

BRANDING CONCHITA

A Social Mediation Perspective

The ideas of customer co-creation (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, Merz et al., 2009), and customer engagement (Doorn et al., 2010) have radically altered previous views on the creation and development of brands in general. Both concepts draw attention towards the active role of customers and move the focal point of interest away from brands as branded goods towards brands as being co-constructed by a multiplicity of stakeholders. Current conceptualizations call for a theoretical integration of stakeholders' interests and consideration of their active participation in the co-construction of brand meaning and co-generation of brand manifestations (Mühlbacher & Hemetsberger, 2012). Further, based on current arguments for contextualization (Aaskegaard & Linnet, 2011), Linser (2013) and Hemetsberger & Mühlbacher (2014) aim to bridge individual level and macro-level epistemologies, introducing social mediation theory to current branding theorization.

This thesis builds on the conceptualization of brands as processes, and applies a social mediation perspective on the development of brands. It aims to empirically develop this perspective on the case of Conchita Wurst.

Relevant literature:

Hemetsberger, Andrea and Hans Mühlbacher (2014). "Brands as Socially-mediated Processes," BBR (Brands and Brand Relationships) Conference, Boston, 2014.

Mühlbacher, Hans and Andrea Hemetsberger (2012). Brands as Complex Social Processes and their Outcomes, Festschrift for the 60th Anniversary of Prof. Klaus Grunert.

Linser, Kevin (2013). Brands as Social Processes – A Social Mediation Perspective. Master thesis.

Aaskegaard, Soren and Jeppe Trolle Linnet (2011). "Towards an epistemology of consumer culture theory: Phenomenology and the context of context," *Marketing Theory*, 11(4), 381-404.

BRANDING CONCHITA

A Mythological Perspective

Consumers use marketplace resources, such as for instance myths with certain meaning in order to develop their identity and help them in becoming what they aspire to be. Personalities are particularly well suited to imbue consumers' lives with meaningful metaphors for their own pursuit of happiness and a fulfilled life. Successful person brands, such as for instance Conchita Wurst, embody prevailing cultural myths, and help consumers cope with ambiguities and complexities of social life. Such brands also engage in myth-making and developing their own understanding and interpretation of themselves as a conglomerate of mythical interpretations of diverse archetypes and social constructions of gender.

This thesis aims to uncover the narrative and visual mythologies that constitute and fuel the branding of Conchita Wurst in contemporary meta-modern consumer culture. It builds on a constructionist perspective of branding and carves out the complexities of meaning ambiguity and cultural emplacement in the making of the brand Conchita Wurst.

Relevant literature:

- Hemetsberger, Andrea and Hans Mühlbacher (2014). "Brands as Socially-mediated Processes," BBR (Brands and Brand Relationships) Conference, Boston, 2014.
- Brown, Stephen, McDonagh, Pierre and Clifford Shultz II (2013). "Titanic: Consuming the Myths and Meanings of an Ambiguous Brand," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 40(4), 595-614
- Arsel, Zeynep and Craig J. Thompson (2011). "Demythologizing Consumption Practices: How Consumers Protect Their Field-Dependent Identity Investments from Devaluing Marketplace Myths," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 37(5), 791-806.
- Stern, Barbara B. (1995). "Consumer Myths: Frye's Taxonomy and the Structural Analysis of Consumption Text," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 22(2), 165-185.
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MOMENTS OF LUXURY

Self and experiences of luxury

Recent studies in the area of luxury experiences (Hemetsberger, von Wallpach and Bauer, 2012) and inconspicuous consumption (Eckhardt, Belk and Wilson, 2015) give rise to the assumption that traditional conceptualizations of luxury and consumer perceptions of what is luxury may differ substantially. Recent studies find that luxury is defined by moments that provide meaning for consumers' selves. Luxury moments revolve around multifaceted experiences of having (materialistic motivations), doing (activity-centered), being (existentialist), and becoming (achievement-oriented) (Hemetsberger et al., 2012).

This thesis aims to broaden the perspective and investigate into moments of intense luxury experiences that are potentially transformative. Self-transformation is a process that encompasses short-term transformative experiences and long-term consciousness transformation of individuals' understandings of their self/selves. An empirical analysis involving deep metaphorical accounts of luxury moments completes the thesis.

