou. 2018. Branding destination co-creatively: A case study of tourists' involvement in the naming of a local attraction. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 28: 189–200.

Koivisto, E., and P. Mattila. 2020. Extending the luxury experience to social media—User-generated content co-creation in a branded event. *Journal of Business Research* 117: 570–578.

Koporcic, N., and A. Halinen. 2018. Interactive Network Branding. *IMP Journal* 12(2): 392–408.

Kornum, N., R. Gyrd-Jones, N. Al Zagir, and K.A. Brandis. 2017. Interplay between intended brand identity and identities in a Nike related brand community: Co-existing synergies and tensions in a nested system. *Journal of Business Research* 70: 432–440.

Kovalchuk, M., M. Gabrielsson, and M. Rollins. 2023. Industrial BRAND-personality formation in a B2B stakeholder network: A service-dominant logic approach. *Industrial Marketing Management* 114: 313–330.

Kristal, S., C. Baumgarth, and J. Henseler. 2020. Performative corporate brand identity in industrial markets: The case of German prosthetics manufacturer Ottobock. *Journal of Business Research* 114: 240–253.

Law, J., and J. Urry. 2004. Enacting the social. *Economy and Society* 33(3): 390–410.

Le, Q.H., L. Phan Tan, and T.H. Hoang. 2022. Customer brand co-creation on social media: A systematic review. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning* 40(8): 1038–1053.

Lindstedt, J. 2015. A deliberately emergent strategy—A key to successful city branding. *Journal of Place Management and Development* 8(2): 90–102.

Lucarelli, A., and A. Hallin. 2015. Brand transformation: A performative approach to brand regeneration. *Journal of Marketing Management* 31(1–2): 84–106.

Mäläskä, M., S. Saraniemi, and J. Tähtinen. 2011. Network actors' participation in B2B SME branding. *Industrial Marketing Management* 40(7): 1144–1152.

Mangiò, F., M. Mismetti, E. Lissana, and D. Andreini. 2023. That's the Press, Baby! How journalists co-create family business brands meanings: A mixed method analysis. *Journal of Business Research* 161: 113842.

Merz, M.A., Y. He, and S.L. Vargo. 2009. The evolving brand logic: A service-dominant logic perspective. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science* 37(3): 328–344.

Merz, M.A., L. Zarantonello, and S. Grappi. 2018. How valuable are your customers in the brand value co-creation process? The development of a customer co-creation value (CCCV) scale. *Journal of Business Research* 82: 79–89.

Michel, G. 2017. From brand identity to polysemous brands: Commentary on "Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction." *Journal of Business Research* 70: 453–455.

Millspaugh, J., and A. Kent. 2016. Co-creation and the development of SME designer fashion enterprises. *Journal of Fashion Marketing and Management* 20(3): 322–338.

Mingione, M., and L. Leoni. 2020. Blurring B2C and B2B boundaries: Corporate brand value co-creation in B2B2C markets. *Journal of Marketing Management* 36(1–2): 72–99.

Nyadzayo, M.W., C. Leckie, and L.W. Johnson. 2020. The impact of relational drivers on customer brand engagement and brand outcomes. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(5): 561–578.

Oliveira, E., and E. Panyik. 2015. Content, context and co-creation. *Journal of Vacation Marketing* 21(1): 53–74.

Onyas, W.I., and A. Ryan. 2015. Exploring the brand's world-as-assemblage: The brand as a market shaping device. *Journal of Marketing Management* 31(1–2): 141–166.

Orlikowski, W. 2010. Practice in research: Phenomenon, perspective and philosophy. In *Cambridge handbook of strategy as practice*, ed. D. Golsorkhi, L. Rouleau, D. Seidl, and E. Vaara, 23–33. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Orlikowski, W., and S.V. Scott. 2014. What happens when evaluation goes online? Exploring apparatuses of valuation in the travel sector. *Organization Science* 25(3): 868–891.

Payne, A., K. Storbacka, P. Frow, and S. Knox. 2009. Co-creating brands: Diagnosing and designing the relationship experience. *Journal of Business Research* 62(3): 379–389.

Pettigrew, A.M. 1990. Longitudinal field research on change: Theory and practice. *Organization Science* 1(3): 267–292.

Ramaswamy, V., and K. Ozcan. 2016. Brand value co-creation in a digitalized world: An integrative framework and research implications. *International Journal of Research in Marketing* 33(1): 93–106.

Riedmeier, J., and M. Kreuzer. 2022. Me versus we: The role of luxury brand managers in times of co-creation. *Journal of Business Research* 145: 240–252.

Sarasvuo, S., A. Rindell, and M. Kovalchuk. 2022. Toward a conceptual understanding of co-creation in branding. *Journal of Business Research* 139: 543–563.

Sarkar, S., and S. Banerjee. 2021. Brand co-creation through participation of organization, consumers, and suppliers: An empirical validation. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 30(8): 1094–1114.

Schau, H.J., A.M. Muñiz, and E.J. Arnould. 2009. How brand community practices create value. *Journal of Marketing* 73(5): 30–51.

Schmeltz, L., and A.K. Kjeldsen. 2019. Co-creating polyphony or cacophony? A case study of a public organization's brand co-creation process and the challenge of orchestrating multiple internal voices. *Journal of Brand Management* 26(3): 304–316.

