The impact of Massclusivity campaigns on perceptions and brand love of Gucci online brand communities' members

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Abstract:

The current research aims to understand the impact of Massclusivity (massive and exclusive) campaigns on the brand love through online brand communities (OBC) interactions. Authors designed a netnography research with the purpose of analysing the interactions between a brand - the luxury fashion brand Gucci – and its online brand community on Facebook, during a specific period of time defined according to the launch of a Massclusivity campaigns of this brand. We collect a total of 10,689 interactions from March 2017 to March 2018. Findings highlight that the development of massclusivity campaigns have several impacts, such as generate awareness towards the brand, increases consumers' engagement on SNP, and promotes communities' expansion. These are directly connected to the interest that this type of marketing strategies generates towards the brands, which may be considered powerful to luxury brands who intend to diversify their audience and become more competitive.

Keywords: Massclusivity; Brand love; Online Brand Communities;

Track: Relationship Marketing

1. Introduction

Recently, researchers have started to analyse Massclusivity into the whole concept of luxury (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016) This is associated to the fact that luxury brands are closer to the masses as never before, either it is with fast fashion collections, digital communication, or others. So, the relevance of this topic is to understand if massive luxury brand campaigns have an impact on the perceptions and brand love of online luxury fashion brand's communities. With the aim of understanding the impact of these strategies on the brand love of online brands communities, the current study purposes to answer to the following research questions: How does consumers' perception towards luxury brands change after developing a Massclusivity campaign? In this vein, here researchers employ a netnography approach, followed by text-mining technique. This technique allows us to extract meaningful content from the online comments of followers of an online brand community page (Facebook) of a luxury brand - Gucci -. This luxury brand was founded by Guccio Gucci in 1921 and it started as a small leather goods store based in Florence, Italy. Nowadays, it is part of the fashion group Kering which includes other brands such as Saint Laurent, Balenciaga and Stella McCartney, and it is one of the most powerful and desired luxury brands, associated with exclusivity, detail and high-end Italian craftsmanship. Forbes (2018) considered Gucci as the 36th most valuable brand worldwide in 2018 due to its value of $14.9 Billion, which positions Gucci as a reference on Luxury Fashion Market, only after Louis Vuitton (ranked #15) and Hermès (ranked #35).

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Luxury market and Luxury brands

Luxury is usually understood as sumptuous lifestyle provided by products (or services) that display a premium quality represented by products' superiority (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016) with high standard and noble materials (Mootee, 2007). They are also linked to efficient logistics and production, and strong communications able to expose properly both product features and emotional attributes (Heine 2012), that are connected to pleasure and exclusiveness (Vigneron and Johnson, 1999). Those products must be recognizable, arouse an emotional consumer response, and become merged into the customer's lifestyle (Brun & Castelli, 2013), by representing both tangible and intangible benefits (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016).

To ensure and sustain the exceptional quality mentioned before, an expensive price tag (Okonkwo, 2009) is also assumed for those product/services (Vigneron & Johnson, 1999) along with a noble brand or enterprise name, capable of keeping luxury brands profitable and

fast-growing. The high value charged by these goods also displays the resources scarcity and constraints, combined with limited production and distribution, contribute to define luxury as something unique, rare and selective (Heine, 2012). To Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2018) luxury value is based on perceived rarity and the feeling that not everyone can or should possess a specific luxury product or brand. It is usually also mentioned as opulence and wealthiest lifestyle (Brun and Castelli, 2013). As Kapferer and Valette-Florence (2016: 125) mentioned: "Luxury brands must be selective in everything they do", and this is the foundation of these brands distinctiveness and singularity".

2.2 Consumer-brand relationship in fashion and luxury

As stated by Fournier (1998), Brand Relationship Quality may be sustained by one of the following facets: love and passion (based on a deep emotional interaction), self-connection (related to expression and identity concerns), interdependence (represented by a high number of intense interactions), commitment (grounded on loyalty, support and reliability), intimacy (relations with strong roots and layers) and brand partner quality (based on the satisfaction that exists between the two parties of a relationship). The dynamics of customer–brand relationships has becoming a topic of interest since late nineties of 20th Century" (Loureiro, 2015) and, consequently, fashion luxury brands are increasingly following the relationship marketing path considering that when a consumer believes that he or she can rely on the brand, it facilitates the development of a love feeling (Albert & Merunka, 2013; Batra et al., 2012).

2.3 Massclusivity

Luxury market is facing a major shift (Brun & Castelli, 2013) towards a luxury democratization in which is targeting an expanded clientele (Kapferer & Valette-Florence, 2016) and widening range of offers from firms (Truong et al., 2009). Also, Internet had a solid influence on Luxury Fashion Brands reinvention since it made luxury fashion more accessible to everyone (Brogi et al., 2013) and because it is considered a mass medium of communication (Baker et al., 2018). This is how several new types of luxury were born, including Massclusivity. This stands for masses and exclusivity and aims selling exclusive products for the masses by combining a high perceived prestige with reasonable price premiums to attract middle-class consumers (Truong et al., 2009), who desire to follow the lifestyles of richer classes (Mundel et al., 2017).

