Authenticity work and brand custodians: 
Leveraging interobjective representations in digital advertising contexts

Abstract

Purpose- Our aim is to explore how managers as custodians of digital brands draw upon and are invited to leverage interobjective representations in digital advertising contexts with multiple market actors.

Design/methodology/approach- A case study approach of three digital branding advertisements is undertaken.

Findings- The findings reveal how digital brand authenticity work operates through three main forms of interobjective representations: i) safeguarding, ii) sense discovery, and iii) enlighten creation.

Practical implications- Findings provide insights into how digital interaction contexts yield efforts by managers to ‘detect and focus’ on reading the signs of authenticity and developing digitized authenticity that supports dynamic content creation.

Social implications- This paper reveals how a wide array of market actors contributes to digitized authenticity and how managers as custodians can leverage the inherent social nature of crowds in digital ecosystems.

Originality/value – This study underlines the importance of problematizing novel IT based managerial practices that reveal the necessity to understand and act upon the human and preservation aspects of digitized brands.

Keywords: Digital advertising, brand custodians, authenticity work, interobjectivity

Paper type: Research paper
Authenticity work and brand custodians: 
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1. Introduction

This study explores the importance of authenticity work and the ways in which brand custodians accomplish this in digital advertising contexts. The implications of digital technology have only begun to infiltrate digital advertising behaviours (Rogers and Thorson, 2017). Digitalization is bringing about opportunities for interaction with a range of market actors. But this has also presented challenges as evident in the prevalence of new product introductions, imitation (copycat), fake news claims (Mihailidis and Viotty, 2017; Morin, 2010), or counter-narratives (McDowell-Smith, Speckhard and Yayla, 2017). These challenges imply that there exists, a demand for research into the growing complexity of digital environments, particularly that which is deemed authentic or otherwise. A central concern for the custodians of digital brand is the work of managing, organising and preserving brand authenticity. The overall aim of this paper is to explore the nature of the brand authenticity work by revealing from a manager perspective the value of digitized brand interobjective representations to sustain dialogues with multiple market actors. This authenticity work approach is based on understanding both the contextual conditions as well as processes that yield and form brand authenticity (Beverland and Farely, 2015; Morhart et al, 2015). We contribute to the literature on brand authenticity by exploring the ongoing, dynamic, custodian maintenance work that is required to preserve digitized brand authenticity in an era where consumers dynamically exert control (including creation) over their media and the ad environment.
Research contributions on brand authenticity include its measurement (Napoli et al., 2014, 2016; Morhart et al., 2015), social construction (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010; Gilpin, Palazzolo and Brody, 2010; Cunningham and Craig, 2017), advertising (Chalmers, 2007; Beverland, Lindgreen and Vink, 2008; Christodoulides, 2009), self-identity (Arnauld and Price, 2000) and management (Akbar, and Wymer, 2017; Holt, 2016; Cunningham and Craig, 2017). While existing knowledge acknowledges the importance of dialogues to foster digitized brand authenticity, it does not clearly establish how to leverage user-generated content (UGC) as the manifestation of the dialogue between market actors (M-As) (i.e. brand managers, consumers and possibly other kinds of brand stakeholders) (Berthon, Leyland, and Campbell, 2008). We contend that the digital medium not only questions whether but also “how” the brand engages a vast array of M-As who have different agendas and vested interests. The numerous managerial challenges of negotiating brand authenticity offline have been recognised in the literature (Beverland, 2005; Holt, 2002; Beverland et al, 2008), yet there is still a lack of evidence on how managers can, in practice, work on digitized brand authenticity by acting upon real-time, dynamic consumer interactions. This paper adopts an interobjectivity theoretical perspective to shed light on how digitized authenticity work is accomplished. Here, authenticity work refers to the ways through which brands within the digital ecosystem come to recognise themselves with clarity and envision what they ought to do/create/modify (Holt, 2002; MacNeil and Mak, 2007; Tierney et al., 2016). To manage market interactions and relationships, brand managers traditionally relied on formalized knowledge management systems (Hung et al., 2015), but with emergence of digital platforms, managers are also exhorted to leverage real-time advertising contributions to build brand authenticity (Beverland et al., 2008). This presents significant challenges if brand managers lack understanding of what to respond to, what to encourage/discourage, what to pay attention to, on which communication platform, what to
keep/remove, how to respond appropriately (MacNeil and Mak, 2007; Quinton, 2013). These common digital issues reflect the dynamic nature of digital advertising and possibly brand managers’ limited experience with such platforms, along underdeveloped digital investment models (Bauman, 2000; 2007a,b; Rosa, 2003; Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017). Engaging with these common digital issues therefore means work for the custodians of a brand. In particular, authenticity work seeks to leverage the digitized brands’ value-in-use in real-time (Kreps and Kimppa, 2015). Authenticity work, moreover, implies to leverage brand interobjective (i.e. successive, shared and overarching) representations of the brands. The reason why these are crucial is twofold. First, in the digital context, brand interobjective representations are evidence of the role played by brands in revealing both conditions and manifestations of authenticity negotiated through interactions between different market actors (Latour, 1996). Second, as brand managers look to deepen the digital reinvention of their brand, to preserve the digitalized brand dimensions, these representations enable them to discern how their brands strive to adjust and evolve in accordance with social change.