Shulga, L.V., J.A. Busser, B. Bai, and H. Kim. 2023. Branding co-creation with consumer-generated advertising: Effect on creators and observers. *Journal of Advertising* 52(1): 5–23.

Siano, A., A. Vollero, and A. Bertolini. 2022. From brand control to brand co-creation: An integrated framework of brand paradigms and emerging brand perspectives. *Journal of Business Research* 152: 372–386.

Simmons, G., and M. Durkin. 2023. Expanding understanding of brand value co-creation on social media from an S-D logic perspective:

Introducing structuration theory. *Marketing Theory* 23(4): 607–629.

Stach, J. 2019. Meaningful experiences: An embodied cognition perspective on brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Brand Management* 26(3): 317–331.

Strauss, A., and J. Corbin. 1998. *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*, 2nd ed. London: SAGE.

Swaminathan, V., A. Sorescu, J.-B.E. Steenkamp, T.C.G. O'Guinn, and B. Schmitt. 2020. Branding in a hyperconnected world: Refocusing theories and rethinking boundaries. *Journal of Marketing* 84(2): 24–46.

Tajvidi, M., M.-O. Richard, Y. Wang, and N. Hajli. 2020. Brand co-creation through social commerce information sharing: The role of social media. *Journal of Business Research* 121: 476–486.

Teresa Borges-Tiago, M., C. Arruda, F. Tiago, and P. Rita. 2021. Differences between TripAdvisor and Booking.com in branding co-creation. *Journal of Business Research* 123: 380–388.

Tierney, K.D., I.O. Karpen, and K. Westberg. 2016. Brand meaning cocreation: Toward a conceptualization and research implications. *Journal of Service Theory and Practice* 26(6): 911–932.

Tjandra, N.C., I. Rihova, S. Snell, C.S. Hertog, and E. Theodoraki. 2021. Mega-events brand meaning co-creation: The Olympic case. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 30(1): 58–73.

Törmälä, M., and R.I. Gyrd-Jones. 2017. Development of new B2B venture corporate brand identity: A narrative performance approach. *Industrial Marketing Management* 65: 76–85.

Törmälä, M., and S. Saraniemi. 2018. The roles of business partners in corporate brand image co-creation. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 27(1): 29–40.

Üçok Hughes, M., W.K. Bendoni, and E. Pehlivan. 2016. Storygiving as a co-creation tool for luxury brands in the age of the internet: A love story by Tiffany and thousands of lovers. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 25(4): 357–364.

Vallaster, C., and S. von Wallpach. 2013. An online discursive inquiry into the social dynamics of multi-stakeholder brand meaning co-creation. *Journal of Business Research* 66(9): 1505–1515.

Vallaster, C., and S. von Wallpach. 2018. Brand strategy co-creation in a nonprofit context: A strategy-as-practice approach. *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 47(5): 984–1006.

Veloutsou, C., and I. Black. 2020. Creating and managing participative brand communities: The roles members perform. *Journal of Business Research* 117: 873–885.

Veloutsou, C., and F. Guzman. 2017. The evolution of brand management thinking over the last 25 years as recorded in the journal of product and brand management. *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 26(1): 2–12.

von Wallpach, S., A. Hemetsberger, and P. Espersen. 2017a. Performing identities: Processes of brand and stakeholder identity co-construction. *Journal of Business Research* 70: 443–452.

von Wallpach, S., B. Voyer, M. Kastanakis, and H. Mühlbacher. 2017b. Co-creating stakeholder and brand identities: Introduction to the special section. *Journal of Business Research* 70: 395–398.

Voyer, B.G., M.N. Kastanakis, and A.K. Rhode. 2017. Co-creating stakeholder and brand identities: A cross-cultural consumer perspective. *Journal of Business Research* 70: 399–410.

Ward, E., S. Yang, J. Romaniuk, and V. Beal. 2020. Building a unique brand identity: Measuring the relative ownership potential of brand identity element types. *Journal of Brand Management* 27(4): 393–407.

Wider, S., S. von Wallpach, and H. Mühlbacher. 2018. Brand management: Unveiling the delusion of control. *European Management Journal* 36(3): 301–305.

Yin, R.K. 2018. *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*, 6th ed. London: SAGE.

Zimmer, F. 2018. So denkt St. Pauli über Marketing: "Wir sind das Produkt von Fans". *Werben & Verkaufen,* 12 December, https://www.wuv.de/marketing/wir_sind_das_produkt_von_fans. Accessed 20 Oct 2023.

Publisher's Note Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Lars Brand   is Ph.D. candidate and lecturer in Marketing & Sport Management at the University of Bayreuth, Germany. His research focuses on brand management within the multi-actor dominant logic of brands, with particular emphasis on sport brands, human brands, and conscientious brands.

Matthias Anderski   is joint Ph.D. candidate and lecturer in Marketing & Sport Management at the University of Bayreuth, Germany, and at the La Trobe University Melbourne, Australia. His research focuses on integrative human branding and co-creation of brand meaning, athlete activism, and digital transformation in sport.

Tim Ströbel   (Ph.D.) is professor of Marketing and Sport Management in the Faculty of Law, Business and Economics at the University of Bayreuth, Germany. His research focuses on brand management, empowerment of human brands, and value co-creation on digital engagement platforms.