3. Methodology

3.1 Netnography and text-mining

Netnography is compared to ethnography (the study of cultures and societies) since it provides data about consumers' habits and lifestyle. However, it is transplanted and adapted to online communities (Kozinets, 2002; Brown et al., 2003), which are defined as groups of people with similar interests, that interact, discuss and influence each other (Kozinets, 2002) at online platforms. This research is based on a solid and confirmed approach, already validated and tested by several authors (e.g., Bilro et al., 2018), with the purpose of understanding the behavior of luxury consumers and fashion mass market consumers on online brand communities towards massive luxury, throughout their comments and interactions on the selected platforms. As so, to assure that luxury and mass market perspectives are represented on this netnography analysis, the Gucci luxury fashion brand is selected.

One of the most representative online communities for this brand is Facebook (17 million followers), from which the data from consumer's interactions was retrieved. In order to retrieve and process the amount of data from these platforms with massive communities, it became necessary to proceed with a text mining technique capable to extract, examine, and transpose the vast amount of users' interactions on these OBCs into valuable insights (Fan et al., 2006). After collecting the data, we develop a Sentiment Analysis to understand the consumers' feelings towards the brand. Thus, we opt to use a MeaningCloud as the text mining tool, which is capable of examining a vast amount of data efficiently.

3.2 Selection of Gucci campaign

Gucci aims to redefine luxury concept. This new mindset led to a revolution on these brands' campaigns which are more focused on digital strategies and that target a vast audience when compared to traditional luxury campaigns. Gucci has developed several social media campaigns with media repercussions, since they are usually responsible for generating high levels of electronic word-of-mouth contents due to their innovative and revolutionary contents, leading to a robust brand presence on social network platforms (Ong, 2017).

The research period for our Gucci's netnography analysis was carefully chosen based on the launch of a specific campaign that generate controversies among the public. On March 17th, 2017, Gucci launched a campaign named #TFWGucci (Gucci, 2017b), which reveals the focus on digital communication based on the use of the hashtag (#) that is also part of an internet trend and phenomenon - #TFW stands for "That Feeling When" – responsible for several user generated content. This exclusively digital campaign was developed considering the need to generate awareness towards the launch of Le Marché des Merveilles collection of watches. The main characteristic of this campaign was the communication through Memes

(Gucci, 2017a) which are defined by McCrae (2017) as any fad, joke or memorable piece of content that spreads virally across the web, usually in the form of short videos or photography accompanied by a clever caption. Considering this definition, the primary observation is that it is incompatible with luxury brands that have an exclusive and premium image to maintain. This was a risky strategy adopted by Gucci that selected several Meme artists (Gucci, 2017a) to develop this communication based on memes usually associated with the masses and with a younger audience, and not with the regular Gucci – or other luxury brand – buyers. Having this in consideration, this campaign was selected to be part of this netnography analysis with the aim of understanding if this mass-driven communication has any impact on the brand love of usual Gucci luxury consumers.

4. Results

Data collection of Gucci Facebook online brand community uses the comments from March 2017 to March 2018. On Table 1 there is a resume of the consumers' interactions (comments to brand's posts) during the research period defined, with 10,689 users' comments published by 7,034 different users that interact with the #TFWGucci campaign.

Gucci OBC	# Comments Analyzed	Period
Gucci Facebook	10,691	March 2017 to March 2018

Table 1. Gucci Facebook page comments on #TFWGucci campaign

While analysing the data we realize that user's comments were not timely stable, i.e., they did not present a regular evolution during the research period. However, it was possible to understand that March 2017 was one of the months of 2017 with a higher number of consumers' interactions on this Gucci OBC during 2017, which happens to be the month of #TFWGucci launch (the campaign was launched on the March 17th), so this data considers only half of the month and still, presented significant results (Table 2). Moreover, the findings of this timely analysis demonstrate that during the three months analyzed on 2018, Gucci had an exponential growth on the number of consumers' interactions towards brands' Facebook posts – January 2018 interaction' number grew 127% from December 2017. Thus, Gucci social media strategy and investment may have been internally improved for 2018 in order to achieve better engagement results. The period between January 2018 and March 17th, 2018 corresponds to 56% of all interactions during the research period established - a 12-month analysis – as so, it is possible to note that Gucci's engagement on this brand community in 2018 was very preeminent on this analysis.