In addressing digitized brand authenticity work, we study three case studies of FMCG digital advertisements across three product categories: garment, food and stationery. These case studies were selected due to the intriguing ways in which authenticity work has been accomplished and the opportunity to explore the related brand interobjective representations. The study offers two contributions to the information technology and advertising literature. First, utilising interobjective representations of digitalized brands, we shed light on authenticity work for brands in a digital era, clarifying the conditions through which the custodians of the brand are empowered by digital brand advertising artefacts. Specifically, we elicit how the brands’ authority as a cultural resource can be preserved alongside social discourse and consensus-making. This extends the research of Bauman, (2000) and MacNeil and Mak (2007). Second, we show how digital brand authenticity work operates through three
main forms of interobjective representations: i) safeguarding, ii) sense discovery, and iii) enlighten creation representations. We find that through these representations, the work of authenticity can be threatened. That is, authenticity work in the digital environment is in the hands of many market actors, each acting in many different ways, - or as Latour (1986) put it, “letting the token drop, or modifying it, or deflecting it, or betraying it, or adding to it, or appropriating it” (Latour, 1986, p.267). By highlighting these interobjective representations, we enrich our understanding of what digitized brands and their digital advertising material genuinely mean bolstering the scope of actions digitized brands can take.

The paper proceeds as follows: In the theoretical background, we briefly outline the current understanding linking brand management, IT and digital advertising to brand authenticity. Next, we justify the use of interobjective representations to explore authenticity work in digitized brand advertising. We then report the methodological and case selection followed by the findings. Lastly, we discuss how these findings contribute to both academic literature and provide insights into managerial practices and offer future research directions.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Brands in a digital era

Traditionally, studies have characterised branding, both offline and online, as a distinct phenomenon, with the combination of functional and emotional benefits that promise a certain type of experience (de Chernatony and Christodoulides, 2004, Holt, 2016). As described by Borel and Christodoulides (2014, p. 268) ‘branding was an exercise done to/for consumers as opposed to with consumers’ allowing brand managers to quash deviating opinions (e.g. copyrights). Over the last decade, a vibrant multi-disciplinary literature on branding, advertising and IT, reflecting the emergence of advanced technological platforms, have witnessed the re-development of more comprehensive branding strategies that leverage key
digital behaviours namely interactions and co-creation experiences defining multiple actors (Pera et al., 2016; Rogers and Thorson, 2017). These include behaviours that change business’s scope and value, including disruptive strategic posture, search engine optimisation, sharing and the hyper-scale phenomena. Accordingly, growing interests have emerged in areas ranging from e-music (Meier, 2017), global branding (Steenkamp, 2017), the reputation economy, crowd-culture (Holt, 2016; Cunningham and Craig, 2017), social media (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016), e-WOM (Yadav and Pavlou, 2014), personal branding and inputting (Cunningham and Craig, 2017), to anti-branding legality (Kucuk, 2016); all attempting to make sense of these changes. Personal branding in particular permits brands to create an intimacy and fit with multiple actors, while allowing brand managers to retain the option to communicate on selected themes (Pera et al., 2016; Brems et al., 2017). Managing brands’ digital advertising considers this dynamic and is often produced via User Generated Content (UGC) and/or Consumer Generated Advertisements (CGA), where sender and audience are increasingly the same (Cova and Dalli, 2009).

These studies have highlighted the emotional and intellectual aspects of brand engagement work, particularly being “true to one’s self” (Holt, 2002; Steiner and Reisinger, 2006). How this work is achieved with technology mediation poses interesting questions for academic research and practitioners alike. IT executives now must reflect on the sensitive ongoing-socio-cultural change as well as disentangle, accommodate and reassemble the multiple actors’ representations of the digital brand. It is recognised that digital advertising’ representations help to align users’ branding preferences with other market actors (Arnould and Price, 2000; Coupey, 2016), reflecting the expanding IT and brand managers’ roles within a larger multimedia business network (de Souza da Silva and Hjort, 2009; Juul, 2010). In this context, digital branding work is mediated through interactions in an ecosystem where digital advertising personality does not rely as much on ownership, material and enduring
engagement, but on access, dematerialized and ephemeral attachment (Bardhi and Eckhardt, 2017; Gomes, 2017). Brands are therefore exposed to more approval-seeking, contestations and rejections from an increasing diverse array of active market actors (Leigh et al., 2006). Critical in this ongoing interaction (or lack thereof) is the inescapably of digital brand authenticity (Holt, 2002; Giesler, 2012).