Relevant literature:

- Hemetsberger, Sylvia von Wallpach and Martina Bauer (2012). "Because I'm Worth It – Luxury and the Construction of Consumers' Selves," *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 40.
- Bauer, Martina, Sylvia von Wallpach, and Andrea Hemetsberger (2011), "'My Little Luxury': A Consumer-Centred, Experiential View," *Marketing - Journal of Research and Management*, 33(1), 57-68.
- Eckhardt, Gianna M. Russell W. Belk and Jonathan A.J. Wilson (2015). "The Rise of Inconspicuous Consumption," *Journal of Marketing Management*, 31(7/8), 807-826.
- Juliana Reiter (2014). *Luxury Across Generations: Luxury Experiences Over the Life Course of Two Generations*, Master thesis.
- Jantzen, Christian, Per Østergaard, and Carla M. Sucena Vieira (2006). "Becoming a 'Women to the Backbone': Lingerie Consumption and the Experience of Feminine Identity," *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 6 (2), 177-202.
- Markus, Hazel and Kunda Ziva (1986), "Stability and Malleability of the Self-Concept," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 51 (4), 858-66.
- Vieten, Cassandra, Tina Amorok, and Marilyn Mandala Schlitz (2006). "I to We: The Role of Consciousness Transformation in Compassion and Altruism," *Zygon*, 41 (4), 915-31.
- Wade, Gail Holland (1998). "A Conceptual Analysis of Personal Transformation," *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 28 (4), 713-19.

WASTE FOOD COOKING

Devaluing the risks of consuming dumped food

Recently, critics of mass consumption and consumerism have problematized the wastefulness of a Western consumption style in general, and food consumption in particular, culminating, for example, in consumption practices of dumpster diving and waste food cooking. Although widely applauded by environmentally conscious consumers, non-profit organizations, and ethical entrepreneurs, consuming food that has been sorted out by retail stores is perceived as risky.

Based on risk theories and literature on dumpster diving/anticonsumption, this thesis aims to elicit narratives/practices of risk and risk devaluation connected to the consumption of food, and waste food cooking, in particular.

Relevant literature:

Adam, Barbara, Ulrich Beck and Joost Van Loon (2000). *The Risk Society and Beyond: Critical Issues for Social Theory*. London: Sage.

Beck, Ulrich (2009). *World at Risk*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Clark, Dylan (2004), "The Raw and the Rotten: Punk Cuisine," *Ethnology* 43, 1, 19-31.

Eikenberry, Nicole and Chery Smith (2005), "Attitudes, Beliefs, and Prevalence of Dumpster Diving as a Means to Obtain Food by Midwestern, Low-income, Urban Dwellers," *Agriculture and Human Values*, 22, 2, 187–202.

Edwards, Ferne and David Mercer (2007), "Gleaning from Gluttony: An Australian Youth Subculture Confronts the Ethics of Waste," *Australian Geographer*, 38, 3, 279–96.

ANDERS-SEIN

In Pursuit of Being Different

Recent research into men's fashion consumption and beard styles shows that neither the urge of being unique, nor to be conspicuous is explanatory for specific fashion identity projects of young urban males. It is rather characterized by a general variation and differentiation from the profane and the common, which we denominate *Anders-sein* as contrasting conformity (Hemetsberger and Weinberger, 2013). Further studies investigating into how *Anders-sein* is perceived by others support the assumption that *Anders-sein* is contrasted with non *Anders-sein* (Unterweger, 2015). This thesis aims at elaborating on the concept of *Anders-sein*, and contrast the concept with current understandings of normality, deviance and differentness in a consumption context. An empirical study into 'normalness' is optional.

Relevant literature:

- Katrin Binder (2014), *Anders-Sein - In Pursuit of Being Different*, Masterarbeit.
- Silvia Unterweger (2015), *Anders-Sein – The Perception of Others*, Masterarbeit.
- Hemetsberger, Andrea and Weinberger, Ralf (2013), *In Pursuit of Being Different*, *Advances in Consumer Research*.
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