Year	Month	Interactions	%	Year Distribution %

Year	Month	Interactions	%	%
2017	March	554	5%	
2017	April	64	1%	
2017	May	168	2%	
2017	June	68	1%	
2017	July	416	4%	
2017	August	459	4%	44%
2017	September	1106	10%	
2017	October	972	9%	
2017	November	377	4%	
2017	December	551	5%	
2018	January	1,252	12%	
2018	February	2,548	24%	56%
2018	March	2,154	20%	
Total		**10,689**	100%	100%

Table 2. Timely Distribution of Interactions on Gucci's Facebook page.

We then perform a sentiment analysis based on these 10,689 comments of Gucci brand followers on its Facebook page, so we can comprehend the feelings associated with each one of these interactions. This sentiment analysis identifies the polarity of each interaction, i.e., if the user's comment is positive, negative or neutral (table 3).

Interactions' Polarity scale				
	Scale	**Sum**	**%**	**P-N%**
P+	5	1,121	10%	31%
P	4	2,181	20%	
NEU/NONE	3	5,219	49%	49%
N	2	1,625	15%	20%
N+	1	543	5%	
Total		**10,689**	**100%**	**100%**

Table 3. Gucci Facebook OBC's Interactions Polarity Scale.

The second stage is the topic sentiment analysis aiming to define the main topics addressed by the users at Gucci's Facebook OBC and the frequency that they are mentioned. It also enabled the polarity classification of each topic. While scrutinizing all of the 10,689 comments from Gucci's Facebook page, there were 14,537 sentiment topics identified from 204 different categories. As explained on this research's Methodology, these topics were aggregated by 26 clusters.

Topic Sentiment Analysis - Clusters Frequency		
Clusters Defined	**SUM**	**%**
Person	5,668	39%
Fashion Product (cosmetic, accessory, clothes, footwear or others)	1,189	8%
Vocation & Titles	684	5%
Other Products (food & beverages, electronic appliances, vehicles or others)	539	4%
Place (city, town, street or others)	529	4%
Store	420	3%
Entities (language, doctrine, religion, meanings or others)	372	3%
Group of People	312	2%
Nature (outdoor spaces or others)	269	2%
Animals (design, texture or others)	234	2%
Cultural Product (music, picture, show or others)	211	1%
Companies	201	1%
Body (or body parts)	180	1%
Public Organizations (Government, Military, Education or others)	168	1%
Contacts	139	1%

Currency	136	1%
Hashtags	105	1%
Services	91	1%
Social Events	85	1%
Process	78	1%
Time (period, date)	77	1%
Nature (design, texture or others)	68	0%
Other Units (time, weight or others)	50	0%
Natural Phenomena	38	0%
Artistic & Sports Organizations	30	0%
Other	2,663	18%
Total	**14,536**	**100%**

Table 4. Clusters' Frequency of Gucci's Facebook OBC.

The frequency of these clusters on this concrete analysis is detailed on Table 4, and according to this data, the most mentioned topic is "Person" (39%). On Facebook, the consumers who want to identify other individuals to a certain brand publication have to do it by writing the person's name on the comment section. This information may induce that the contents shared by Gucci at Facebook promote a high engagement level, because its users identify other users and friends, which may lead to the conclusion that Gucci is investing on this community's culture by posting contents able to provoke interactions among consumers that bring other persons into this Facebook page, enabling a community expansion. The next cluster considered as the second with a higher frequency is Fashion Product (cosmetic, accessory, clothes, footwear or others). Since Gucci is a Luxury Fashion Brand, the frequency of 8% (table 4) of this cluster indicates that the users from this OBC are effectively commenting the fashion products represented on Gucci's communication at Facebook, which is the main core of this brand. Thus, these interactions are aligned with the brands' main focus: fashion.

The third main cluster is "Vocation & Titles" that aims to aggregate the interactions that mention a vocation of a person or even a job title (e.g., creative director, designer, model, monarch). It has an expression of 5% (table 4), demonstrating that these interactions with Gucci are aspirational and associated with the essence of a luxury brand that wants to embrace and communicate their professionalism, heritage, quality and usually reinforce the position of its main designer. As previously stated, Gucci is focused on changing its traditional luxury brand strategy to a more disruptive approach, and it is essentially depending on its creative director - Alessandro Michelle. Having this specific cluster on the podium may induce consumers' recognition of this fact.

The Topic Sentiment Analysis also enables the evaluation of the polarity of the topics and clusters defined (table 5). The cluster with the highest polarity average score and with the strongest positive feeling associated - with a score of 3.38 – is the cluster "Store", with a low standard deviation of 0.74. Hence, it is possible to mention that Gucci Facebook OBC's users

associate positive feelings towards the cluster "Store" which denotes that the way this brand is positioned on the marketplace is positively evaluated by its consumers.