2.2 Digitized Brand authenticity work
IT communication often depends on intertextuality: that is, market actors leverage resources such as IT skills, popular culture, mainstream media texts and commercial films (Beer and Burrows, 2013). Digitized brands appropriate these resources and re-assemble them within the ongoing co-construction of authenticity. Following Latour (2005), a technological artefact generated by market actors ought to be considered not as substances (i.e. pre-existing, finished solid entities) but more as events or experiences in the making. Authenticity generated by the brand forms part of a new and more complex circuit of communication along a disparate set of material, traditionally associated with something that appears as being ‘genuine’ or ‘true’ according to experts (Trilling, 1972). As such, from a sociological perspective, authenticity refers to something that is “sincere, innocent, original, genuine unaffected, distinct from strategic and pragmatic self-presentation” (Fine, 2003 in Beverland and Luxton, 2005, p. 103). From these understandings, researchers have proposed the notion of indexical authenticity or the use of objective source of information to provide some verification of what is claimed (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Beverland, Lindgreen and Vink, 2008). In parallel, authenticity is also explored from a social or personal perspective and is manifest in everyday life through often-commercial quests that connect individuals to artefacts and to the anticipated experiential outcomes these generate (Leigh et al., 2006; Beverland, 2009).
Applied to the digital ecosystem, a more integrative account of authenticity has been proposed as “the extent to which actors perceive a brand to be faithful toward itself and its consumers, and to support them in being true to themselves” (Morhart et al., 2015. p. 202). Here, the emphasis is placed not on the technological tool per se (for example, adopting Google Analytics for brand performance indicators), but on the people and the processes (for example, in providing the time and interpretative skills to encourage and integrate data sources) (Mühlbacher et al, 2006). The dynamic digital advertising ecosystem is concurrently shaping and being shaped by digital advertising and individual market actors. In this regard, digital advertising material is assembled according to individual self-relevancy, artefact visual appeal, types and quality of content deployed across social media entertainment (e.g. Gameplay, personality Vlogging) (Arnould and Price, 2000). Latour (1986) suggests that people will individualise technology ideas along personal modifications in line or against brands’ main narratives, appropriation or rejection up to voluntary flouting. Within digital advertising what is relevant is the journey of thoughts and what happen when these thoughts are turned into news actions in new situations. The literature also highlights further dimensions through which brand authenticity impetus needs to be negotiated (e.g. continuity, credibility, integrity, symbolism often away from the persuasiveness of the originator) to fit with the market actors’ affinities, to attain congruence, assimilation and self-fulfilment (Baumeister, 1987; Whan Park, et al, 2010). This implies that the various market actors interpret and act upon digitized brand signs to negotiate brand meanings in a differing way from customary diffusion as now ‘the first actor in the chain is no more important that the last’ (Boonstra, 2004: 187).

Given this review, it is interesting to question the extent of which digitized authenticity work is inscribed in real time marketplace changes, but also how through often ephemeral stabilisations brand managers navigate and find consensus amongst the different
market actors. At stake is the constant scrutiny and ever-present question marks being posed about the *relevancy* of digital advertising representations (Beverland and Luxton, 2005), but also about the ways to *establish brand narratives* as valid points of references for discussions with multiples actors (Johnson *et al.*, 2015). Considering the demanding march of technology, new product introductions, imitation (copycat), fake news claims (Mihailidis and Viotty, 2017; McDowell-Smith, Speckhard and Yayla, 2017), singular and total accounts of brands’ advertising appear somewhat conceptually limiting. To summarise, the literature is increasingly recognising that brand custodians concurrently anticipate, produce, stabilize, dispute and take stances on the opportunities and challenges emerging within the digital environment (Muñiz and Schau, 2007). How, then, do brand custodians work organise and manage authenticity?

### 2.3 Authenticity work through interobjective representations

To theoretically deepen how custodians of digital brands support multiple actors’ ‘selves’, we draw on the concept of interobjective representations to appreciate how digitized brand authenticity work operates. We define the concept of interobjective representation as the necessarily shared and overarching (i.e. interobjective) representations about objects through which human relations operate between different groups of individuals (Latour, 1996; Sammut *et al.*, 2013). Here, objects mediate interactions by inviting some ways of dealing with them, while inhibiting others (Kalthoef and Roehl, 2011). The merit of interobjectivity is twofold: first it enables to alleviate an important theoretical weakness of intersubjectivity namely its lack of possibility to find ‘mechanism of interpretation’ that enable a bridging of subjective worlds through imagination and personal self-understanding (Harre and Sammut 2013). And second, sensed by the interobjectivity construct, it conceptually permits consensus and dissention, giving rise to an ‘objective’ reality (Harre and Sammut 2013).
In the realm of technologies, certain artefacts-based affordances serve to foreground specific meanings of underlying objects while backgrounding others (Verbeek, 2005). Reflecting this, and present in all interactions, interobjectivity and its occurrence in interobjective representations is defined as ‘a representation of an object that incorporates different social meanings and that exists across diverse cultural groups […] that permits different inter-objective relations […] with the object in common, according to each group’s version of the object itself” (Sammut et al., 2010: 456). As such, the digital ecosystem empowers both IT and brand managers as agents reflecting and devising open-ended projects i.e. formulating the aspects of brand’ appeals utilising multiple actors’ (including their consumers) interaction. So, far from operating in a vacuum, authenticity work revolves around a shared agreed (i.e. interobjective) representations (Corciolani, 2014) where objects ‘co-emerge in relation to other human and nonhuman entities’ (Bettany and Kerane, 2011, p. 1746-47). As authenticity is neither linear nor solidified (i.e. multi-layered ongoing, real time narratives), interobjective representations deal with uncertain, precarious, contradictory and ephemeral assemblages allowing to explore what hold multiple actors together or take them apart. Put differently, interobjective representations facilitate authenticity work traceability ‘in which objects, bodies and other heterogeneous entities are embedded’ (Bettany, 2007, p. 44).

In summary, the above literatures do not provide an adequate understanding of the nature of the brand authenticity work, both in terms of the contextual conditions as well as processes that yield and form digitized brand interobjective representations to sustain dialogues with multiple market actors. We outline the methodology adopted by this study in our attempt to address the limitations above.
3. Methodology

The research design employs visual analysis approaches to advertising analysis (Scott, 1994; Schroeder, 2002) and conventionalised representations of brand advertising meaning in the service of commercial ends (Visconti, 2010). This is guided by the netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2015) which favours multiple understanding of the ways companies communicate. Specifically, we utilised non-participative netnographic approach (Cova and Pace, 2006). Given the distributed nature of the digital world as open source domain, multi-site/platform, qualitative data were collected. Reviews and threads (text and images) posted as comments on brands’ advertising were chosen as representing key informants. These informants were found to be users, non-users as well as owners or non-owners of the brands representing the heterogeneous set of digital market-actors. Our analysis is based on informants’ description, reactions, construction and negotiation of digitized brand authenticity-building.

To theorize how brand authenticity work occurs, we relied on a case study approach; as our phenomenon (authenticity work) represents contemporary real-life digital situation where the boundaries between phenomenon and its context are not clearly evident (Spiggle, 1994). When selecting cases, the aim was to depart from the large number of studies analysing luxury products and iconic brands with symbolic meanings and thus to choose a set of brands that reflect day-to-day, mundane and ordinary consumption.

Following Spiggle’s (1994) criteria for case study selection, we went through preliminary investigations into online resources on Adweek from 2005 to 2015. A purposeful sampling selection of three advertising campaigns emerged: Campbell Soup Star Wars: The Force Awaken (2015) by BBDO New York, as part of a campaign themed "Made for Real, Real Life." aimed to celebrate the changing face of the American family; Tipp-Ex: A hunter Shoot a Bear (2011) by French agency Buzzman along its sequel in 2012 and Wonderbra campaigns (1994-ongoing) concentrating especially on the yellow background cluster first
created by Ogilvy & Mather (see Figure 4a) part of many campaigns on women body and society. We relied on multiple sources of online material that allowed market-actors to comment, respond, create and react. Three requirements were used: (a) the selected brands and advertising should have a substantial amount written about them online (relevant and active/interactive participants) to facilitate access to data (along no-login requirement, English language, and open sources—Kozinets, 2015); (b), the selected brands are seen as in flux on digitized platforms and illuminate both the unusual and the typical, allowing us to capture heterogeneous data and a range of opinions (Schiele and Venkatesh, 2016); and (c) the selected cases had to show both various facets of leveraging multiple actors showing different translations (Latour, 1986; Coleman, 2005) to understand what happen when these translations are turned into news actions in new situations. These in view to support a satisfying understanding of a phenomenon (here digitized brand authenticity work) leading to theory building (Eisenhardt, 1989). As such, we partly follow conventional ethnography by “providing a Geertzian sense of "thick description" through the “immersion” of the researcher in the life of the online culture or community (Kozinets in Bowler, 2010 p. 1271”).

We observed discussions (threads along the images and videos) over a 6 months period in late 2016 early 2017. Regardless of the original date of the advertising, we collected each week about 50 new to us postings via a google search of the three advertisement titles (50x3). No platform limitation was imposed beyond free access. This step reflects an appropriate identification of the various digital communities. This resulted in the collection and analysis, among the large amount of material available of a total of 1200 original shared text postings for each advertisement. These were direct copy from communications of online community members that were subsequently anonymised. Data collection was made easy by the success of the advertisements. Tipex campaign had over 50 million views, leading to 1.3 million sharing in over 217 countries including its retake in 2014, and Campbell soup as part
of a wider campaign #RealRealLife especially on Twitter lead to many short comments.

Regarding Wonderbra campaigns these were long-lasting and rejuvenated via the launch of its ‘decoder app’ leveraging QR code technologies in 2012 and in 2014 through the 20 years brand anniversary. This launch encouraged many market-actors to re-visit and re-share previous iconic advert image including the ‘hello boys’ unique 1994 starting point.

Following Spiggle (1994), the analysis started with an isolation of thematic categories of discrete brand interobjective representations. Along the detailed threads provided by informants, the analysis followed the common broader process of qualitative data analysis (symbolic richness vs. construct clarity) including activities related to categorization, abstraction, comparison, dimensionalization, integration, and iteration. Harmonies and concord on brand as vector of authenticity emerging from the data were identified. Emergent themes in the data (researchers’ observations) were compared, with a consensus sought among the authors regarding the three-overarching intertwined brand interobjective representations through which selected brands engage in authenticity work. Lastly, following Kozinets (2015) and Bettany and Kerrane (2016) we acknowledge that there is still a grey area in term of research ethic regarding, if or not, informed consent, can or need to be obtained from virtual respondents when the data are available on open sources. Considering this, we follow our university ethical guidelines while reporting the data.

4. Findings

The data collected reveal how digitized brand authenticity works is produced through dialogues that involve text, images and videos between a variety of market-actors (users(non), consumers(non), owners(non), brands’ employees and competitors). This critical mass of active, non-institutionalised participation awards brand the authority to partake in social discourse (Visconti, 2010). While brands are found to encounter many critical voices over the
interpretation and translation of the socio-cultural meanings of digital advertisements, the importance of a clear consensuses about who they are and have chosen to be were found to be directly linked to the action (or lack off) taken market-actors.