Being a luxury brand, Gucci must transpose an aspirational image to its customers and provide a meaningful experience during the purchase process, so the polarity related to this cluster has to be perceived as a considerable evaluation for Gucci. The second cluster with a highest polarity average (3.22) is Time (period, date), which is associated with the seasonality of the of the communications and products' launch (e.g.: Summer, winter, Halloween). With a polarity mean of 3.21, the cluster "Fashion Product (cosmetic, accessory, clothes, footwear or others)" is the third with the strong positive feelings associated (table 5), which denotes the affection that Gucci's users have towards the products that are produced and sold by this luxury brand. On the other hand, the clusters with the lowest polarity average (table 5), value were Natural Phenomena (mean = 2.08) and Services (2.53).

Regarding Services, it was possible to understand that Gucci Facebook page users criticize substantially this brands' customer service, and for that reason, is one of the clusters with a lower polarity mean, which goes against the quality standards that luxury brands strive for.

Clusters Defined	Polarity Mean	Polarity Standard Deviation {SD}	Polarity Variance {Var [x]}
Store	3.28	0.74	0.55
Time (period, date)	3.22	0.77	0.60
Fashion Product (cosmetic, accessory, clothes, footwear or others)	3.21	0.90	0.80
Nature (design, texture or others)	3.19	0.83	0.69
Person	3.17	0.75	0.56
Hashtags	3.16	0.61	0.37
Other Units (time, weight or others)	3.12	0.69	0.48
Artistic & Sports Organizations	3.10	0.48	0.23
Vocation & Titles	3.08	0.75	0.56
Cultural Product (music, picture, show or others)	3.08	0.74	0.55
Other Products (food & beverages, electronic appliances, vehicles or others)	3.08	0.78	0.60
Process	3.08	0.82	0.67
Place (city, town, street or others)	3.07	0.63	0.39
Companies	3.07	0.70	0.50
Nature (outdoor spaces or others)	3.04	0.74	0.54
Public Organizations (Government, Military, Education or others)	3.02	0.64	0.41
Animals (design, texture or others)	3.00	0.73	0.54
Social Events	2.99	0.73	0.54
Body (or body parts)	2.96	0.61	0.38
Entities (language, doctrine, religion, meanings or others)	2.95	0.81	0.66
Contacts	2.91	0.51	0.26
Currency	2.90	0.71	0.51
Group of People	2.87	0.79	0.62
Services	2.53	0.83	0.70
Natural Phenomena	2.08	0.59	0.34
Other	3.09	0.74	0.54
Total	**3.11**	**0.76**	**0.58**

Table 5. Topic Sentiment Analysis Polarity for the Clusters defined.

5. Conclusions and implications

Based on the findings, we may conclude that the massclusivity campaign under analysis promote the emergence of several impacts for the luxury fashion brand and for the fashion mass market brand. However, those impacts did not have a significant influence on the brand love or hate of the members of the OBCs of each brand. Nevertheless, this strategy provides a positive outcome to Gucci who achieved a high polarity average of its community members' interactions. To the generality of consumers, the ability of the selected luxury brand – Gucci - to become closer to the masses did not affect negatively the perception they had towards the brand, considering that the sentiments associated to the users' interactions was higher than the one attributed to the mass market brand. Despite some negative comments regarding Gucci's disruptive strategy, the differentiation from the other luxury brands with contents with topics usually adopted by the masses generated conversation among users, considering that the most relevant clusters on this analysis are based on consumers' identification of their peers. Thus, it induces that consumers' perception towards Gucci may have change to a more open brand which stands near its audience, since the tendency is to promote a community and the respective engagement increase, due to the evolution and growth of consumers' interactions during the months of the research period established, especially on the Facebook OBC.

Regarding practical implications for marketing managers on luxury fashion brands' segment and their community management, we can point out that online brand communities on SNP are a strong channel to reinforce and sustain the relationships between customers and the brands. Also, the development of Massclusivity campaigns display high levels of consumers' interactions and their identification of other users. Considering that luxury fashion brands are currently facing a major turnover due to the ever-changing environment of new forms of communication, this market is revelling a high competition since brands are trying to differentiate themselves from the competitors (e.g.: Gucci hiring a disruptive artist to assume the role of Creative director and to develop Massclusivity campaigns). As so, to overcome the obstacles of this competition, these brands must attract new customers and expand their action to other type of public.

Marketing managers may also consider understanding what type of topics they must be focused on when communicating with their communities and to comprehend the need of maintain an active brand community with valuable contents for its users. These findings aim to sustain an enduring relationship capable of generating brand love, specifically if managers promote the interaction between brands and its communities, to understand users' feedback and insights on the creation of Massclusivity campaigns. Only by listening consumers'

feedback on brand communities, luxury brands will be able to understand what they value on these exclusive campaigns and products for the masses and where is the line that the brands itself should not cross to avoid brand dilution.

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