By combining the wide range of market actors’ translations, the presence in the background of complex societal issues and the more overt brand stances and responses in the foreground enable us to understand how digitizing brand authenticity work is conveyed along three shared and overarching interobjective representations. The meaning of these representations for digital advertising (that operate as conditions) foster the sustainability of digitized brands authority, signification and legitimation within the extended digital ecosystem (see Figure 1).

In such settings, the authenticity work conducted by various market actors is enduring and can be considered as both multi-directional and subject to a work of stabilization, which enables us to trace brands authenticity work formation (Holt, 2002; MacNeil and Mak, 2007). The multi-directionality is observed for each of the three cases by appreciating the diversity of interpretation and translation of meanings observed in discussion threads. While critical observations level varies between cases (oscillating between market actor signs of delight to more serious quest for social significances), the data analysis reveals the conditions and manifestations of digitized brand authenticity work. Following Latour (1986) and Boonstra (2004) the first actor in the chain is no less important than the last for the brand’ authenticity journey, whereby each representation can be considered as effective types of stabilized configurations through which digital authenticity work can be leveraged by managers. While the three forms of interobjective representations are present in each case, we present in what follows the more stabilized forms revealed in each case. The findings reveal how digital brand authenticity work operates through three main forms of interobjective representations: i) safeguarding, ii) sense discovery, and iii) enlighten creation.
Authenticity work as safeguarding

Digital advertising artefacts act as hubs for clarifying emerging consensus that encourage partial stabilization. A first stabilization is based on an interobjective representation about safeguarding the status quo – the traditional way things are and accordingly questioning the right of a brand to intrude, organize and shape the consumers’ lifestyle. We code this representation ‘safeguarding’, considering its imperative to preserve the traditional socio-cultural meanings and principles claimed in their product or service – “Campbell as a solution to time starved consumers, healthy and accessible food to all.” In this case, Campbell soup, the data, depict discussions between gay parents on a video designed around Star Wars: The Force Awakens, (Figure 2). This video is part of a wider setting and set of commercials around the #RealRealLife hashtag. In a context in which “the American family is changing faster than at any time in recent history and it is now a true mosaic of shapes and sizes, all bonded through love, and love of good food” (Friedman 2015: n/a), brand managers are attempting to mobilize Campbell abilities to embrace social change by showing that its soups are consumed by all parents’ categories.

Campbell brand managers encourage, real time, interaction and discussion among the various market actors, realising that the brand digital advertising is considered as a legitimate springboard to open-up and engage with social and contentious issues concerning the expansion of one of the oldest institutions - family. The socio-cultural signification of Campbell, its brand personality, as a long-established food provider part of many market actors’ lifestyle, is being questioned not for its intrinsic product qualities but for its place and role in possibly intruding into the private domain of the family and the related lifestyle preferences. Some custodians view their role as safeguarding the traditional role of the
family. This rebuttal of the inquisitive stance by questioning the role the brand manager ought to play within the context of a changing social phenomenon – the composition and nature of the family - contributes to authenticity work. At the same time, while using the contours of the brand (e.g. logo colour etc.) and the status of its own institution, in real time, market actors attempt to project and assert the future away from commercial considerations. Elucidations, movements, moods (enduring or ephemeral) stemming from brands advertising affordances grant the market actors, including brand managers and technological artefacts, the authority to re-assemble and negotiate a social new consensus within family practices and point of references.

[Insert Figure 2 About Here]

Rather than being led to passive association or disassociation with the brand as product/services provider, new agency is placed upon market actors to elaborate through invitations to march social boundaries. By negotiating and voicing who they are, what they think they are, or taking an active part in the discussions, they shape the emerging broader discourse around a fundamental contemporary social issue. The following quotation highlights how one market actor attempts to reclaim Campbell as a brand whose traditional core value – food-authority – ought to be preserved and not eroded by ‘big society’ debates.

“Please Campbell’s stay out of the culture war and just feed us the food we have loved for decades”. (YouTube comment)

The discourses surrounding the digital advertisement were both adverse and supportive, illustrating the polyvocality of market actor engagement. Some market actors sought to frame and then label Campbell's as ‘political’ by encouraging a different type of family. In this context, the Bible, as social moral compass, was quoted and tagged with the
video sinful. In this, minorities were highlighted as “only representing a smaller part of their customer base” and was not representative of ‘normal’ or ‘real life’. For others, the choice of actors or the Star Wars association were perceived as pioneering and innovative. The ongoing trade-offs and tensions between the taken-for-grantedness of safeguarding representations, against the imperative for the brand to engage in meaningful and relevant societal issues, were evident in many reviews:

I'm glad that Campbell's took the haunt leap like that. The same with the IKEA commercial with the two women celebrating their anniversary. I'm straight but have many family/friends that are not. Just glad that there's now or getting commercials/shows that are diverse. (Thread on Blog)

The video was not censured by regulators while Youtube, as a platform, provided permanency of content presentation and format in turn allowing all market actors to appreciate the same resource for what it is before negotiation. Besides this, even if not directly considered as authentic or inauthentic by market actors, the link to #RealRealLife hashtag provides a platform that legitimized, mobilized and encouraged translation and re-interpretation of authenticity by capturing characteristics of realities otherwise unnoticed – as displayed in the following passage:

I love that you take issue with things that you feel might affect your kids and don't hold back. [...] family is your priority and how anyone can find fault in that based on one's sex, gender, skin colour etc. is beyond understanding.

Campbell’s Youtube video is therefore recognised as authentic because the brand custodians are perceived to be in control of their projects (not to be confounded with policing or repairing the brand or technology platforms). As such, market actors are subtly encouraged to be mobilized without being primed or stimulated to modify, adjust, or transform the video.
Authenticity work as sense discovery

In the second campaign, Tipp-Ex®: a hunter shoots a bear video (Figure 3), hosted on Youtube by BIC European Group's brand, and the European market leader of correcting products, leverage Flash technology in a pioneering way. In this viral video, a bear and a hunter are put face to face, inviting the viewers to create the ending they want to see by typing and re-typing a title for their video on Youtube. More than 50 different hilarious endings can be discovered. The campaign is signed: Tipp-Ex®, white and rewrite.

Tipp-Ex® brand managers explicitly encourage market actors, beyond post-hoc reviews and feedback to take a direct action by creating and evaluating their decision and action impact on the advertising resource (the conclusion of the advertisement) without, in appearance, the possibility by brand managers to influence the outcome. A free hand is given to each market actor, to take direct, unaided responsibilities in the next iteration and actually undertaking the brand authenticity work. This digital advertising opened up the brand to the gaze and work of others. What is striking about this case is the way that Tipp-Ex organizes its authority in its script – it is the primary scripter, but also opens up the negotiation the brand legitimation and signification at the same time. Tipp-Ex® willingness to frame the conversation but in a semi-open way is coded ‘sense discovery’. Even if the invitation to remind viewers to buy corrective liquid is still the original message, the semi-open nature and the related serendipity allows the videos to be high in search engines, shared on many platforms, translated by market actors and discussed via PR in traditional media. Here, many scenarios are welcomed, and the expectation is that market actors will act judiciously (i.e. not be ashamed of their actions). Brand managers intervene in the (re)interpretations and assess how to best negotiate the need for hands-on, real time digital interactivity along social
network’s netiquette and rules of engagement. We underline that this operating mode cannot guarantee commercial effectiveness as characterised in the following quotation:

*Found these so far: tipp-ex, punch, run, eat, hugs, fuck, music, drug, drink, alcohol, football, tv, jump, sleep, fart, joke, love, fed... Yeah, I have a looooooooooot of free time:D*

Notwithstanding, the nature of the ‘typed-in’ actions, market actors provided social slots - the social topic the brand ought to be (dis)associated with and which language register is used (e.g. humorous, cool, young, gamification). Such slotting activity, particularly when norm violations occur, can be the making of marketplace buzz and viral initiatives. Being seen and being discussed is considered as an important part of digitized authenticity work and what the Tipp-Ex® ad reveals is the way that brand managers have opportunities to take extreme risks to bring awareness to the brand and why negotiating cultural evolutions requires hands-on interactivity. This risk is highlighted in the quotation below:

*They take you to the same thing..., This should not be on here as there is swearing*

The case of the innovative digital advertising by Tipp-Ex® demonstrates that when shifting and distributing the agency, there is a key change in how brand managers understand their roles and practices in relation to the echoes of the digital ecosystem. For instance, how the echo chamber can expose specific minority areas or concerns that need to be addressed, rectified or removed. The echo chamber can also become ‘overrun’, taking on ‘life of its own’ from the most outspoken market actors. Having said this, brand managers can become indifferent or ambivalent to the echo chamber, ignoring and becoming frustrated with the uncontrollability of its social dynamics.

*Authenticity work as enlighten creation*

The third campaign displays a form of authenticity work that supports open discussions and pure creation with market actors but these are prudently policed to privilege the long-term brand focus. We refer to this work activity as ‘enlighten creation’. Enlighten creation is
based on temporal normative framing; that is, attesting that actors are doing the ‘right thing’ at the ‘right time’ on the ‘right platform’. This form of digitized authenticity work appears to be particularly apt for sensitive topics such as in the Wonderbra case. Enlighten creation aims to enforce and control the interactive arrangements to ensure long-term brand norms are maintained. The aim of this authenticity work is to ensure the negociation of new at time controversial market norms. In this regard, the case of Wonderbra adopts a creative spirit but justifies disregarding any short-term negative or unwarranted association, as highlighted in the following quotations:

*Obviously, its fake you think they [Wonderbra] would actually do that?*

*Genius. I usually dislike paradoxical ads like this but this is great sweet.*

The Wonderbra campaign demonstrates market actors’ mobilization and empowerment within a broader array of platforms, while leveraging technological access in creating, shaping, photo shopping images and videos creating and building UGC and CGA that have not been purposely framed by brand managers’ work. Instead of targeting digital market actors who were talking specifically about Wonderbra, the brand is communicating and relating to people about something new (e.g. women cause, video making, image creation, QR code technology use etc.) that the brand feels comfortable with, proving through underlying representations that the brand digital authenticity work is considered culturally significant. From the 1994 poster in time square to the latest QR code efforts, Wonderbra advertising philosophy has made the brand a house-hold name that signifies much more than the products innovation themselves. The sensitive interpretative flexibility of the product category has generated noticeable positive mobilization of market actors, building bridges between identifying the brand role online and managing interactions at a scalable level. CGA, as outreach, has cautiously been tolerated and even cheered (see example of “non-original ads” in figure 4a).
In this context, contrasting market actors’ communities are being formed, harnessing conversations that matter most around the creative unknown, shaping the products themselves but also causes and social discourse across the world. With this emulation, comes logically a deeper understanding of what the brand influencers are saying. The Wonderbra ads generated by consumers (CGA) show a welcomed organic engagement along a level of transparency that let market actors to know exactly when and if there are any issues with the digital material created. An important validation in Wonderbra success to trigger engagement comes from the unusual need and want by other brands, in other fields, to connect, imitate, echo the type of advertisement created i.e. the spirit of authenticity work crafted by Wonderbra’s material and its communities (Figure 4b).

Observed conversation (outside of those initiated by the brand) vs. facilitated conversations allow the brand to clearly watch and verify who is interacting (or not), together with the ‘what’ and ‘why’ parts of the engagement question, in turn, determining the brand persona on social media, its identity, character and personality. What matters here for brand managers is to make their brands be a compelling resource in the making, motivating market actors to create and spread further the digital material underscoring the brand authority (vetted resources) while giving away something on a larger scale by inviting creation. Using the yellow background, its logo and day-to-day objects/shapes, Wonderbra suggests that body appearance and debate around the place of the women body in different social contexts can be entirely different. These often-controversial campaigns create connections and invite creations that are more than sensory allowing ordinary actors to emerge as authorities -creating stars- as illustrated in Figure 4b.
As illustrated in the quotations below, content that is focused on the needs of market actors is not necessarily focused on the product or company. Digital content is important but context both when and where is really central. This illustrates digitized authenticity work as an iterative process which is distributable in different ways e.g. content curation, pointing your followers to content from other people, counted views/likes/share that keep creators from departing to competing brands and platforms.

*Indian society is pretty strict about women's issue so people can't mention to it frankly.*

*So maybe expanding the mind will expand the market to that land. Declaring their advancement in India implies that the company takes a serious part in Indian women's reasonable revelation. Maybe slowly but surely.*

5. Discussion

Our research explored the nature of authenticity work by brand custodians through interobjective representations in digital advertising contests. In doing so, we contribute to explaining how authenticity work is negotiated by considering digitized interactions between and within multiple market actors. Our findings determine how digitized brand authenticity work relies on interactions not only with the brand existing consumers, but also with a greater number of non-institutionalized, ICT enabled market-actors, all shaping the brand discourses. While digital transformation offers challenges, mainly over control and preservation of the brand, it also presents dynamic opportunities to establish the conditions and contexts for empowering authenticity work. We demonstrate that digitized brand authenticity work operates through three main forms of brand interobjective representations: i) safeguarding, ii) sense discovery, and iii) enlighten creation. Our analysis emphasises that in digitized environments brand authenticity can be sustained if brands cultivate dynamically a sense of continuity (i.e. safeguarding) among non-homogenous stakeholders; foster and provide
supports (hardware and moral) to reflective concertation in the expansion of agency of others (i.e. sense discovery); and go beyond toward appealing and recognising imaginativeness that sustains creative leaps (i.e. enlighten creation). Rather than primarily considering the immediate, often commercial, value of consumers’ motives and responses to cues (Beverland et al, 2008), we foreground the importance of digital contexts through their interobjective representations. These lead to a wider appreciation of the scope and social roles of digitized brands and digital advertising artefacts (Kalthoef and Roehl, 2011). In doing so, digitized brands open up new understandings on the way the marketplace reveals the inherent social nature and interdependence of crowds in digitized ecosystems. In turn, this contributes to research on the interactions between flat ontologies (digital advertisements) and tall ontologies (societal issues, e.g. role of the family).

By understanding the interactions of brand managers as one amongst an array of market actors, including technology artefacts, we are better able to deal with agency of the authenticity work – that is to say, brand preservation is not the exclusive province of managers. The concept of authenticity work becomes traceable via the construct of interobjective (i.e. shared and overarching) representations as enablers of interactions (Latour, 1996; Harre and Sammut, 2013). The reliance on the interobjectivity construct is justified by the way market actors fluidly move around individuals and technology artefacts within digital advertisements. People nor technology is either anchored or aiming for permanence (Bardhi and Eckhardt 2015, Harrison and Kjellberg, 2016). Indeed, our case studies show how fluid these can be in relation to the market actor interactions and the social dynamics. Echoing recent research that recognises the range and importance of actor engagement in digital advertising, we demonstrate how brand managers can leverage the dynamics of brand interobjective representations, by reflecting on the source, direction and type of content.
creation when sender and audience are increasingly the same (Cova and Dalli, 2009; Pera et al., 2016; Brems et al., 2017). The findings provide insights into how digital interaction contexts yield efforts by managers to ‘detect and focus’ on reading the signs of authenticity and accordingly developing digitized brand authenticity that supports dynamic content creation. In doing so, managers should be sensitized to the monitoring of intersubjective resonance of brands as authentic resources. This exercise encourages the detection of weak signals observable from latent, less visible interobjective representations knowing that the later could be stabilized in other social configurations. It also questions how brand managers understand their roles and practices in relation to the echoes of the digitized ecosystem. The distribution of agency, while necessary, is not fully predictable and its effect on produced authenticity work will be considered by brand managers as both positive and negative. In this respect, our paper builds on the calls for further understanding of overarching and implicit representations of IT objects, in the mediation of interactions (Kalthoef and Roehl, 2011; Harre and Sammut, 2013; Sammut et al., 2013).

The findings also show that advertising as technological artefacts act as agentic hubs between dispersed market actors and brand managers towards authenticity work. More precisely, when digital brands engage with multiple actors, the content, technology devices (eg. Hashtags) and discourses create powerful agencies that are elaborated upon through interactions. Vantage points vary and shift in-between market actors. This calls into question brand managers’ agency in such environments. For instance, the emphasis that is often put by brand messages on their legitimacy to shape a cultural evolution (including lead nurturing and scoring) may not necessarily be recognized by market actors as authenticity work, but it is paradoxically part of it since it leads brands to appear as being in control of their projects i.e. paying attention to what they hear and what and how market actors act. This elevated position grant brands the ability to remain one of the most compelling agent that exert authority on cultural
resources. Overall, instead of working in a polemical fashion (Holt, 2002; Giesler, 2012) brands under digital transformation conditions are operating within an ecosystem, that encourages narratives based on imitation, copy, content curation etc. all favourable to brand sustainability. More surprisingly, and contrary to extant literature, our analysis shows that digital brands will voluntarily generate conflicts, tensions, flaws and potential antagonistic interpretations to bring about market change. This should not be surprising as conflict is one of the main ways to bring about change (Diamond et al., 2009) and market driving behaviours are often required to do this.

Building on brand communication models and CGA (Brunel et al., 2010; Ertimur and Gilly, 2012), this study argues that technological artefacts are bestowed agency (Verbeek, 2005). The three digital campaigns jettison notions of the firm-controlled communication centred on product attributes (Johnson et al., 2015; Visconti, 2010). There is therefore much to be learned from how individuals elaborate on the agency of technology. For some, it is a struggle too far, as in the case of Weatherspoons who announced recently that they were withdrawing from social media engagement (BBC news, 2018). Our findings in many ways resonate with verses from one of the longstanding institutional scripts - the Bible, Luke 12:48. “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.” It therefore remains a moot point whether market actors take any responsibly in the supply or production of digitized brand culture.

6. Conclusion

While the social construction of authenticity is already considered in the marketing discipline (Grayson and Martinec, 2004; Beverland and Farrelly, 2010), more research is required. The now wider custodians of digital brands are all required to manage, assemble and
organise authenticity. This situation explicates how the nature of the authenticity work required to leverage digital brand interobjective representations to sustain dialogues with multiple market actors by understanding both the conditions and the processes that form brand authenticity (Morhart et al, 2015). Perhaps this reflect a certain lack of understanding of the way change is manifested in ITs in use (Kreps and Kimppa, 2015). This study attempts to capture the authenticity-building work in real time (Abohlasami et al., 2017), particularly the real-time interactions which underline brand generated interobjective representations. This study recognises the importance of User Generated Content and Consumer Generated Advertisement not as competing with firm cultural resources but as complementing, deepening and enhancing both cultural resources range and social understanding. As described in our interpretative model (Figure1), competing versions of brand mediated authenticity are found to be present, and taken as not mutually exclusive. Indeed, while the brand signaletic (colour, logo etc.) maintains consistency and durability, the humanisation of brands via digital artefacts produces the capacity to be shocking or ‘a bit off’ with imperfections. This is challenging the corporate script and the polished impression management practice. There is here some parallel with studies on rework on social media whereby authenticity is always in the making, always being reworked and remade (Holt, 2016). The study also shows the value of digital advertising artefact and interobjectivity to depict authenticity work as powerful defiance to that political authority. Increasingly those corporate scripts are questioned, taken as suspect and fake. There are thus important connections to be made to recent work that has focused on ‘rupture’ and disarticulation’ in global branding formation along further research to more broadly depict the role of IT in assisting individuals and collectives to shape the social construction of authenticity. Here, following recent calls in the literature (Hung et al., 2015; Kreps and Kimppa, 2015), we show the merit of problematizing some important managerial practices to reveal how digital
managers use IT, specifically the necessity to understand and act upon its human side. A further step in this research agenda could be to investigate other practices, by possibly studying those firms that have withdrawn from social media.

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Figures

**Figure 1:** Ecosystem of digitized brand authenticity work in digital advertising.

**Figure 2:** Real life gay family are the cutest in new Star Wars soup advert
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rZOMY2sOnE.

**Figure 3:** A hunter shoots a bear – Tipp-Ex
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RcGaTzFV-pw
Figure 4a: Wonderbra’s original, modified and related ads

Original and modified Wonderbra ads
a. original Wonderbra ads image, ‘Calibrator’, by Ogilvy &Mather Mexico, Mexico, November 2001
b. non original Wonderbra ads created by Advertising School: DMJX Creative Communication, Copenhagen, Denmark. http://adsoftheworld.com/media/print/wonderbra_straw
c. original Wonderbra ads image, ‘Volume’, by OgilvyOne Mexico, Mexico, December 2002
d. non-original Wonderbra ads created by Etrouth Sudhakar http://adsoftheworld.com/forum/2057

Figure 4b: Cancer research NGO in the UK and Adasia 2003 Advertising Congress

https://coppafeel.org/